Knowing about headteachers as effective leaders

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Years letter that young woman become critically ill. The local doctors were baffled. They finally sent her to the big city, where they called in specialists to study her rare disease.

Dr. Howard Kelly was called in for the consultation. When he heard the name of the town she came from, a strange light filled his eyes. Immediately he rose and went down the hall of the hospital to her room. Dressed in his doctor’s gown he went in to see her. He recognized her at once. He went back to the consultation room determined to do his best to save her life. From that day he gave special attention to the case. After a long struggle, the battle was won. Dr. Kelly requested the business office to pass the final bill to him for approval. He looked at it, then wrote something on the edge and the bill was sent to her room.

She feared to open it, for she was sure it would take the rest of her life to pay for it all. Finally she looked, and something caught her attention on the side of the bill. She read these words: "Paid in full with one glass of milk" (signed) Dr. Howard Kelly.

Tears of joy flooded her eyes as her happy heart prayed: "Thank you, God, that your love has spread abroad through human hearts and hands.

**Shared by**

**Father Rick**

**Kingston, New York.**

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School leadership has been identified as one of the major contributing factors to school improvement in both developed and developing countries. In the context of Europe, Australia, North America, and South Asia, several professional development programmes are being offered to headteachers in order to improve their professional and leadership competence, attitude and knowledge. However, these programmes seem to be more 'academic' rather than 'practice' oriented and therefore, such programmes tend to have either little or no impact on the overall school performance. Thus, schools are yet managed through 'top-down' management model in spite of giving major emphasis on creating alternative management models.

Literature on educational leadership suggests that headteachers play the most important role in managing change in schools but our experience reveals that the majority of schools in Pakistan are not managed effectively. Thus, the question arises why schools are not being managed effectively. If this question were asked to teachers, students, parents, and others they would respond differently perhaps because of the lack of shared perceptions and understanding of headteachers’ role and responsibilities. On the other hand, headteachers would defend their position by saying that they do not have adequate human and non-human resources, lack of professional autonomy and power, interference of school management, non-cooperation of parents and teachers etc. To answer the above question, we all need to understand the role and responsibilities and the context in which headteachers operate. We need to come up with some alternatives to
stop a tug of war between headteachers and other stakeholders.

This indicates that headteachers should create schools as ‘learning centres’ through ‘collective inquiry’ and ‘problem solving’ approach. Schools keep changing because of internal or external forces and headteachers play crucial role in communicating changes to all stakeholders. Therefore, they must learn how to collaboratively work with all stakeholders to develop shared vision and team building for effective schooling. Effective headteachers always act as ‘facilitators’ to create enabling environment for teachers and students so that they should be responsible for their own learning and growth. Headteachers’ prime responsibility should be how to enhance students’ learning outcomes for better performance. They should not only expect from teachers and students to perform effectively but they should themselves set the standards of high performance in their schools.

Headteachers need to nurture themselves through working with other experienced mentors. Managing schools is not the job of lay persons but it requires new perspective, vision, deeper understanding of school culture and adequate management experience. This requires reconceptualization of headteachers as effective leaders. We all know that a sinking school is there because of its failing headteacher. We also know that the school context makes difference, therefore, single model of school effectiveness may not be the solution to sinking or failing schools. Similarly, a successful headteacher in one school may not become successful in another school. This requires further investigation to understand why a successful headteacher of successful school became failing headteacher in another school. This suggests that the ‘tricks of the trade’ of the successful headteacher may not be applicable in other school because of the different dynamics of school culture.

In the British context, Nathan’s (1996) advice seems to be relevant and practical. Accordingly to him, headteacher should be involved in: a) finding out about the school; b) analysing role and task-demands; c) identifying skills and knowledge required to deal with the school; d) analysing one’s own skills, personal qualities and expertise; and e) creating one’s own professional development programme. We all know there is no substitute of professional development which not only prepares headteachers to meet the increased demands of their job but it also prepares headteachers to make them effective leaders.

The Aga Khan University, Institute for Educational Development (AKU-IED) offers a field based modular programme which aims to prepare the practicing and aspiring headteachers as ‘pedagogical leaders’. During the programme, headteachers go through the process of reconceptualization which helps them to critically reflect on their current management and leadership practices and explore alternatives for improving management and leadership practices required for making schools effective. Headteachers employ these alternatives during their fieldwork to reflect on their appropriateness and relevance.

Literature on educational leadership suggests that we have recognized the centrality of educational leadership for the success of schools. Schools need ‘elite’ leaders who have earned their elite status due to their high performance, professionalism and passion. These ‘elite’ leaders believe in the long-term planning, global trends, participatory decision-making, shared vision and values, artistic and creative thinking and imagination, capability of renewing and reviewing the school programmes. School leaders create history of their own schools and create environment for others to emerge as leaders. They make their institutions as ‘learning organizations’, which continually expand their capacity to create situation to develop collective aspiration, learning how to learn together for achieving the desired outcomes.

Literature reminds us that leaders are not just born but they are developed. Therefore, I take the stance that all leaders are managers but not all managers are leaders. In order to provide an effective and practical leadership we need to develop headteachers as ‘elite pedagogical leaders’ who should be concerned about the professional and intellectual development of teachers and social and academic development of students. Perkins (1995) has identified the following six standards, which can help developing leadership by promoting the success of all students:

a) by facilitating the development, articulation, implementation and stewardship of a vision of learning that is shared and supported by the school community.

b) by advocating, nurturing, and sustaining a school culture and instructional programme conducive to student learning and staff professional growth.

c) by ensuring management of the organization, operations, and resources for a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment.

d) by collaborating with families and community members, responding to diverse community
Interests and needs, and mobilizing community resources.
e) by acting with integrity, fairness, and in an ethical manner.
f) by understanding, responding to, and influencing the large political, social, economical, legal and cultural context.

There was a time that the school headteachers tended to prefer their role as ‘administrators’ and ‘chief executives’ and thus they served as ‘solitary instructional leaders’ and were not able to meet the demands of educational reforms. Therefore, efforts were made to reshape headteachers’ role as symbolic, charismatic, moral, cultural, instructional, visionary, collaborative, transformational, transmission, transactional, educative, reflective, pedagogical and strategic leaders. In his study, Marsh (1992) found that school headteachers normally move through three major stages, which seem to be applicable to any context of school leadership. These include:

Stage 1: Getting started
- Initial socialization into the role of site administrators.
- Development of routine management skills.
- Reflection about the nuts and bolts of school management and own role in the school.

Stage 2: Doing the Pieces of Educational Leadership
- Enhancement of management capability.
- Mastery of pieces of education responsibilities.
- Fragmented views of educational leadership.
- Reflection about management and education leadership pieces.
- School change is incremental and fragmented.

Stage 3: Understanding the Whole of Educational Leadership
- Integration of management and educational leadership.
- Integration of educational leadership pieces (activities and functions):
  - Deepening and integration of views of educational leadership.
  - Reflection about integrated educational leadership and school life.
  - Transformation of the school in relation to the vision; the school is substantially changed.

This indicates that at the initial stage headteachers tend to learn the ‘tricks of the trade’ how to ‘walk on the tight rope’. Then, they gradually move to learn how to make sense of their actions and practices and move towards maturity and stability in their thinking and actions. Thus, they become ‘elite’ leaders when they start demonstrating their clear vision, mission and value relating to school goals and policies. Therefore, our schools require ‘elite pedagogical leaders’ and contextualized professional development programmes for headteachers as ‘elite pedagogical leaders’ enabling them to use higher leverage strategy to school improvement so that they can set high standards for themselves and for others.

AFFLICT THE COMFORTABLE AND COMFORT THE AFFLICTED: PREPARATIONS FOR SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

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