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DARYA DINO K DARYAN: PROMOTING A OPTIMISTIC LEARNING MILIEU IN THE PRIMARY SCHOOL

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Abstract

Traditionally, girls in most government schools remain inactive in the classroom and are shy to speak and express their views. They have been given very few chances to be recognized or to participate actively in the classroom. This tendency seems to be changing in one girls' primary school situated in an urban part of district. Most of the students belongs to the poor and lower middle class families. Few years ago, their school was in a poor physical and learning condition, but when the current head teacher was hired, she tackled the problems of the school's including physical condition. As recently, however she is working as a mentor, she realized that trained teachers not only can make the physical situation better but also can focus on improving the teaching and learning environment. Now she sees her trained teachers promoting a positive learning environment in their own classes and also supporting other teachers as they learn new strategies. As out of fifteen, six female teachers including headteacher in the school have been trained under the professional development component of STEP. She depicted that *"after I participated in STEP programme, I realized that teachers can easily improve the way the classroom looks, but they must work hard to change the processes of teaching and learning."* The whole school now has a welcoming and pleasant feel. The head teacher conducts ongoing sessions for untrained teachers to continue the process of improvement. Lately she has talked about increasing the variety of learning materials in the classroom. As a result, each class now has a learning corner with materials like flash cards, pictures, models, and drawings made by teachers and children together. Activity-based teaching is used by all the teachers. These new approaches have increased children's interest in school, reduced absenteeism, and decreased the perceived gap between teacher and student. Students are more confident and are willing to talk and share in the classroom. Teachers have modeled good social skills through their positive behavior, a change that is equally as important as the change in pedagogy in creating a positive learning environment.

This is a little effort of a thirty nine years rural Pakistani female head teacher Daryan at Daryan dino District (old name of Sukkur), who had showed change thrust upon her personal and professional growth and organizational development. Memon & Pardhan, (2001) supports her thrust that "the quality of education highly depends on teachers' capacity building in terms of intellectual and professional growth, development and empowerment. As according to Wasley (1991, p20) "Empowerment of teachers is a desirable ingredient of School Improvement. Empowered teachers have 'the autonomy to make decisions about curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment'. They also take on new roles such as team leader, action researcher, curriculum developer, and a trainer (Boles & Troen, 1992).

This paper argues that the headteacher Daryan Khatoon is well placed to exercise curriculum leadership within the collegially run primary school; her role lays emphasis on interpersonal relations. Over all in this paper the authors' will discuss the changing role of a teacher leadership, which extended beyond the classroom, through professional development programmes under the project titled the Strengthening Teachers Education in Pakistan

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Introduction

In the past decade, public educators—both teachers and administrators—have faced considerable pressure from parents, the private sector, and politicians to be accountable for the “bottom line.” The bottom line is student learning, and now more than ever, educators are expected to create schools in which all children achieves excellent outcomes. School headteacher must possess a wide array of competencies in order to lead schools effectively toward the accomplishment of educational goals.

What is School Milieu?

Anyone who spends time in schools quickly discovers how one school can feel different from other schools. *School climate* is a general term that refers to the feel, atmosphere, attitude, beliefs, or milieu of a school. Just as individuals have personalities, so too do schools; a school climate may be thought of as the personality of a school.

The concept of *organizational climate* has a rich history in the social science literature. In the early 1960s George Sterns was one of the first psychologists who saw the analogy with individual personality and used the concept of organizational climate to study institutions of higher education. The use of the concept quickly spread to schools and business organizations, each with a somewhat different conceptual view of climate. Although there are a variety of conceptualizations, there is general agreement that organizational climate arises from routine organizational practices that are important to an organization's members, that it is defined by member perceptions, and that it influences members' attitudes and behavior. Thus, school climate is a relatively enduring character of a school that is experienced by its participants, that affects their actions, and that is based on the collective perceptions of behavior in the school. Thus, school climate is defined in terms of educators' perceptions of the leadership behavior of the principal and interactions among teachers. An open school climate is one in which teacher and principal behavior is supportive, genuine, and engaged, whereas a closed climate is characterized by lack of authenticity, game playing, and disengaged behavior.

Another metaphor regarding school climate is measured in terms of healthy interpersonal dynamics. This broad climate perspective examines the relationships between the school and environment, the leadership of the principal, relationships among teachers, and relationships between teachers and students. Openness of school climate has been linked primarily to expressive characteristics in schools. For example, the more open the school climate, the more committed, loyal, and satisfied the teachers are.

School climate has become a global construct that researchers often use loosely to group together studies of school environment, learning environment, learning climate, sense of community, leadership, academic climate, and social climate. This broad application reveals both the strength and weakness of school climate study—it is a useful integrating concept on the one hand, but it also suffers from a lack of clear definition. Like so many other terms that are bandied about, the word *climate* threatens to become meaningless. Because its referents are so diverse, the word sometimes obscures, rather than creates, understanding. *School culture* is a related term that has been use to describe the work environment; in fact, climate and culture are often used interchangeably by some educators to refer to the distinctive

workplace of a school. A useful distinction is that culture consists of shared values and assumptions, whereas climate is defined by shared perceptions of behavior all stakeholders.

Why School Leadership Matters?

School leadership has become a priority in education policy agendas internationally. It plays a key role in improving school outcomes by influencing the motivations and capacities of teachers, as well as the school climate and environment. Effective school leadership is essential to improve the efficiency and equity of schooling.

Another recent study on leadership emphasized not only organizational learning, but a trusting and collaborative climate, a shared and monitored mission, the capacity to take initiatives and risks and ongoing relevant professional learning opportunities. Research suggests that schools with effective leadership were also found to be schools where teachers were motivated to participate in training, showing connections between school leadership, school climate and willingness to participate in professional development.

Explicit changes at individual and organizational level Under STEP project

The STEP project set out to transform teacher knowledge, in its constituent forms of curriculum, school and pedagogic knowledge. But learning is not merely the accumulation of knowledge and skills, detached from who we are and what we do. For example, when we talk of developing the teachers' pedagogic knowledge, we do not just mean that they have some familiarity with the theories of Piaget. Pedagogic knowledge calls upon the teachers' knowledge of the learners, the goals they are trying to achieve, the strategies and activities they choose to reach their goals, the discourse they engage in and the relationships they develop. The authors had been documenting the impact of the professional development programmes in terms of explicit changes at individual and organizational level. In this paper, following, success stories are included to demonstrate the initial impact of STEP project initiatives in primary school.

Success story 1: Government Girls Primary School Shamsabad

This school is situated on top of boys primary school. Comprising six classrooms and over two hundred learners, it is co-educational, catering for learners from grade 1 to 5 and has sixteen female teachers including the principal.

Previously this school was one of the many disadvantaged primary schools; it had no electricity, no staff room or office, no washroom and clean water. The principal shares a class with the grade 5 or sometimes the grade 1 class. The school was severely lacking in resources, especially for the learners'.

Daryan Khatoon, working as a primary school head teacher at the school. She is a graduate with experience of fifteen years in primary education. She successfully completed diploma programme at AKU-IED. She believed that her experience at AKU-IED enhanced her confidence and empowered her to be a better principal. She said, "...before coming to AKU-IED, I had not sufficient leadership and management knowledge and skills, I was somehow not confident about my roles and responsibilities as a head teacher. Also, I was unfamiliar with the issues related to classroom management, school development, community development, female education and team building. Even for minor things, I was dependent on my management.

But after attending the programmes at AKU-IED, “I myself felt incredible improvement in my leadership and management style and skill. It developed my confidence to move forward and find out problems and their solutions locally and make decisions. For example, as a manager, I was responsible to enhance girls enrolment in my school during this academic year but I failed. I did not understand how to solve this issue. Because my attitude was very bossy and rude and I did not value my colleagues. After attending the programme, I made changes in my attitude and started working with my colleagues. As a result, we (me and my teachers) planned how to solve this issue and came up with ideas to knock at the doors of the community and meet with parents especially mothers and encouraged them to send their daughters to the school. Finally, we achieved the targets and realized the importance of involving parents specially mothers to solve the issue. Now we have decided that once a month there will be a meeting with mothers to strength partnership with the parents. The programme really developed my interpersonal and management skills. I did not know how to walk on the tight ropes of effective school management, but it has enabled me to run.’

To collect the evidence a meeting was conducted with the teachers from cluster schools who are working at the STEP project. The purpose of the meeting was to evaluate their progress on the project activities, as well as to share ideas about pupil achievement and progress. Rozina, one of the young teachers from this School, shows an animated (folk tale) she has created in language to support literacy work, whilst her colleague discusses issues of classroom organisation when using a few story books with a large class. Colleagues from a nearby school demonstrate presentations, spreadsheets on animal classification, and illustrated poems produced by their pupils in literacy and science lessons during the workshops. 'With the arrival of the resources everyone in the school was overjoyed. The first time I introduced resources to my learners, they were so curious and wanted to use them. Using the resources makes teaching and learning more enjoyable. I am no longer a traditional teacher but I, together with my principal always plan activities in such a way that learners work cooperatively..... Even shy and withdrawn learners become involved.with the theme 'living things ANIMALS' we are able to integrate with other learning areas like Literacy and Science. PowerPoint presentations for learners (as they work in groups) improve what was previously difficult work for them. Animated stories like 'HARE AND TORTOISE' enhance learners' curiosity and they in turn want to create their own animal stories. By doing role play using animal words, learners develop language and critical thinking skills....learners can become poets and writers. Stories like these also help learners for reading and writing. They are an entertaining way to foster the love of reading, increase vocabulary and learn a moral/life lesson that will be useful to them for the rest of their lives. I am proud to say that a number of learners have showed tremendous improvement in reading and writing and are more confident with using a story books. Using the story books also contributes in developing learners' spelling skills. For me there is less work because those learners who are confident are able to teach others! Many learners have shown more responsibility for their work.

Success story 2: Daryan khatoon’s support at Individual level

Fouzia Bhatti is 38 years old, working as a teacher in a primary school bagh Hayat Ali Shah. She is a graduate with an experience of 14 years in a primary education. She is mentee at Shamsabad school. About her learning, she said, “I feel a change in myself. I belief that now I can share and implement practical activities in my school by using no-cost and low-cost material. I must clear this thing that our mentor always reminded us about our own school context and give emphasis on using of low-cost material. I like these ideas, which I can afford to implement in my school. Throughout the workshop, we were encouraged by the mentor to use low-cost and no-cost material in our own classrooms. Hence, I learnt using such material

for conceptualizing activities. I appreciate the idea of low-cost, no-cost material. Now I have decided to make a resource corner in my school in which I would collect all these tiny things. I would also request other teachers and students not to throw away things, which we usually consider as useless, but place them in a resource corner. I would make it possible to take relevant material for teaching different topics. Further to this, she states, “Prior I teach the students traditionally but now I am making lesson plans. I teach students by interactive activities and make friendly environment in the classroom”.

Success Story 3: Daryan Khatoon’s Continues support at School Level

Bagh Hayat Ali shah is morning shift girls primary school where Daryan Khatoon visited frequently to provide continues follow-up support to the mentees. She conducted meetings with head teacher and mentees and discussed on lesson planning, copy checking, copy covering, school improvement plan, classroom management, effective teaching material for class room teaching, development of display material, effective teaching with the involvement of student and so on. *She shared that* ‘the students of evening shift, were destroying the display material, so in meeting head teacher and mentees agreed to paint walls instead of putting charts on the wall and develop flexible cards and models. They took interest and doing their work effectively.

Now after the continuously follow up visits, the condition of classrooms are entirely different. Head teacher along with mentees are working for the betterment of the school. She always supports her mentees morally and financially for the implementation of the new ideas in the classes. She gives easy / comfortable atmosphere to her staff. In this school boys and girls have separate washrooms, just because of her efforts. She always gives her best to the education. Head teacher reflected on her mentees’ efforts. She said, “Now teachers are taking very much interest in painting work, making of teaching aids with low cost / no cost material, using effective lesson planning in the classrooms. Mentees are collecting no/ low cost materials like, rubber bands, invitation cards for flash cards, boxes, rope for washing line, colors for painting etc. Mentees also shared that now they feel more responsibilities about their teaching, one of them reflected that, “Because of training and frequent follow up visits, I am happy to make my teaching more effectively and students are taking interest in the class.” another said, “Now student attendance ratio is increasing. Students are taking interest in group work, and I am also enjoying when I design the activities for students especially in science and maths subjects.” She reflected about mentors that, “with mentors kind guidance and suggestions I am doing my work more effectively.” She also shared that she is satisfied about her teaching with the help of lesson planning.

Conclusion

These are just a selection of observations from field notes and interviews, but it is clear that the development of [professional] identity has been an important outcome for the project teachers, as well as more broadly for the school and community. Further to this, principals need to possess a wide array of technical knowledge related to curriculum concepts, processes, and content. Equally important, however, they must understand the school culture and be able to work with the entire school community—teachers, parents, students, and support staff—in leading and supporting curriculum implementation. Furthermore, principals must be proactive in obtaining resources to support curriculum development, they must ensure that teachers receive the time and staff development opportunities to implement curriculum change, and they must keep a constant eye on the “bottom line” of positive student outcomes.