

Servant Leadership: The Leadership Style for Teachers

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Abstract

Leadership in schools has started assuming increased importance in schools across the globe. Effective leadership in schools is crucial for improving school outcomes, school culture and for influencing the motivations and capacities of teachers. Countries across the globe are striving to adapt their education systems as per the expectations of the contemporary society and hence the challenges that stand before school leaders is huge. In many countries principals and teachers have a heavy workload and people are hesitant to apply for a teachers' job due to the overburdened roles, insufficient training and preparation, limited career prospects and inadequate support and rewards. There has been immense study on leadership and the vast literature has enabled the development of a variety of competing models that have been combined and clustered together by writers to form some broad themes. This conceptual paper tries to examine the application of few servant leadership principles in teaching to enhance effectiveness of schools in developing better students.

Key words: Leadership, Servant leadership, Teaching

1. Introduction

Education forms the backbone of the growth and progress of any individual and subsequently the nation. Effects of globalisation has also touched the education sector in many ways and countries are now trying to adapt their education systems to satisfy the needs of the contemporary society. Schools are often managed by principals or headmasters who can influence the working life of teachers and their motivation which in turn affects the effectiveness of teachers and the school's performance in terms of student achievement (Hallinger and Murphy, 1986). Schools are now increasingly facing the effects of globalization like sudden technological interventions, diversity in workforce as well as the student community. Schools are no longer localized organizations but global organizations that have to train their stakeholders to sharpen their skills to adapt to the changing world. Leadership in schools is no longer restricted to administrative management of daily issues in schools but has to radically change to enable reforms that

could bring about radical changes in the educational system.

Bellon & Beaudry, (1992) have suggested that traditional roles like that of a department head, curriculum revision committee memberships and union memberships have typified leadership in schools. The role of a teacher is very stereotypical roles that allowed very limited scope for any kind of leadership actions. Nickse (1977) has strongly argued that teachers are the most suitable agents of change yet teachers do not perceive leadership roles for themselves (Bellon & Beaudry, 1992).

There has never been a clear idea of what effective leadership in schools is all about. In educational leadership the leader and the manager co-exist in the same individual (Manasse, 1986, p. 153). Also the assumption that change can come only from the top of the hierarchical level has led to ignoring the presence of leadership at lower levels too (Murphy, 1988, p. 655). Recent research seems to be focusing on teachers as leaders rather than just focusing on administrators (Bellon & Beaudry, 1992; Boles & Troen, 1992; Wasley, 1991).

There are several theories of leadership that discuss the way leaders ought to lead (Northouse 2010) and most of them focus on how the leader plays an active role in ensuring that followers willingly accept organizational values, serve and support the organization and contribute wholeheartedly to the attainment of various goals of the organization. These theories do not talk about the need for leaders to serve the needs of the followers. These theories also do not talk about how to collectively work with followers and get them into the decision making process thereby engaging them in their work. This servant leadership style provides a new insight into understanding the responsibility of leadership. The servant leader assumes an attitude of service and stewardship in his or her area of responsibility (Greenleaf, 1977).

Servant leaders according to Greenleaf are people who innately are motivated by a sense of service and putting other people first (Greenleaf Centre for Servant Leadership, 2010). Greenleaf (p.27) has stated, "The great leader is seen as a servant first, and this simple fact is the key to his greatness. A servant leader is a servant first. It begins with a natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first" Leading or occupying a pivotal position of leadership is never in the mind of the servant leader.

2. Teaching : An Inner Calling

Deciding to become a teacher especially, to teach children or teenagers, is a big decision that is not anything like a normal career growth in any other organization. The most important thing that an individual who takes to teaching would admit is that teaching is more of a vocation than a profession. I do not know whether any teacher has ever become rich , famous or powerful though possibly every rich, famous and powerful personality always had a teacher. Teaching is a noble act where the teacher commits to the development and education of a future generation which is very rare in other professions barring a few. Thus it is not a salary or monetary benefits that encourages somebody to enter the teaching field. According to the oxford dictionary, a, “profession” is a paid occupation that involves prolonged training and a formal educational qualification while a “vocation” is a strong feeling of suitability for a particular career or occupation, especially regarded as worthy and requiring dedication. A salesman can keep trying to sell his product but if the buyer is not convinced he has a choice of looking for another customer but can a teacher do this? If a student does not understand the teacher has to relentlessly keep finding ways and means to make the child understand and only then can she go ahead with her further teaching. No one can become an effective teacher if they come into teaching just because they have an appropriate graduation degree or higher unless there is an inner calling. Teachers also get salaries like any other profession but to become a real teacher it requires commitment and dedication to the enhancement of students,

Teaching is technically a profession where it normally involves occupation and the salary that is being awarded to a teacher after hard days of work. However, unlike any other profession, it requires dedication and service in order for an individual to be considered as a real teacher. That’s the reason why teaching should not just be treated as a simple profession but also a serious vocation where other people and service is over self and salary.

When many qualified people get into the teaching field, it raises eyebrows. People feel that possibly the individual did not have that “factor” to make it rich or famous hence he has become a poor teacher. Teaching is grossly misunderstood by general public and it becomes difficult to voice one’s opinions on the real reason of entering the teaching field. Everybody does not experience or understand the meaning of an inner calling to teach. A teacher develops the future generation not only in academic subjects but also life skills thus contributing to the holistic development of young lives. This is like an unexplained bond between the teacher and the children that binds the teacher for ages despite all the hardships, and

sacrifices the teacher has to make. Dealing with young students has its own rewards too. It keeps a teacher young at heart always, alert and curious about various aspects .As a teacher it becomes so important to set a vision for oneself and one’s students and always create conditions in class and otherwise that will help the students focus on their goals and become what they are truly capable of. The teacher allows the child to experiment, read and stumble in his path of learning but is always there for the child as a strong pillar of support. The journey of a teacher enables the student to become a friend for life for the teacher and vice versa. Teaching is also a learning process wherein the teacher also learns a lot from the child.

3. Servant Leadership in Teaching

This section tries to examine the application of few servant leadership characteristics in teachers

3.1 Service before Self:

The term servant leader seems very contradictory and confusing. How can a servant be a leader and how can a leader be a servant? Servant leadership is an innate deep feeling of caring for and treating followers as ends in themselves rather than as a means to an end. McCrimmon (2010) suggested that followers can be treated as most important only if the leader respects, values and motivates those who follow them. The meaning of servanthood is not subservience but having the concept of service always. A teacher embodies the principle of service because for a teacher nothing is more important her students. She serves her students in all possible ways to make them responsible people. The teacher is a mentor who has deep seated desires to develop her students at her own expense.

3.2 Vision:

The aim of any school is to make their students responsible citizens who would contribute in different ways to the improvement and well being of the society. Leaders of any organization should have a vision that would enable achievement of the objectives of the organization through processes that would induce and sustain the inspiration and momentum of both the leader and the follower (Goodwin 2006). Leaders should set ambitious and big goals that are realistic and achievable for themselves and their followers .Leaders should role model the values and behaviours for followers to follow in their endeavour to achieve the goals. Leaders should constantly allow their followers to find out ways and means to improve their performance just as teachers raise the performance bar for their students. Servant leaders

manifest qualities of humility and integrity in all their dealings and serve a higher purpose. Servant leaders are not obsessed with position, hierarchical power or limelight but are focused on ensuring that their followers' needs are served. Sipe and Frick (2009) suggest that a leader with foresight is creative and is a visionary who has a sound judgement. Teachers are humble and do not need any kind of credit for the success of their students. The real reward for a teacher is to see her students doing well in life making all the money the teacher could never make, getting all the glory the teacher never aspired for. The real pride for a teacher is in the silent but strong contributions that she made to make the student's future.

3.3. Letting Go

Servant leaders do not crave for the lime light and constant acknowledgement from others for their work. Since these leaders inherently love to serve, there are no vested interests and there is authenticity in their actions. They are very comfortable working behind the scenes. So these leaders come across as very humble (McGee-Cooper and Looper, 2001), integral (Wong and Page 2003) and vulnerable. There is a trust relationship between a teacher and a student. A teacher most of the times never criticizes a student's doubts, never makes a student feel foolish in front of others. A teacher encourages open presentation of a student's thoughts however trivial and gives equal importance to all students. This quality of teachers, as in servant leaders, may develop students to become individuals who are confident, will possibly assume responsibilities in their future. I am certain when an individual becomes famous, rich and powerful, there must be a teacher, who has never craved for recognition for the efforts put in by her to make the man what he is, would wipe tears of joy silently.

3.4 Openness and Authenticity

The authentic nature of a servant leader enables him to accept people as they are without any expectations from them (Greenleaf 1977). This unconditional acceptance puts people at ease and helps them experiment, become creative and take risks without the fear of ridicule. Servant leadership, unlike other forms of leadership, does not lay emphasis on status symbols or job titles. This style believes in equality of all in the organization and treats everybody accordingly. Teachers unconditionally accept all their students without any bias. Every student differs from the other with regards to the knowledge base, learning styles, background, thinking and ease of coping with

academics but the teacher prepares a standard ground for all these and levels the playing field for all of them. The result being all students will feel wanted and involved. Servant leaders encourage a culture of open communications, mutual trust, shared values and true concern for welfare of the other party. The same holds true for a teacher. The resultant relationship between the student and teacher is thus built on faith and is strong and can withstand disagreements or conflicts without reaching the breaking point, which is a strong characteristic of relationship of servant leadership with followers (Sendjaya et al; 2008).

Thus it may be proposed that servant leader characteristics of service, vision, letting go and Openness and authenticity may contribute to the effective learning and growth and development of students

4. Conclusions

Servant leadership is a choice made by the individual to serve rather than occupy a leadership position. Teaching is also a choice that individuals make to pursue as a dream of their life. The inner calling to teach lies buried deep in the soul and this calling leads an individual to the profession. The field of teaching is full of rigours and committed teachers face the rigours with joy but those who cannot make those kind of sacrifices. People who can make sacrifices will certainly experience a sense of satisfaction and fulfillment that is beyond compare. Servant leadership behaviours like service before self, a strong vision to enhance followers' potential before one's own enhancement, letting go and not craving for recognition and authenticity in behavior with no necessity to put on a façade, completely complement the teacher's role.

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