

Change and Transformation of School Leadership in the New Quality Era: A Case Analysis

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Abstract: Education in China is welcoming a new quality era, in which schools are required to transform their original development mode and to focus on student's core qualities. In order to cope with the challenges in the new quality era, we propose three aspects of school leadership transformation: firstly, to respect the essence and ultimate concern of education in order to realize the value of leadership in modern schools; secondly, to respect student's core quality needs and realize the teaching leadership of modern schools; and lastly to respect the creativity of headmasters and their exploration of individuality of the school in order to realize the organizational leadership of modern schools.

Keywords: New quality; Transformation of school; Development; Change in leadership

JEL Classifications: I20, I21, I24

1. Introduction

Nowadays, elementary education in China is welcoming a new quality era. In this era, schools focus on the development of student's core qualities and aim at accommodating the students to satisfy the needs of future world. Schools are required to shift the emphasis to foster real learning ability of students: nurturing student's responsibility to the country and their people, enabling their creativity, and developing their ability to explore and solve problems (Yin, 2017).

In this perspective, this new quality era requires an overall transformation and change from the original focus on scale, and from the instrumental value of education, to the genuine respect for humans and their development. In order to fulfill this aspiration of caring student's ultimate value, the rigid uniformity and lack of individuality should be abandoned. Meanwhile, schools need to update their educational, operational, managerial leadership ideas under the guideline of being exceptional and flexible with supportive environment. Definitely, this would challenge the rigid antiquated leadership ideas for school administrators.

In order to deal with the challenges, the school leadership is required to develop new approaches and standards in their daily management. In this thesis, we try to explore possible approaches. Based on the research of previous literature and the experiences we have drawn from successful daily operation of school, we propose three standards to meet the challenges and

elaborate our proposal with the practice of our school—Wuxi Fengxiang Experimental School, China.

2. Literature Review

Regarding the issue of transformation and change of school, there are many related literatures domestic or abroad. It is a commonly held idea that the transformation and development of schools is an integral change in the educational system and overall educational regulation in the process of social transformation and development. In this process, jointly, the scarcity of high-quality resources, the unbalanced development of schools and the obvious unfairness of educational opportunities have formed a global trend of school choice based on the public choice theory. Professor Benjamin Lavin pointed out that education reform is a kind of "hodgepodge": it is a complex social and historical phenomenon. It involves the renewal of educational ideas, the adjustment of educational policies, the reform of educational system structure and the resistance of history and culture (see Cheng, 2016).

In this complex process, how to transfer the ideas into practice has become an important issue. The British practice has set an example for this: the characteristic development of their schools is based on the view of equity and efficiency. Due to the urgent need for characteristic development at that time, the *Education Reform Act 1988* was introduced. In the further practice, the *Choice and Diversity* was published and established a policy framework to promote the diversification of schools under the implementation of the national curriculum. After the new Labour Party came into power in 1997, this administration adjusted its characteristic school policies to overcome the inequalities brought about by its competitors while maintaining the momentum to improve quality. It introduced its first whitepaper *Excellence in School* and set an aim of raising educational standards and narrowing the gap between schools.

The several steps of British practice have inspired other societies. Based on these, we could see that equal opportunities for education should be diversified to meet the different needs of children and seek differentiated equality. We could propose a strategic way in which the overall development could be achieved through the building and development of the characteristic schools to promote the surrounding schools, by narrowing the school gap, reducing the competition of quality school resources, and promoting more balanced distribution of opportunities (Ni & Zhang, 2012; Rosalind & Jenkins, 2006).

For the guidelines, Yi (2016) proposed that school restructuring should be presented in the five development ideas of "innovation, harmony, green, open and sharing" for the purpose of promoting schools to accelerate development. It is a balanced development combined with sustainable development, upgrading and development, and healthy development. Yang (2015) further suggests that in the new period, the blueprint for the transformation and development of compulsory education key schools should be woven from four aspects: paying attention to capacity building, carrying out reflective practice, establishing cooperative relationships with external partners, and implementing teacher leadership.

Cheng (2016) pointed out that, in a new era the transformation and development of modern schools mean that internal entity, the school education structure and values have been transformed from one form into another. Moreover, both the internal and external function of the school education have experienced vast changes. These changes enable the modern school education system to obtain a new relatively stable existence of general education reform process. The transformation and development of schools is faced with choice of value of equity and efficiency, and it should also undertake the mission and responsibility of social equity. In this background, how could a school take specific actions has become an urgent matter.

Although the literature shows that the transformation and development of schools is the trend of world education and many theoretical and general guidelines have been proposed, the specific matters and standards for schools are rarely studied or discussed. The following section of this paper discusses the practice of transition development from the micro perspective of schools. We will study a specific case of Fengxiang Experimental School of China and propose three standards based on its successful practice.

3. Standards of School Leadership in the New Quality Era

3.1 Standard I: Respect the essence and ultimate concern of education in order to realize the value of leadership in modern schools

To realize the value of leadership in modern schools, the key is to explore the individuality of a school. This is a process of correcting the one-sided aspiration of instrumental education and deviation of the true goal of education, i.e., comprehensive human development. Additionally, this would help to clarify the misunderstanding of current confusing education theories (Pei, 2017). The famous Russian educationist Sukhomlinski emphasizes that the prime role of a headmaster is to be the leader of education ideas, and the secondary role is to be an administrator. The leader of educational ideas requires the headmaster to design autonomously all aspects of the school and plan its development path under the care of human development. Every school is a combination of teachers and students in which headmaster and teachers could collaborate to realize educational ideas. It is an experimental lab for them to transfer their ideas into reality. This realization requires multi factors to be successful: educational wisdom, top-level design and scientific planning. Apart from these factors, the headmaster should be able to stand in the height of the development of the times and people, and to coordinate all the school teachers, students, parents, and social stakeholders. The headmaster should conduct extensive analysis of school conditions, concise teaching ideas, explore personalized school paths, and fully activate the school and social resources in order to build a good vision of the school.

The second step is to cultivate personalized culture. The school should be good at refining the core values, and find an organic integration of fine cultural traditions in order to form a unique spirit of the development, thus forming a strong democratic atmosphere, modern school philosophy, and unique school characteristics. Through consecutive adjustments and accumulations, a school-specific culture could thus be formed. Considering the fact that many schools have distorted the goal of education, we must break away from the pursuit of academic scores, utilitarianism, sensibility and even brutal utilitarianism, and change to the all-round development of the people. We need to guide students to have self-development, own the ability to life-long learning, and live a healthy life. We should guide students to have more social participation, have the social responsibility, and practice the spirit of innovation. At the same time, by focusing on the lack of democratic awareness of the school, the weak atmosphere of care, and the scarcity of school cooperation, among many other long-lasting problems in Chinese education, we could take initiative to find appropriate strategies and create a healthy and personalized school culture.

Wuxi Fengxiang Experimental School could be taken as a case to illustrate this. As a nine-year compulsory public school, we have been trying to create an individualized and characteristic school by embody the ultimate concern for students in planning and school cultural construction since its foundation in 2007. Two rounds of school development planning have been organized and formulated to guide the scientific and orderly development of the school. The breakthrough we have found is to create a culture-based school leadership with respect to the essence of education. We have refined the theoretical framework and practical system of our unique school culture. Based on the Chinese culture, especially the culture of the school name, Fengxiang (meaning Soaring Phoenix), we have sought the cultural root in the traditional culture and deeply explored the

meaning and connotation of the Phoenix culture. Furthermore, based on the governmental guideline, people's expectation, and the actual conditions of this school, we have raised our New Civilian Education Initiative as our guideline. Under this guideline, we have set the goal of letting every student have a wonderful life. Apart from this, all theoretical frameworks have been integrated with educational practice, including the teaching styles, development of teachers, administration, etc. The culture has been deeply integrated with educational practice and yield countless motivation, which gradually contribute to the formation of a publicly acknowledged quality school.

3.2 Standard II: Respect core quality needs of students and realize the teaching leadership of modern schools

The current score- and exam-oriented education would cause endless troubles, not only to the chaotic administration of schools, but more importantly to the overall development of students. The real education that we pursuit should be based on the following aspects: a school's mission is to enable the students to develop; all resources are obtained and utilized in order to support student's development; and all school behaviors should aim at supporting curriculum and education. To realize this, we need to reform the teaching leadership.

The key is teaching leadership in curriculum leadership. Therefore, the current transformation of leadership need to focus on the curriculum. It requires enhancement of teacher's ability in creatively implementing the national curriculum, improving their overall ability, integrating the educational resources, constructing school-based curriculum, and thus developing the practical ability of the school curriculum (Pei, 2017).

In the transformation practice, based on core quality needs of students, our school has established a comprehensive system which embodies the basic curriculum, extended curriculum, and exploration inquiry. In this system, the development of student's core quality is the essence while the national, regional and school-based curriculums are unified. Moreover, a monitoring system of curriculum quality has been established as well. In teaching practice, students are the core.

The core transformation in reform is to create a True Classroom Teaching, whose aim is to create a happy learning environment and gradually shift the learning styles. The True Classroom Teaching, as its name clearly demonstrates, clarifies the real value of teaching and pursues a quality and natural teaching style. In this new teaching style, teachers shift from a dominating role to a cooperative role in a class, and they focus on how to transmit the essence of teaching and knowledge, to the students.

The construction of True Classroom Teaching is not a rash advance but a gradual result of joint-effort of school leadership and teachers. The leadership invites educational experts, peers to provide professional advices. The school also initiates experiments to guide the teachers to welcome the reform. In the daily practice, three types of examination, exploration and follow-up curriculum are introduced in each subject every week. Based on this monitoring system, certain committees would attend and evaluate lectures throughout the whole academic term. A curriculum development report would thus be formed based on these evaluation and monitoring activities.

As the key resource, the administration of teachers should be the prime concern of the headmaster. In our school, teachers are robust power, instead of a tool, and one important part of school-student-parent community. In this way, we build a school full of potential, and aim at fulfilling the overall development of not only the students but also the teachers. We also provide our teachers with academic support by cooperating with Jiangsu Provincial Educational Institution. We have organized various teacher development activities as well, such as Sukhomlinski Research Committee, Expert Teacher Workshop, "2+2 Workshop", etc.. All the efforts have been targeting at the consistent development of teachers.

3.3 Standard III: Respect the creativity of headmasters and their exploration of individuality of the school in order to realize the organizational leadership of modern school

In recent years, voices have raised that educationists run the schools. This new era calls for more educational professionals who are in possession of educational ideals, feelings, and broad forward-looking vision to lead schools. The newly introduced *Administration of Primary and Secondary School Leading Personnel* emphasizes the long-term effect of educating people and the professionalism of their posts, which indicates that the educational ecology is developing towards the direction of educational health. The educational administration should further change its functions, from the administrative leadership which focuses on screening, adjudication, and decision to overall planning, service and guidance. We should respect the creativity of headmasters and tolerate and support their personalized exploration of the schools (Yang, 2016).

The headmaster is in the key position of a school. Headmaster should strive to create a field full of vigor and vitality; respect every teacher's creativity and stimulate their inner desire for educational beauty so that teachers and students could then work together to achieve a higher and deeper realm of cooperative development.

In the six-years long school development exploration, we have found a way to combine qualitative and quantitative measures, and combine the long-term and short-term practices. The key we found is the standardization of management. This school adheres to the precise management by integrating the goal of education with the details of school organization and management. By compiling a detailed management manual, a clear management process has been established. We need to adhere to human nature on one hand, and promote orderly operation on the other hand, in order to let the school goes into the new era of governance. All administration branches are reorganized and given new functions.

We have also conducted other measures to promote the modern administration of the school. Board of Management, Committee of Parents, Board of Supervisors, and other recourses are widely consulted, in order to collectively promote school development. The school leadership also introduces the positive psychology and creates the belief of Appreciative Inquiry. This is a novel practice which stimulates all school members to get involved in school administration by taking the school as a place to fulfill their own dream. School members are encouraged to positively identify problems and creatively contribute in solving it; they are also encouraged to identify the advantages and to utilize the strength of the advantages to further promote the development of the school (Zhang, 2015; Cooperrider *et al.*, 2008).

Additionally, we do not treat the school as an isolated island but integrate it into an ecological system. We aim at creating an educational community and construct a Two-Generation and One Educational Family Plan. One example is to promote the 100-1000-10000 Reading Initiative, i.e. 100 teachers promote reading, 1000 children to love reading, and thus 10000 parents get involved in reading and then 100000 community citizens influenced by reading. By promoting mutual reading activities, we want to cultivate lifelong readers and instruct all parties involved to be educated. Another example is the home-visit activities. The school stays focusing on two-day home visits per semester to stimulate the communication and cooperation between parents and teachers. Apart from the practical meaning, the seeds of right education are sown into every parent's mind so an effective education alliance with multi cooperation could then be formed.

4. Concluding Summary

This paper discusses a few standards that school leadership could consider in the transformation in this new quality era. The change and transformation of school leadership is not

patched or affiliated to the traditional administration, nor is it a kind of cosmetics package to the original school management standards. These three standards would help the leadership to transform leadership to accommodate the new era. These standards respectively aim at the innovation of (1) school organizational vision, (2) personnel training objectives, and (3) school development path. Meanwhile, they agree in nature and cooperative contribution to the successful transformation. More importantly, these standards are far more than empty expressions as they are drawn from the successful practice of a school's development in the past several years, which certainly sheds lights on other educational institutions.

The transformation is the innovation of school organizational vision, personnel training goal, and school development path. It requires introduction of novel ideas and motivation against the long-lasting utilitarian function of a school. It bears a goal to promote human development, and to make people adapt to social needs of the ever-changing society. People are advised to take advantages of the school, carry out their dreams, carefully and precisely design and then achieve the goal, and thus create a positive road.

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