



Dreams and Destiny in Teacher Leadership in a Barrio School in Infanta, Quezon

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ABSTRACT

PURPOSE. This research aimed to describe and portray the teacher leadership in Tudturan Elementary School in Infanta, Quezon.

DESIGN/METHODOLOGY/APPROACH. The study utilized the appreciative inquiry method.

FINDINGS. The results revealed that teacher leadership in Tudturan Elementary School can be described as active, collaborative and engaging, and transcendent. Similarly, they envision to have a leadership that is excellence in teaching and learning, with sound professional growth and development, and with unity and collaboration. On the areas that needs improvement, four themes emerged; pursuing relevant skills and knowledge, strong desire and determination for change, positive attitudes and viewpoints, and personal responsibility and accountability. While the things that need adjustment which are essential to uphold, they shared to maintain positive relationship among colleagues, parents, and pupils, flexibility in the workplace, commitment and dedication to the teaching profession, and organizing plans to meet goals. Furthermore, teacher leadership can be a dream like a star and a destiny like a journey to travel.

IMPLICATION/LIMITATION. This research was focused on the four aspects of the research topic specifically the highlights, visions, facets of improvement, and the adjustment to be done for development in teacher leadership in Tudturan Elem. School.

ORIGINALITY/VALUE. The research is the first appreciative inquiry research in the Division of Quezon that dealt with the teacher leadership.

KEYWORDS: Teacher Leadership, Collaboration, Professional Growth And Development

Introduction

Vince Lombardi once said that leaders are not born, they are made. And they are made over many years, shaped by professional and personal experiences. The best leaders learn from their experiences in a thoughtful, strategic manner (Hallenbeck, 2020). Teachers as leaders are now facing an extraordinary challenge, they would ever experience that is, providing quality education service amidst the COVID 19 pandemic.

According to Pokhrel and Chhetri (2021), COVID 19 pandemic has created the largest disruption of education systems in human history, affecting nearly 1.6 billion learners in more than 200 countries. With issues on reliable internet connection and access to digital devices, lack of parental guidance for the young learners, vulnerability of the learners to online exploitation because of the unstructured time spent on online learning, and the absence or lack of physical workspaces conducive to different ways of learning, the level of academic performance of the learners is likely to drop for the classes due to the reduced contact time of learners and teachers.

In the Philippines, the study of Marquez, et al (2020), presented another face of teacher leadership challenges brought by the pandemic. As revealed, the inadequacy and shortage of educational materials is one of the major problems in the education system because the government has failed to provide the needs as well as the impossibility of providing all learners in the public schools. Another is the issue on internet connectivity, especially to the schools, teachers, and learners residing and situated in the far-flung areas.

Likewise, according to Mercado (2020), the one who suffer the most in this pandemic are the teachers because they are required to reproduce the modules in spite of tight budgets. They are also compelled to distribute the modules that in some instances may take hours of motorcycle riding in a rocky, muddy or uneven terrain or to cross rivers just to deliver them to the hands of their learners.

With these enormous problems exist due to the impact of COVID 19 in education system, teacher leadership in a barrio school is in great challenge. With a few members of work force, insufficient budget, delayed production of self-learning modules, and limited resources, the teacher leadership is a necessity while education is emergency.

Thus, this research highlights the best practices of teacher leadership in Tudturan Elementary School amidst the pandemic in response to the challenges and issues of teaching delivery. Furthermore, this research undertaking recognizes the efforts and sacrifices of teachers along with their vulnerability to COVID 19. Much more, this study helps the teachers reflect on the aspects of teacher leadership which needs more focus, innovation, and improvement towards school organization.

Research Question

This research investigation aimed to describe and explore the teacher leadership in a barrio school in Infanta, Quezon. Specifically, it seeks answers to the following questions:

1. How do teachers describe their leadership highlights?
2. How do teachers in the barrio school envisage their leadership?
3. What aspect of teacher leadership needs improvement in the barrio school?
4. What adjustment in teacher leadership is essential to uphold?
5. What significant insight in teacher leadership may be drawn from the study?

Scope and Limitations

This research on teacher leadership in a barrio school focused on the four major aspects prerequisite to appreciative inquiry: highlights, visions, facets of improvement, and the adjustment to be done for development. The research participants were limited to the teachers of Tudturan Elementary School in Brgy, Tudturan, Infanta, Quezon. The method used was appreciative inquiry coupled with open-ended question and interview guide, while the means or techniques for data gathering were focus group discussion and participant observation.

Methodology

This research highlights the teacher leadership in a barrio school using the appreciative inquiry method. According to Reed (2007), appreciative inquiry is a radical and pervasive approach to understanding the social world. Cooperrider and Whitney (2005) define it as the cooperative coevolutionary search for the best in people, their organization, and the world around them. The researcher found this method to be the most appropriate relative to the objectives of the study and research purposes.

Research Setting

Tudturan Elementary School in Brgy. Tudturan is located in the Eastern part of Infanta, Quezon and one of the agricultural barangays. It has five barangays catchment area and classified as rural or in a barrio since farming and fishing were the common occupation of people living in this place.

Research Participants

The research participants of the study were the nine teachers of Tudturan Elementary School. They are all regular permanent and with a minimum teaching experience of three years. No sampling technique will be used in the selection of research participants since qualitative research didn't require a minimum number of research participants depending on the method being used by the researcher (Patton, 2002).

Research Instruments

The main instrument used in this research undertaking was interview utilizing the open-ended question as the interview guide of the researcher.

Data Gathering Procedures and Techniques

The researcher wrote a letter to the Public School District Supervisor requesting the conduct of research and data gathering. All teachers in Tudturan Elementary School were informed and a focus group discussion was conducted to collect qualitative data.

Data Explication and Analysis

The data and information gathered were thematically analyzed and interpreted. All narrative paced the process of coding and then developed into themes.

Research Ethical Consideration

Research participants were informed of the purpose and surrounding of the study, assured of free from harm or pressure, kept in anonymity, and given the privilege to know the result of the study.

Results and Discussion

A Portrait of Teacher Leadership

The leadership of teachers in Tudturan Elementary School can be described and illustrated in three categorical themes that emerged from their accounts during the focus group discussion. These themes exemplified the highlights of their leadership despite of the challenges to their health security.

Active Instructional Leadership

One of the notable aspects of teacher leadership in Tudturan Elementary School is their active instructional leadership. As Ma'am Melia mention in her account;

I have a group chat with my students. It is quite good because almost everyone is a member. If they have quarries, they sent private messages with me. I also search for video lesson that are similar with our topic and in our module. I forwarded all of these with them.

Teachers are dedicated to service and instructional leadership, focusing on the success of their pupils. Lowery-Moore et al., (2016) and Cosenza (2015) both emphasize that teacher leadership is concerned with curriculum selection, program enhancement, instructional resources, student placement, and everything else that influences children's learning results. Teachers are thought to be leaders when they take action in making judgments in these areas.

Collaborative and Engaging Leadership

Another aspect of teacher leadership that came out from their narratives is their collaboration and engagement with the barangay officials and parents. As mentioned by Ma'am Annie,

I am also coordinating with the Sanguinan barangay official so that children will not go anywhere or ride bikes. I told them that during the school days that they should be at home. Atoy is helping me (the barangay councilor) to keep the children in their homes and should not be out during their class time because we have a schedule. So with the support and assistance of the Sanggunian in roaming around the place, they insured that children should not go elsewhere during that time.

Chee Yuit, Yusof, and Mohammad (2016) suggest fostering a collaborative culture to support teachers' collaboration and student learning. Effective teacher leaders build trustworthy and collaborative connections to foster life-long learning and reflective practices.

Transcendent Leadership and Service without Boundaries

Being a teacher is about extending your service at all occasions, seasons, and situation. This time of pandemic, teachers of Tudturan Elementary School are trying to meet the needs of their pupils through home visits. In this activity, they were able to determine the situations and challenges of their learners. Here are the experiences of Ma'am Hanna and Ma'am Sonia, the grade one and five teachers.

Through our home visit activities, we were able identify the needs of our learners as we assessed them, that they need our earnest guidance. The time that we had our duty every day, we had the opportunity to teach them how to write appropriately from blue line to blue line and red to blue line. These are our best practices, conducting home visits and activities here in school.

In connection with Hanna, through our home visits, I was able to find out who among my learners needing a one-on-one guidance. Every Tuesday, I teach one of them reading and provided them some reading materials based on their abilities. Through home visits, I became aware of his situation and determine the reasons why he wasn't able to study his lessons at home. I found out that he is alone at nobody can teach him.

The Institute for Educational Leadership (2001) suggested that teacher leadership is not necessarily about power, but about seeking additional challenges and growth opportunities. When COVID 19 hit the Philippines, teachers suffered the most due to their high personal standards and sense of responsibility. A study conducted by Rupšienė and Skarbalienė (2015) found that teacher leadership characteristics in schools include high personal standards, strong vision and loyalty, the ability to overcome fears, stress, and evaluate working situations realistically, the sense of responsibility, the resolution to strive for result, and the ability to motivate learners and colleagues.

Dreams and Visions for Teacher Leadership

Dealing with the teachers' desires and dreams in their leadership, two remarkable themes transpire from their account; the teacher leadership that centers on teaching, learning and the leadership with sound professional growth and development, and leadership with unity and collaboration. Here are some narratives of the teachers in Tudturan Elementary School.

A Leadership with Excellence in Teaching and Learning

To Ma'am Liza,

Sir, I dream to be an excellent teacher in reading. Now, I want all of my pupils be a good reader. I, together with Ma'am Danniese we have developed classroom rules because we want to focus on reading as well as in numeracy and literacy. The reasons why we have to develop these rules was because of our experience last year. We enlisted everything so that we cannot miss the things that we need to do in this school year. And if ever that we missed something today, we will write it again. Hoping this will serve as our guide this year.

Teacher leadership is the initiative of teachers to improve practice, acting strategically with colleagues to embed change, gathering and using evidence in collaborative processes, and contributing to the creation and dissemination of professional knowledge. It is the process by which teachers influence their colleagues, principals, and other members of the school communities to improve teaching and learning practices with the aim of increased student learning and achievement (Center of Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement 2019).

A Leadership with a Sound Professional Growth and Development

Teachers in Tudturan also express their hopes and dreams in having a leadership with a sound professional growth and development. As shown in their narratives, one teacher stated her hopes to develop video lessons for her pupils. Here is the account of Ma'am Melia;

I agree with all your opinions. I do also like to teach reading and Math, dreaming that they may be able to recite the multiplication table. Would you agree that if they would be promoted to grade 4 and unable to learn this, it would be difficult for them. Similarly, I do also hope to create video lessons even though I don't know how because for me it is good.

The Bradman University (2019) identified teacher leadership as an association leadership that focuses on their capability to create and guide others in a collective action. It also focuses on their ability to sense what is working and what is not in the learning environment, and their ability to support other colleagues in the achievement of quality instructional practice. These competencies include continuing learning and education, group processes, and adult learning and technological facility.

Leadership with Unity and Collaboration

On the account of Ma'am Lenlen, though she agreed with others on making oneself more effective in teaching, she also emphasized that in the process teaching, everybody must be involved and work collaboratively. She also highlighted in her last statement that their relationship towards everybody must always be intact and strong. Here is the narrative;

Sir, I think that all of what we have heard were the same and good but, I hope that we can develop a program that had a focus. And do hope that we can focus on our work as a teacher at the same time to continuously work collaboratively and collectively.

The CSTP or Center for Strengthening the Teaching Profession (2009) identified three categories of effective leadership: collaborative work, teaching, developing and using norms of collaboration, conflict resolution, using protocols, modelling, matching language to the situation, sharing responsibility and leadership, and holding oneself accountable to the group's goals and outcomes.

Areas for Improving the Teacher Leadership

Pursuing for Relevant Skills and Knowledge

Teachers should never stop learning and should be able to adapt to the rapid development of new technologies. Pursuing relevant skills and knowledge is an area for improvement in Tudturan teachers. Here is the account of Ma'am Mylene and Ma'am Sonia, a kinder teacher and an experience grade four teacher;

For me sir, being knowledgeable in ICT today is a great advantage because it is a big help for the children too. Similar to the opinion of Ma'am Melia about making a video, I tried to and ask for help from a co-teacher in Real. I am really having difficulty in teaching kindergarten, that is now may target though little by little we have learned from our INSET.

Integrating technology in teaching is a trend in the 21st century, and Chee Yuit et al. (2016) have introduced measures to improve teacher leadership. These include fostering a collaborative culture, fostering reflective practices, facilitating improvements, and establishing standards.

Strong Desire and Determination for Change

Teachers need to change themselves to become effective leaders, but without determination and will to do so, it will remain a dream. This notion of teachers can be observed as Ma'am Hanna and Ma'am Danniese described;

It's about putting ourselves in a box, that is want we want to change. Like what you have done to us, you always push us to do things that we knew we can do. We need for ourselves to have self-confidence.

Teachers strive to be the best and have a strong vision for change. Chee Yuit et al. (2016) noted that teacher leaders are willing to go beyond their roles and demonstrate exemplary practices to contribute above and beyond the expectation.

Positive Attitudes and Viewpoints

Love and tender care from the teachers are felt despite of the difficulties and problems that parents bestowed upon their child's education. Teachers don't easily give up on their pupils, instead they find ways to help them. Here is the demonstration of positive attitude and outlook in life of Ma'am Liza;

First and foremost, it should not be me alone that takes care of the child but them, because they are the parent or guardian. They should not give because I don't give up for the child; I want him to learn. In this way, I seems that I give counseling to the parents.

Berry et. al. (2010) found that engaging families and other community partners is a frequent challenge for teachers. Dela Torre (2018) found that struggles, challenges, and problems encountered by teachers are common to all teachers and can serve as sources of unfading love and strength. Teachers are optimistic in perceiving trials as their spring of new strength and hope to become more resilient.

A Sense of Personal Responsibility and Accountability

In the improvement of teacher leadership, the teachers in Tuduran pointed out the importance of sense of personal responsibility and accountability. The teachers also realized their indecisiveness and uncertainty in their works. These are the confessions of Ma'am Lenlen and Ma'am Anie;

One thing that we need to develop is our attitudes in leadership towards the day. There are times that we disregard our task and think that it can be done tomorrow or the other day or later. We also tend to look for somebody to be with until we missed it and then crammed.

The Center for Strengthening the Teaching Profession (2009) identified systems thinking as the last category of effective teacher leadership. This includes recognizing the layers of the systems, understanding the power and structure of decision making, working within the rule of hierarchy, garnering support from and working with stakeholders, dealing effectively with resistance, facilitating collective inquiry practices, understanding and leveraging resource allocation, and asking the right questions at the right time. It also includes advocacy skills such as setting achievable goals, creating and implementing plan to meet goals, building capacity for sustainability, identifying decision makers, crafting and delivering an effective message, and mobilizing people into action.

The Principles of Effective Teacher Leadership in the Barrio School

Maintaining positive relationship among colleagues, parents, and pupils. Collaboration among colleagues, partnership with parents, and understanding the learners' situations are indications of well built and strong positive relationship. As teachers, maintaining this principle can sustain or increase their current level of teacher leadership towards success and excellence. Here is the account of Ma'am Janet;

I want to maintain our good relationship. I hope that we will continue to work together for one goal, hoping also that nobody left and keep being strong and solid.

Fostering a collaborative culture to support teachers' collaboration and student learning is essential for successful and effective teacher leadership. Chee Yuit et al. (2016) emphasize the importance of life-long learning and reflective practices to foster this culture.

Flexibility in the workplace. There are instances that works, reports, projects, and activities must be done and submitted immediately. Most of the time, we must adjustment our time and other task and prioritize the others. Being flexible in the workplace will help us accomplish and finish the job with sensirity and effectiveness. Likewise, flexibility can also support the camaraderie in the organization. As mentioned by Ma'am Danniese;

What I really want to maint with us is our flexibility, especially for me. Unlike before that we are so much stressed with the reports and sudden changes, we can now be more flexible like if there is a need to bend then we bend or if we need to get up then we do it. At the same time we should maintain being open for the challenges, something like that.

Commitment and dedication to the teaching profession. Teachers' dedication and commitment to work is unmatched, as they prepare instructional materials and lesson plans at home, conduct home visits to monitor their pupils, and extend their service beyond the period of work. This was pointed out by Ma'am Lenlen;

May be what we need to maintain is our dedication, being a teacher we pledge to do our work. Would you agree with me that there times though Saturday and Sunday, we have to work? So we really understand that this is the nature of our job.

According to Mercado (2020), teachers are the most affected by the Pandemic, as they are required to reproduce modules in spite of tight budgets and distribute them in difficult terrain. This is especially evident in schools in the barrio and hinterland.

Organizing plans to meet goals. Another important principle that was identified by the teachers in Tudturan Elementary School is the significant role of plans in teacher leadership. Teachers are working based on the plans extended to them. Thus, it serve as their guide in performing their duties and responsibilities. Furthermore, their effectiveness will be measured according to the goals being met. Here are the narratives of Ma'am Hanna and Ma'am Liza;

Sir, maybe, we should maintain our goals for example in our project. Let us enhance it, modify it, and if needing for a change then, let us change it.

This principle that has been pointed out by the teachers in Tudturan Elementary School is being described by the Center for Strengthening the Teaching Profession (2009), illustrating the association of teacher leadership and systems thinking which includes the capabilities and strong advocacy in setting achievable goals, developing and executing plan to meet long term goals and objectives, and mobilizing the stakeholders into action.

Insights from Research Study

Upon reflecting on the results of the study, the researcher identified the two significant concepts that may be considered elemental and cardinal to teacher leadership; dreams and destiny.

The teachers at Tudturan Elementary School have identified their hopes and dreams for their leadership. They have presented ideas such as collaboration, improvement of teaching and learning practices, impact of continuous desire to grow professionally, and self-awareness. Being motivated and determined in teacher leadership is essential for success and excellence. Having a dream and vision of the future is essential for effective and efficient teacher leadership. Keeping oneself aware and sensitive to areas that need improvement, focusing on the aspects that should be prioritized, and developing plans and strategies align to the vision will ensure the realization of the dreamed teacher leadership in the barrio school.

Conclusions

The following statements are the conclusions of this research based on the findings of the study.

1. Teacher leadership at Tudturan Elementary School is active, collaborative, engaging, and transcendent.
2. Teachers in the barrio school strive for excellence in teaching and learning, professional growth, and collaboration.
3. Teacher leadership needs to focus on developing relevant skills, desire and determination, positive attitudes, and personal responsibility and accountability.
4. Teachers agreed on the importance of maintaining positive relationships, flexibility in the workplace, commitment and dedication to the teaching profession, and organizing plans to meet goals.
5. Teacher leadership improves learning outcomes at Tudturan Elementary School.
6. Teacher leadership in barrio schools can lead to success and excellence.

Recommendation

In this research, the following recommendations are hereby provided.

1. To the teachers. Teachers should maintain the existing level of active instruction, collaboration and engagement, and service with no boundaries, focus on the vision, improve the desire to grow professionally and work with strong collaboration, and uphold the principles of positive relationship, flexibility, commitment, and organization of plans.
2. To the school head. Empower teachers, support them, and encourage them to pursue their vision and live within their potential for effective and successful teacher leadership.
3. To the parents and pupils. They should collaborate with the teachers in their effort towards the improvement of the learning outcomes and support the teachers in the pursuit of their vision and living within the prospects and possibilities of effective and successful teacher leadership.

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