THE INFLUENCE OF TRANSFORMATIONAL SCHOOL LEADERS IN TRANSFORMING THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

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Abstract
This paper highlights the practices of transformative leadership in the schools in Malaysia. Studies show that the school leaders who practice transformative leadership are the pivotal players in establishing better environment at schools. This paper begins with the discussions of the dominant characteristic of transformative school leaders. It is a qualitative study whereby six transformative school leaders who had been identified were interviewed. The study was guided by three research questions: 1). What constitutes transformational leadership? 2). How does transformational leadership get constructed? 3). What are the impacts of transformational leadership? The respondents were purposively selected based on three criteria: i). the respondents were of transformational leaders; ii). they had done transforming or reshaping the schools; iii). they have been principals for at least five years. In-depth interviews were used to gather information from respondents who were interviewed. A total of ten interviews were conducted. These in-depth interviews provided the researcher with ‘real-life” experiences of these respondents in achieving a more authentic data. The trustworthiness of the study was ensured through triangulation, namely member check, peer examination and a documentation of an audit trail. The findings revealed that transformative leaders influenced the teachers in term of commitment. Transformational leadership practices created an impact towards the learning environment significantly. In addition, the study also suggests that transformative leaders had significant social influence on community that leads changes to the learning environment. This study contributes to the continuing discussions how far transformative leadership have effect on the educational development.

Keywords: transformative leadership; learning environment; social influence

Introduction
Transformational leadership is a process in which the leaders take actions to try to increase the awareness of what is right and important. As well, it is a process to raise motivational maturity and to move beyond the persons’ own self-interests for the good
of the school or society. These type of leaders provide others with a sense of purpose that goes beyond a simple exchange of rewards for effort provided.

The transformational leaders, in many different and unique ways, are proactive. These leaders attempt to optimize not just performance, but development as well. Development encompasses such things as the maturation of ability, motivation, attitudes, and values. They convince others to strive for a higher level of achievement as well as higher levels of moral and ethical standards. Through the development of their teachers, they optimize the development of their school as well. High performing teachers build high performing organizations. The aim of the study was to explore the dominant characteristic of transformative school leaders. The study also investigated how does transformative leadership influence the learning environment? The study was guided by three research questions: 1). What constitutes transformational leadership? 2). How does transformational leadership get constructed? 3). What are the impacts of transformational leadership? The discussions had argued how transformative leadership transform the learning environment. The discussion has also attempted to offer realistic strategies for implementing this new leadership model. Thus, the insights help to link educational policy with practical educational development and to improve the educational community as a whole.

**Transformational Leadership**

There are various conceptions towards transformational leadership. One of the common one put forth by Downtown is that transformational leadership is a leadership when one or more persons engage with others in such a way that leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of motivation and morality (Downtown, 1973).

At the same time, Burns (1978) first introduced the concepts of transformational and transactional leadership in his treatment of political leadership, but this term is now used in organizational psychology as well. According to Burns, the differences between transformational and transactional leadership is what leaders and followers offer one another. Transforming leadership occurs when or more persons engage with others in such a way that leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of motivation and morality. Their purposes, which might have started out as separate but related, as in the case of transactional leadership, become fused.

The heart of transformational leadership is the leader’s desire and ability to raise the consciousness of others by appealing to powerful moral values and ideals. The leader is able to transform followers beyond the dishonorable emotions of jealously, greed and fear to higher principles of liberty, justice and humanitarianism. As Burns (1983) would say, the followers are raised from their “everyday selves” to become “better selves.” Transformational leaders influence followers by serving as a teacher, mentor and coach. They seek to elevate and empower others to a higher level. Transformational leaders can be found within any organization and at any level in the organization. This is a leader that can influence superiors, peers or subordinates.

Bass and Stogdill (1990) expanded upon the earlier ideas of Burns with his own theory of transformational leadership. He defines this supervision in terms of the leader’s motivational effect on followers. They feel loyalty, trust, admiration and respect toward the transformational leader. The followers are motivated to serve and achieve
more than they originally were expected to. They are inspired to achieve higher-order needs and are made more aware of the organization’s needs for their unique skills and talents. Today, it is acknowledged that there are four various types of transformational leadership behavior. Bass (1990) outlined four main components of transformational leadership.

In schools, it deals with finding a way to become successful in collaboratively defining the essential purpose of teaching and learning and then empowering the entire school community to become energized and focused (Liontos, 1992). Leithwood (1992) defines transformational leadership as a leadership that facilitates the redefinition of a people’s mission and vision, a renewal of their commitment and the restructuring of their systems for goal accomplishment (p. 9). It is a relationship of mutual stimulation and elevation that converts followers into leaders and may convert leaders into moral agents (Brubacher et al., 1994). Hence, transformational leadership must be grounded in moral foundations (Bass and Steidlmeyer, 1998).

Methodology
The study intended to examine the transformational leadership experience and the impacts of their transformational leadership towards the schools. This study employed qualitative approach for a number of reasons: i) it enabled the researcher to gather the insights of the experience of leadership from the teacher leaders; ii) different experience can be shared as these experiences were embedded within each respondent; iii) the different perspective provides a more holistic view of the transformational leadership process; and iv) the researcher is interested in discovering the meanings, perspectives and understanding on the characteristics, attitudes, and knowledge amongst these teacher leaders in the transformational paradigm.

The qualitative inquiry should be able to facilitate the understanding and explain the phenomena investigated. Qualitatively, the outcomes of such experiences can be collected and analyzed accordingly in bringing the meaning of the experiences.

Case Study as Research Strategy
The researcher employed a qualitative case study design for the inquiry. Case study approach had been used by number of researchers (Ishak, 2001: Zainab, 1998, Loy, 2003; Yeo, 2006) in exploring transformational leadership in local setting.

Merriam (1998) defines a qualitative case study is an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single instance, phenomenon, or social unit. A case study needs to have a boundary. She proposes the use of the case study in addressing the “how” and “why” questions of the study (Merriam, 1994). She defines a case study as an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident.

Creswell (1998) describes the bounded system is bounded by time and place, and the context of the case involves situating the case within its setting. Stake (1995) expects a case study to produce a “thick description’, “and experiential understanding’ and “multiple realities’. The use of case study seeks to provide greater understanding and appreciation on the uniqueness and complexity of the case, its embedded ness
and interaction with its context. Patton (1990) discusses the benefits of case studies particularly useful where one needs to understand people, problem or situation in great depth.

**Case Selection**
Cases were selected for the study because they are particularly interest given the study’s purpose (Patton, 1990). Selection of these teacher leaders in the primary and secondary schools facilitates for the research was based on the State Education Department records highlighting the few teacher leaders in the selected states under investigation. The few schools had been identified as it has shown from the records that these teacher leaders had created an impact in reshaping the schools.

Merriam (1998) suggests the use of purposive sampling is based on the assumption for an in-depth understanding that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned. Patton (1990) suggests information-rich case study as the criteria for sample selection. A case is chosen as to maximize what the research needs to learn (Stake, 1995).

**Selection of Respondents**
In order to provide us with a “truer” picture of the transformative school leaders attitudes towards community development as well as how they appreciate their role as school leaders in the community, data were gathered from three sites to allow triangulation. Firstly, and primarily, data were gathered from in-depth interviews with the five identified respondents whom are school leaders.

In addition to in-depth interviews with the school leaders, data were also gathered from the teachers’ perspectives, which they have been asked to fill up a brief survey reflecting on their observations, thoughts and comments on the school leaders selected for the study. Finally, open-ended, informal interviews were carried out from the community to obtain the views of the school leaders with regard of the roles of the transformative school leaders have demonstrated in the journey of leading the school. Hence, triangulation through multiple modes of data collection (Patton, 1990) and prolonged engagement (Creswell, 1998) were used to enhance the credibility (Patton, 1990), or trustworthiness (Lincoln and Cuba, 1985) of the findings and to ensure the quality of the findings.

Ethical issues were a major concern in my study. The researcher must be conscious of the ethical issues that pervade the research process and to examine her philosophical orientation. Guidelines and regulations are available, to remind the researcher, when questioning of a participant becomes coercive, or when to intervene in abusive or illegal situation or how to ensure the study findings will not be used as a detriment to those involved (Merriam, 1999).

In the nature of my study, ethics has to do with the application of a system of moral principles to prevent harming or wrongdoing others, to promote the good, to be respectful, and to be fair. Ethic is also about the manifold of interest and feelings—one’s own and those of others—that must be recognized, understood, and taken into consideration to achieve optimally good results. Research that harms or offends, or that
appears to be conducted incompetently, invalidly or without due regard for consequences is likely to result in someone questioning the prerogative of the researched.

**The Participants**

The School Leaders

Purposive sampling was employed for the purpose of this study and as the term implies, selection of the case and the respondents also considers time, money, location and availability of the respondents (Merriam, 1998). Snowballing techniques was used to get to the respondents as initiated by a liaison officers. The school leaders for this study were selected based on the requirement of this study, which was i) the respondents were of transformational leaders; ii) they had done transforming or reshaping the schools; iii) they have been principals for at least five years. A short listed names was provided by the human resource of the education department and from the district education department. The general description of each respondent is as shown in Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Education Background</th>
<th>Types of school</th>
<th>Leadership Experience (Years)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GB Donald</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>B. Ed. Education Management</td>
<td>Primary School</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CB Max</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>M Sc Information Technology</td>
<td>Secondary School</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GB Sam</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>B. Ed. TESL</td>
<td>Secondary School</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GB Paul</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>B. Ed. Education Management</td>
<td>Primary School</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GB Meg</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>B. Ed. Education Management</td>
<td>Primary School</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The School Teachers

The multiple sites of the case can only be complemented by the presence of the teachers’ voice at the school. Therefore, at least one teacher from the same school of the selected school leaders was encouraged to share in the conversational-style conversation. This technique allowed a glimpse of participants speaking about how their experience had changed their perspectives or views.

The Community

An effort was taken to communicate within the community of the school situated to gather information of the influence of the transformative school leaders on them or the impacts towards the development of the respective school. The researcher focused on some of the aspects such as the relationship of the school leaders and the people and also the participation of the school leaders in community activities.

**Data Analysis**

The approach and methodology of the inquiry is Case Study. The data was analyzed inductively, that is, there was no attempt to prove or disprove the hypotheses that the
researcher held before study, “rather, the abstractions are built as the particulars that have been gathered are grouped together” (Bogdan and Biklen, 1998). The process involved working with the data, organizing them, synthesizing them, searching for patterns, discovering what was important and what was to be learned and deciding what to tell others (Bogdan and Biklen, 1998).

Prior to analyzing, the audio tapes of interviews were labeled after each interview, transcribed and stored properly. As Carey (1995) suggests data should be analyzed as promptly as possible after collection so that the qualitative elements of the encounter recorded in data can be recalled as accurately as possible. During the transcriptions of the interviews, thoughts, ideas and questions that crossed the researcher’s mind and were considered related were written down.

Words, sentences, paragraphs or sections were given thoughts and attentions. In many occasions, the transcriptions were read several times. Thus, there was an initial coding. These coding may be numerous and varied. During this process, names and labels were assigned to each event, object, happening and action or interaction that was significant to the study. These codes represented a theme or an idea with which each part of the data was associated.

The reading process continued where ideas were highlighted to the research concern. During data coding, notes were made about how decisions had been reached, how the coding process had been conducted, and any specific queries raised. Codes were, therefore, generated from the data, rather than predetermined. Although literature-based codes provide useful tool, they can impede the development of new ideas (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). Writing down all the appropriate codes at the side of the passage is done throughout the process. Having coded the first transcript, each subsequent reading of this and other transcripts was carried out with this in mind. New codes were added as necessary. The coding continued on this way until all of the transcriptions in the study had been worked through. The coded sections of data were placed in categories in the data collection methods used. All the merged codes were kept into a file created to store the categories. Some codes were placed in more than one category. The final result was a matrix of the categories against the respondents’ responses. It formed the data based for analysis.

Results and Discussion
Views of school leadership are changing largely of current restructuring initiatives and the demands of the 21s. The idea of transformational leadership has been extended and the study reveals that transformational leadership in Malaysia schools’ context focuses of few dominant characteristics amongst school leaders. The themes emerged are:1. Taking risks; 2. Visionary; 3. Value driven; 4. Empowering followers and, 5. Perpetual desire for learning.

Transforming the school learning environment
School learning environment refers to that set of factors that can be regarded as influencing the feel or personality that a school exudes. School learning environment can also be defined as that set of internal characteristics that distinguishes one school
from another and influences the behaviour of its members, both staff and students (Hoy and Miskel, 1987).

Fraser (1986) argued that school learning environment factors can operate at both classroom and at school levels. Although both are related, school-level environments are more global. A classroom climate may be limited to involve relationships between student and student an between student and teacher within the boundaries of an individual room. The study examined the school learning environment constructs identified by Fraser (1986) which operate at the school level which is more global, rather than the classroom level. It was found that transformational leaders initiated closer contacts with the community to enhance a more conducive learning environment. In other words, that transformational leaders potentially influenced the significant of the larger context for change at schools.

Transformative leaders initiate closer contacts with community was more of the development of a sound and constructive relationship between the school and the community. The transformational leaders believed it is necessary that learning environment should be expanded to outside the schools. This position arises from a consideration of the character of the school and the legal framework with in which it operates. This realization runs parallel to and is important of the school development and the community involvement. As the transformational leaders presented a good example of the ways he initiated the connection with school and community, “The first thing I think I did was to sit down with my assistants to chart up programs to get the people involved in the school activities. We managed to get them together. We are very close. We always have lunch together, discussing about the school matters. When come to activities, it is smoothly run, accepted by everybody. The teacher leader believed that sound and constructive relationships must develop and maintained with the expanded context if the school is to meet its obligations to the cause and continuance.

Initiating closer contacts with parents or the neighborhood in order to break down the barrier to cooperation involves the question of what activities are most appropriate to interest parents in joining the school family. The Transformational leaders shared a number of ways of starting a school-community relations program. One of the systems, the invitational visitation technique, has produced good results in schools that have used it. It is a technique whereby a certain number of parents –usually five or six are invited by the leader to spend half-day visiting classes, having lunch and observing students activities in the school. The visits were given a mimeographed evaluation sheet and asked to use it for guiding their observations. The evaluation contains such questions as what the parents think of the way to discipline is handled, whether or not they change the methods of teaching and, how valuable the consider the learning activities. Each of these is discussed in conference provides an excellent opportunity to clarify observations and do further interpret the work of the school.

While the necessity for getting community to involve is a fundamental, nevertheless it was the connections that have helped to enable schools to know the community in which the programs all function. Understanding the community makes it possible to plan more intelligently and to reduce substantially the guesswork that would otherwise jeopardize the cooperative relations.
Implications
What does it mean to be transformational leadership in Malaysian schools? The Malaysia schools teacher leaders has progressed from the instructional leadership to transactional leadership and now even common teacher leaders are evidently demonstrating transformational leadership styles. This positive development and encouraging leadership is reflected as the transformational leaders under studied have been recognized as a new challenging player in the world of education industry. In the pursuit of world recognized, the transformational leaders have exhibited and prepared to sustain such as grooming the new potential leaders once they identify them in the schools.

The findings also demonstrated that the teacher leaders readiness in schools nowadays responding to this leadership change. The expansion of leadership of the school leaders is a further illustration of the Malaysian schools capability. From merely the two previous styles of leadership, more teacher leaders ventured into providing its leadership to a higher level of influence or motivations. This change is a strategic direction sees the teacher leaders contributing significantly to the development of schools in Malaysia.

The study suggests that significant relationship exist between aspects of transformational leadership and teachers’ reports of changes in both attitudes toward school improvement and altered instructional behavior. Thus, it leads to prove that students’ achievement can be “remarkably improved” by such leadership. This effect has certainly influence schools environment become more conducive and lead to continuing success.

Conclusion
The study and the discussions put forth provide a glimpse on transformative leadership in the context of schools in Malaysia. It was found that transformational leadership exists in all common schools and amongst common teacher leaders’ disregard of the type of schools or certain categories of principals. The discussions and insights generated provided valuable information for stakeholders to link educational policy with practical educational development. For example, it is timely we inform education reformers to make changes to avert a crisis where students are dropping out and teachers are on the declining scale in terms of the passion towards teaching profession. The qualities of leadership identified through this research simply are good pointers for policy makers and educators from varying philosophical framework to develop strategies for facilitating education for all.

However, the study raises a number of interesting research question for future research. For instance, what assumptions do we have about the readiness of our teachers towards transformative leadership? Did the influence or transformation by transformative leadership within the community hold and people had continued to have changed in appreciating transformative leadership. Many tasks remain, alternative epistemological truths are required to describe the process to educators.

References


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