

EDUCATIONAL SYNERGY AND INSTITUTIONAL HARMONY FOR BETTERMENT: GUIDING NOTICE FOR CURRICULUM LEADERS

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ABSTRACT

Increasing the quality of education at schools has always been one of the ambitions educational leaders desire to approach systematically. Therefore, successful schools have always been placed under the spotlight; while examining how successful they happened to be and what steps were taken towards becoming a successful school. This study proposes educational synergy and institutional harmony as the key to success and draws attention to these concepts as the projection of successful schools. Having mentioned the significance of creating a synergy and harmony and pronouncing Hall's Three-Dimensional Model of Culture, the problem of mentality fossilization at various levels is discussed. Then, the concept of mentality change is proposed as a solution to the problem.

Key Concepts: Educational synergy, institutional harmony, mentality fossilization, mentality change, constructive communication, beneficiary interaction, inclusive school.

İYİLEŞTİRME ÇALIŞMALARINDA EĞİTİM SİNERJİSİ VE KURUMSAL UYUM: MÜFREDAT LİDERLERİ İÇİN YÖNLENDİRMECİ UYARILAR

ÖZET

Eğitim liderleri için okullardaki eğitimin niteliğinin artırılması her zaman sistematik yaklaşılan bir amaç olagelmiştir. Bu nedenle başarılı okullar hep mercek altına alınmışlar; bir yandan nasıl başarılı oldukları incelenirken, öte yandan başarılı olma yolunda hangi adımların atıldığı belirlenmeye çalışılmıştır. Bu çalışma eğitim sinerjisini ve kurumsal uyumu başarının iki önemli anahtarı olarak önermekte ve başarılı okulların bir izdüşümü olarak bu kavramlara dikkat çekmektedir. Sinerjinin oluşturulması ve uyumun sağlanması için atılabilecek adımlar tartışıldıktan ve Hall'in Üç-Boyutlu Kültür Modeli belirtildikten sonra anlayış fosilleşmesi kavram temelli olası sorunların değişik düzlemleri ifade edilmekte ve bu sorunsala çözüm olarak anlayış değişimi kavramı ileri sürülmektedir.

Anahtar Kavramlar: Eğitim sinerjisi, kurumsal uyum, anlayış fosilleşmesi, anlayış değişimi, yapıcı iletişim, faydacı etkileşim, kapsayıcı okul.

AIM OF THE STUDY

Throughout human history, there have always been people who are appreciated for their dedication to educate individuals so as to make a change in their lives. Furthermore, teachers of today are also struggling to have a say in community and for community even if they encounter increasing loads of problems. Regarding this relevant visionary stance, today's teachers feel the need to upload and identify themselves un/consciously as intellectuals responsible for changing, or reshaping, the schools in particular and their society in general. This tendency also dictates the change of the teachers' roles from surviving as passive technicians into taking an active transformational position in their professional lives (Glickman, Gordon, and Ross-Gordon, 2005; Kumaravadivelu, 2003). Apparently, this focus, which supposedly will result in rich and vital learning experiences for all students at schools and for members of society, should be actively observed to increase understanding; positively facilitated to guide these purposes; and voluntarily supported to reproduce programs accordingly at every educational institution (Apple and Beane, 2007).

By its very nature, this new stance has to bring out innovative management and leadership attitudes towards this group of teachers at every level of their pioneering actions to create an 'educational synergy', 'dynamic systematization' and 'institutional harmony'. In accordance with this leadership dimension, the study puts its emphasis on one of the leadership characteristics by focusing remarkable progress of the schools: building up educational synergy and institutional harmony for the betterment of education. However, this study does not announce certain ways or answer the question of "how?" to create such an environment, nor does it claim that building up educational synergy and institutional harmony is the most effective for success. The study simply and merely indicates that whenever and wherever there is a success story of a school, there is educational synergy and institutional harmony. Moreover, this study is not an attempt to analyze to find out the reasons for but an attempt to congregate the idea of synergy and harmony with the success of inclusive and democratic schools by investigating their action plans and success process.

Therefore, it starts with a very brief explanation of leadership in relation with educational synergy and harmony, and then goes on with the negative points and resistance that any institution faces against the change; later on it focuses upon and articulates the place of leaders throughout the changing conditions for achievement.

THREE STEPS FOR SCHOOL LEADERS TO GENERATE EDUCATIONAL SYNERGY AND INSTITUTIONAL HARMONY¹

The significance of the educational leaders to establish a healthy school environment and to provide the best probable educational opportunities for the students is undeniable, yet it is also crucial and difficult to grasp the various strategies that leaders make use of consciously or instinctively and bring success eventually. These strategies are important in the sense that if they are formulated correctly, then they can be the keys to the success on the grounds that the strategy might be applicable for similar situations. However, it is impossible to defend the idea that there is one-size-fits-all strategy or planning that will definitely bring success at every school (Kugelmass, 2004; Apple and Beane, 2007). There is, hence, no clear-cut schema or instruction that will work as we go deep intellectually into the real world of complexity, in which many people and circumstances act and interact in so complicated ways that it becomes impossible to call for simple causes even for certain occurrences (Van Lier, 1998). The situation gets more complicated for a leader to sketch out all these complex variances in the school environment to the teaching staff to help them reflect their personal opinions, and, worse of all, to have a consensus on a plan for the future.

At that point, analyzing the school as a social setting and breaking the complex variants into small pieces to overcome the problems and to make use of the characteristics to the benefit of the school improvement seems to be one of the alternatives: start with a small step and then get it bigger like a snowball. According to Van Lier's (1998:157) description of the

¹ Much as "*leadership to create synergy and harmony*" mostly stands out with distributed leadership (Scheurich, and Skrla, 2003) or functional leadership (Kugelmass, 2004), it is possible to observe it with several other leadership types.

social setting as "... a complex adaptive system" in the sense that understanding should be increased to realize even the smallest details, this sort of understanding should result in particularization, instead of generalization, to adapt to the changing situations and familiarizing ourselves with the acceptance of continual changes. This approach might also be identified as a panacea to the resistance of teaching staff for various reasons against the change when used effectively.

Another point of view supporting this approach in a more concrete and real way with reference to the real life actions is Glatthorn, Boschee, and Whitehead's (2006:11) explanation for *Principal Leadership Responsibilities*, which includes a great large proportion of awareness of personal aspects of teachers and staff, by providing teachers with the necessary materials, enabling the stimulating conditions, and rewarding individual accomplishments. Therefore, the first step of this approach becomes clear: in order for a leader to create the educational synergy and institutional harmony at a school, it is crucial to discover the characteristics and peculiarities of all staff.

Examining the qualities and characteristics of every participant in order to benefit from so as to build up a harmony is necessary but not enough by itself. They are to be melted in a pot and their probable interactions in various and specific contexts are to be taken into account to turn the opportunities into fruitful results for the environment.

The second step for a successful school environment is, then, to make use of the identified strengths as much as possible, to abolish the weaknesses or to turn them into strengths and opportunities for development, to create a compromising and widely accepted vision and to have an action plan including whole participation by the society, which is a must. The leader, now, takes the position with a positive and optimistic attitude towards all the participants; tries to create the synergy and harmony by means of identified characteristics of the individuals, which is the third step for success. Thus, individuals come together; dedicate themselves for the new vision; feel connected to one another for a shared

goal; and create a society in harmony with their ideals. Leader's welcoming attitude and innovative ideas aims at generating enthusiasm, willingness and ambition to make the ideas real. The key concepts for the third step are 'constructive communication' and 'beneficiary interaction' between and/or among all the participants.

With reference to establishing a harmonious social environment, Glatthorn and his colleagues (2006) spell out *social-system variables* as one of the components of the hidden curriculum of a school, along with especially highlighting 'interconnectivity' of the administrators, teachers, parents and communities with one another. These kinds of interrelationships accelerate and empower the journey to the successful and inclusive schools. Byrnes (1998) also points out that to create an encompassing consistent curriculum; visionary and steady leadership is to be largely sustained and amalgamated by the cooperative, collaborative and innovative new ideas, actions and dedications of the members of the institution. Considering the several advantages of this attitude needs rephrasing:

First of all, it increases the ownership of the vision of the school staff (Gordon, 2004). Also it creates other alternatives that only one person is unlikely to come about. By the same token, as Walker and Soltis (1986) address, every subject affecting the learning environment is to be reconsidered and reorganized by the responsible people so as to contribute to the achievement and the accomplishment of the establishment of the inclusive schools. It is the way that the curriculum is rationalized to attain the desired results. Another point to be underlined is the school leader's stance for the curriculum management so as to have a systematic approach to control and check the ongoing process, to activate necessary adjustments when necessary (Hewitt, 2006). Last but not the least, since leaders make an effort all the time for bridging between the other administrators and school staff, in case of changes or new requirements to be made within the school, it becomes easier to understand and to be understood, which makes the

interactive situation easier for probable changes for and routing to the new directions.

These three steps basically explain the attitude of leadership toward synergy and harmony. Nonetheless, it is important to note two points to make the success stories more understandable: One is that the awareness and acceptance of reasons² for the failure or the poor quality of the present conditions, which is highly important. The difficulties that a leader comes across can also be considered as the lighthouses which show the leader how to find the route for solutions and producing alternatives. Success stories of schools also provide the evidence that it is not impossible to make the dreams come true if the right steps are taken at the right time and with the right people. They confirm that any school has an opportunity to change its conditions and get reconstructed to be democratic and inclusive (Kugelmass, 2004), which is just a matter of taking the necessary steps.

RESISTANCE IN RIPPLES AGAINST CHANGE

In a school environment, whenever leaders feel the need to make a change for any reason/s, they come across with internal/external difficulties and/or resistance. The very simple question of **“What are the pressures and difficulties that leaders encounter while transplanting harmonious interconnections with the aim of establishing an inclusive school?”** provides the leaders with various answers. One of the most striking and remarkable answer to this question is about “static or contradictory thinking” or “ways of thinking within certain and limited boundaries”, which this study puts them to the center of attention and that leaders are confronted with at various levels.

‘Mentality fossilization’ against change or development is a crucial issue. The danger that any school faces with during the change for betterment is the underlying values which carry on feeding the individuals with the traditional understandings and stonewalling against the development at different situations and various levels. These individuals might

be school staff, academicians, administrators, even the leaders by themselves.

At the macro level mental fossilization is a worldwide matter. Any kind of indifference, prejudice, underestimation or ignorance against innovative trends or movements prevents the societies from building up the universal harmony on a large scale.

Secondly, it is a national educational problem. Although local differences and local decision-making is supported verily in today’s world, national standards and tests limit the variety and creates *one-ness*, which does not refer to *uniqueness* but more to *sameness*. Critical thinking, judging events, ideas and even compromised and broadly accepted common thoughts, is emphasized at one hand, however schools programs and materials are censored due to standards and/or national curricula mandatory on the other (Apple and Beane, 2007).

The third circle is the society, especially Apple and Beane (2007) urge: Equity threatens the status and power of privileged people in the society. The question is whether those people are going to support the idea of inclusive and democratic schools or they are going to be in a tendency to protect their *status quo* in the society. Another problem within the society seems to be including parents, and people of local community into decision making process.

The fourth level is the school by itself. Cooperation and common good are widely accepted, yet many schools are to foster competition and individuality on a large scale (Apple and Beane, 2007; Kugelmass, 2004; Scheurich, and Skrla, 2003). Compromise is the general consensus to make progress with the sustainability of participatory school culture, yet widespread participation also will cause uncompromised situations that one as the participant of the situation is to learn, at least, to respect to the other’s opinion (Kugelmass, 2004). As the next pace, one should put the emphasis on the shared purpose and try to prize the diversity by realization of the availability of other thoughts (Apple and Beane, 2007).

The fifth is the most important group: teachers. They have a lot of reasons to resist against change,

² Kavrakoğlu (1999:38) refers to Shewart's ideas on quality and gives explanations on the poor quality with reference to Shewart's categorization: systematic reasons and accidental reasons.

most of which are logical for them. As Kugelmass (2004) cites from various academicians and thinkers in her book *the Inclusive School*, teachers would like to maintain control of their classrooms within a bureaucratic system, are against top-down directives, have additional workload without any additional reward or income, are accustomed to changing directives but maintaining school culture.

The sixth, and the last, group is the most affected and the least affecting group: students. They can be called as “passive-naive pressures against change”, since students are the most innocent group when compared to the rest. Their reaction is solely naive. Apple and Beane (2007:67) quote from one of the teachers: “They have unbelievable ideas and enormous creativity.” However, they are the group whose ideas and opinions are asked last for any new decision-making process. It is an unfortunate that the outside conflicts and disagreements directly influence and manipulate their education process and they cannot voice up.

Considering these six level mentality fossilization pressures, leaders should state precisely the problems in their schools very cautiously and produce affordable, applicable solutions to these problems within its contexts subsequently. Dealing with the problem, producing opportunities and putting into action alternatives to overcome these difficulties having prepared a map for their followers is the moment that puts the difference between the complacent and the real leader.

LEADERSHIP FOR HARMONY

As a solution in general; “mentality change” for improvement is a crucial issue as opposed to mentality fossilization. It is a matter of change, which means a reconstruction period and production of a new and meaningful understanding reweighting all the background, lifestyle, and understanding of the individual. It would have been, for that reason, unusual to expect a great change in a limited time period. In this sense, remarkable progress of these schools also proves that a long-term view and commitment is

absolutely essential. When the teachers change their curriculum beliefs about the rationale and the purpose of the curriculum, then large-scale curriculum organization and format will take place. Additionally, not only the attempts to give up the social inequities in schools but also the ones to change the circumstances that generate them are to be in progress. So, teachers’ understanding of and involvement in curriculum development should increase first (Glickman, Gordon, and Ross-Gordon, 2005). To help throughout the process, Scheurich, and Skrla (2003) support the idea that there should be clearly defined rules motivating for a change in order to avoid supporting the maintaining power stance.

Another point that might help a leader is that successful schools are marked by an emphasis on cooperation and collaboration rather than competition. Cooperation and collaboration are widely used concepts, but at the same time they are the indicators of a paradigmatic change in education all over the world. In a democratic society, no one individual or interest group can claim sole ownership of possible knowledge and meaning, to protect their hegemony and to take the advantage of that knowledge or meaning (Apple and Beane, 2007).

From another point of view, regarding the institutional/school culture that shapes and is shaped by the educational approach, Hall’s Model of Culture presents a deepening understanding for creating a successful education atmosphere within an inspiring school culture.

Edward Hall’s Three-Dimensional Model of Culture (Kugelmass, 2004:13)

- Dimension 1: *Collaboration*: The visible-technical level observed by insiders and outsiders.

Instructional practices, physical arrangements, artifacts displayed in the classroom, non/verbal language used by staff, etc.

- Dimension 2: *Collegiality*: The private level shared by insiders, revealed to trusted outsiders, and seen in patterns of interactions.

The values and beliefs that underlie practices.

- Dimension 3: *Compassionate Caring*: The underlying, implicit level of primary culture that links and defines patterns of interconnections between and among each dimension.

Underlying beliefs and values that are the foundation of a culture.

Hall in his model merely picturizes the very general explicit and implicit indicators and/or reflections of a school culture. This three-dimensional model, however, is open to interpretation for any further inferences. The interrelation between practice and beliefs and values is a kind of relationship between the surface level, which has the action-based and explicit grounds; and the deeper level, which refers to hidden/implicit basis of school culture. From another point of view, Dimension 1 has more reference to transactional leadership, as it necessitates what actually works. However, passing through and going deep into the other stages of school culture, Dimension 2 and Dimension 3, the administrative approach for making progress in the betterment of the school culture necessitates a transition from transactional to transformative leadership. The very fundamental reasoning for this shift is the need for deeper interconnectivity among the staff including the constructive nature of positive beliefs and values.

In the same vein, Apple and Beane (2007) underline the fact that success stories of schools have been created even under negative conditions. Therefore, there is no reason not to realize the alternatives to create a harmonious environment for better education. They also suggest an active role of “meaning makers” instead of the passive role of knowledge consumers. It recognizes that people acquire knowledge by both studying external sources and engaging in complex activities that require them to construct their own knowledge. Thus, the ultimate aim for the students and teachers is not only to struggle to understand what goes on within the school boundaries, but also to engage in social actions for amendments. Hence, one option is that students are to be encouraged and taught to help themselves and others through various arrangements and projects. This will also create

an atmosphere and provide an opportunity to spread the success stories.

All in all, putting an effort to analyze an inclusive school systematically to gather comprehensive data has multiple perspectives. The beginning step for a leader to construct an educational synergy is to find out about the school staff, which will also serve for constructing a basis for Hall’s Dimension 2 and 3. At this step, it is at most importance to recognize individual characteristics. Later on, there comes a process which might be called as the socialization of the individual. Positive adaptation procedure, assisted by continual motivation and procedural control, helps each member of the school environment realize and own the new school-wide unity. Clarification and providing a shared common sense and acceptance of the aims strengthen the sustaining commitment as committing to the same goals may be accepted one basic pillar of the harmonious atmosphere. It is an important process to melt the individual characteristics in the values and beliefs of the culture of school. When this is succeeded, then it becomes easier to understand and interpret the other member’s actions and activities within the goals. Constructive communication and beneficiary interaction provide every member of the school environment with the opportunity to question the points or happenings that they get difficulty in understanding and let them improve themselves at different levels or areas, all of which are open to project studies and professional development. It should not be forgotten that the ideal of inclusive and democratic school is exactly a long-term investment to individuals, to the school environment, and to the society respectively.

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