

Why Educational Reforms have failed: Implications for the Research on Principal

Leadership

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We have been ceaselessly trying to enact the educational reform policies. However, the great expense and effort on constant educational reforms did not bring out the satisfactory results. One of the important reasons for this failure seems to be the poor understanding about the characteristics of educational organizations. The ultimate goal of educational reform is the school change, which presupposes the planning for the reform based on the true understanding on schools as educational organizations. In order to succeed in educational reform we should find out the proper strategies to change schools substantially through this kind of understanding.

The school leadership deserves the highest attention as a variable influencing on school change. Even though there is no organization in which the leadership is not important, the leadership in educational organizations has a particular significance. Schools without the proper leadership cannot be changed effectively, and it cannot adequately assure the success in educational reform. If we find the reasons for the failure of reform efforts in the lack of understanding the educational organizations, it

would offer the implications for the research on school leadership, especially on the principal leadership.

The Characteristics of Educational Organizations

The characteristics of the general educational organizations could be divided into the structural and cultural dimensions. The educational organizations are loosely coupled in their structural aspect. This structural characteristic of the educational organization becomes more obvious by the fact that they are well understood by the so-called terms like 'the organized anarchy' or 'loosely coupled systems.' We rarely observe the strict hierarchy and the close relationship of mutual effects among the individuals and departments in schools. The individual members in a school are working at their own discretion of a wide range. Although schools have both the bureaucratic and professional aspects, the core task of the school is still educating as a professional activity, which is performed with much of independence from other members or departments in a school. It is almost impossible to find the highly ordered systems or the standardized way in a variety of educational activities in schools.

Another characteristic of educational organizations belongs to the cultural dimension. Teacher culture is the most important part of school culture. In general, individualism,

isolation, status quo orientation and conservatism are known as the teacher culture in schools. Teachers are not willing to intervene in others' business, and vice versa. They are inclined to consider that each of them is responsible for his or her own tasks as an individual. Teachers are usually ill-informed about and insensitive to what other teachers think and the way they work in other classrooms. It is in the same vein with this isolation of teachers that they are not familiar with the way of communicating and collaborating. The same attributes of teacher culture are reflected in the phenomena that teachers are not responsive to the change demands from the outside and usually prefer the maintenance of status quo.

These characteristics of educational organizations are primarily caused by the nature of educating, the core task of schools. Education has something to do with changing the way of being of a man. It would be possible only if educating will affect the internality of the learner. For this reason, educational phenomena have invisibility and vagueness as its own characteristics. Teaching and learning often happen beyond the domain of the objectivity and rationality. Therefore, it makes it difficult to decide which is right or wrong, a success or a failure in many cases. It is hard to notice the distinction between them objectively by the scientific measurement.

It implies that the scientific management model focusing on the rationality will not be

appropriate for the educational organizations. It seems to be unfeasible to identify the error or achievement accurately and take a proper action in educational organizations. This easily leads to the loosely coupled way of working and the corresponding organizational culture. Teachers are not aware that their performances come up to the educational standard or not. Also, they are not willing to correct the educational errors, nor do they make an effort for their own professional growth. While there is no definite mechanism to certainly identify the success or failure in the educational activities, teachers tend to perform according to a principle they prefer to work and behave without the keen sense of responsibility. As a result, educational organizations come to show irresponsibility, individualism and the preference for the maintenance of status quo as their cultural qualities.

The organizing way of educational activities and the physical conditions of a school aggravate these characteristics of educational organizations. The educational activities in schools are organized into each grade and class, and each teacher is supposed to teach students in their own classroom, the isolated space. Stuck in each classroom, a teacher is in the isolated situation and does not have enough opportunity to communicate with his or her colleagues. In this circumstance, school administrators cannot easily and clearly check out what and how well teachers are performing in their workplace. Consequently,

the abovementioned undesirable attributes easily become prevalent in schools.

As these characteristics of the educational organization have been established through a long time and deeply embedded in the organization, the persevering attributes are difficult to do away with, or even change. Therefore, the requisite for changing educational organizations is to pay special attention to the characteristics of the educational organization.

The Reasons for the Failure of Educational Reforms

What the characteristics of educational organizations suggest is that the forces from the outside of a school do not have a strong influence on it. Schools are inclined to function according to the internal mechanism, which prevents them from responding willingly to the demands and pressures from the outside. The members of educational organizations tend to perform their 'confidential and unclear' tasks in the way of uncertainty. In these organizations there exists a peculiar culture that we cannot control with ease. The members follow the norms that the organizational culture is dictating. In particular, the strong and exclusive norms in an educational organization are likely to defy or remarkably weaken the forces exerted by the external. In brief, the overall

functions in the educational organizations have a strong tendency to be fulfilled by the ‘within-school forces.’

This functional mechanism implies that we can make changes in a school through changing the ‘within-school force.’ Education is essentially human-oriented and human-dependent in that its aim is basically for human being itself and it hugely depends on the thought and intent of those who are educating. The ‘within-school force’ is shaped by the values and intentions of members of the school where such human-dependent educating takes place. Thus changing schools should be accompanied with changing the ‘within-school force,’ which requires changing the members’ thoughts and volitions and, in turn, changing the way of action. With this, it is possible to substantially change what actually happens in schools. Only such a change could lead to the achievement of the goals in educational reforms. The fundamental key to the success of educational reforms would be changing the internal qualities of educational organizations.

Most of educational reform efforts have ignored this point. The educational reform policies were usually developed and implemented in a top-down way. The policies triggered by the central government or the higher administrations have led to the failure in changing schools substantially. This failure is considered inevitable because the reformers failed in communicating their intentions to school members accurately and

securing the proper within-school conditions needed for a real change in schools. While the internal characteristics like the members' thoughts and way of action remained the same, the result was only negative responses and non-cooperative attitudes on the reform programs. Whenever they tried to reform, schools made a fuss about the reform wasting time and money without putting out meaningful consequences. It was a repeating scenario.

Most of all the reasons of the failure in the educational reform reside in failing in building the 'within-school force' that is primarily required for a school change. A meaningful change of schools is possible only when the desirable intrinsic force should be shaped as the attributes of the organization itself. However, ignoring this point, lots of educational reform policies only depended on the external force without dealing with this aspect of the educational organizations, and failed. These experiences are sure to give us significant lessons that we should give priority to healing and strengthening the intrinsic force of educational organizations for the successful educational reform.

Implications for the Research on the Principal Leadership

When we think of the reasons for the failure in educational reforms as failing in securing the 'within-school force' which could make schools really change, it will

bring our concerns to the issues about the principal leadership. The leadership of a principal is a critical variable for shaping the intrinsic forces of a school. The principal leadership would play a great role in the process of shaping the ‘within-school force,’ for this force is built through creating or changing such attributes as thoughts, aspiration, volition, etc. kept by school members.

Thinking of the principal leadership as important when it comes to the educational reform or the school change, we could obtain the precious implications for the research on the principal leadership. These are about improving the general standards of the research, exploring the effective leadership styles for a school change, and diversifying the orientations to the leadership research.

First, the research on the principal leadership needs to be improved in a wide range.

The researches on the principal leadership have conducted steadily with a variety of themes and methods. However, at least in the case of South Korea the researches are still unsatisfactory, considering the significance of the leadership research.

The leadership research should be improved as the following.

- To extend the range of the research themes
- To increase the number of the research cases

There should be more researches on the principal leadership than now.

- To balance between the theoretical and empirical leadership studies

The theoretical studies on the leadership are too weak, while we admit the contributions of the positive and practical researches. We need to conduct more active in-depth theoretical studies than ever.

- To activate the studies for the diagnosis and development of the leadership

- The studies to diagnose the actual conditions of the principal leadership

We hardly find out the leadership research that analyzes the current leadership problems thoroughly even though the issues concerning the principal leadership are frequently mentioned.

- The studies to develop the leadership

We should facilitate the studies to analyze the elements of competence constituting the effective principal leadership and design the training programs for building the leadership.

- The studies to manage the leadership training program effectively

We need to conduct the researches on the effective management of the training program and the evaluation of its results.

- To diversify the research methods

- The balance between the quantitative and qualitative methods

Though we need the balance of both research methods, for now the studies using the participant observation are more needed. For this method would reveal the authentic leadership phenomena as they are.

- The sophistication of the research methods

Despite the prevalence of the quantitative research in number, most of them take the simple statistics as the research method. We need to use more sophisticated statistical techniques, which would give more enhanced explanation about the leadership phenomena.

- Enhance the quality of the leadership research

- The standard in the empirical and theoretical studies should be enhanced in terms of the research content, the research method, the level of discussion, etc. The superficial level of the research cannot give any solution to the leadership problems.

Second, we need to pay more attention to the principal's cultural leadership

The school culture is emphasized in that the 'within-school force' would primarily drive the school change, the aim of the educational reform. The school culture is the basic assumptions, values, beliefs and attitudes shared by the school members, which

means that school culture is the internal forces of the school organizations. The success or failure of schooling seriously depends on the inner conditions of school members, in a word their minds, in the sense that education is typically human-dependent. These internal conditions could be indicated by the 'culture' of a school organization. That's why we should manage the school culture with a particular concern. It is the principal leadership that shape and manage school culture. Therefore, we should deal with the cultural leadership as an important theme of the principal leadership research.

- The studies on the model of the good school culture
 - To explore a model of the desirable school culture based on the characteristics of educational organizations and the environment of contemporary schooling.
- The studies to diagnose the school culture
 - To analyze the actual conditions and problems of the principals' leadership and find out the factors causing the problems.
- The studies on the dynamics of school culture and its management
 - To explore the mechanism of shaping and changing the school culture and develop the practical methods and procedures to deal with the school culture.

- The studies on the competence of the principal as a school culture manager
 - To find out the elements constituting the competence that the principal should have to manage the school culture effectively.

- The studies on the development of the principal's cultural leadership
 - To find the ways to develop the principal's cultural leadership in many respects including the education for the potential school leaders and the preparation/in-service education for the school administrators.

Third, the aesthetic nature of the principal leadership would be another significant theme of the leadership research.

The principal leadership cannot depend only on the strict rationality model or engineering model. The more the principal leadership leads to the symbolic and cultural leadership beyond the technical or human relation approach, and leads to the level of the creative and holistic completeness beyond the marginal and daily management, the more limited those models would be. Such a higher level of the principal leadership requires the qualities as intuition, imagination, creativity, expressiveness, harmony, and totality. And these qualities coincide with those of the aesthetic. Considering this point, it is interesting and meaningful to study the aesthetic dimension of the principal

leadership. The achievement of the research on this theme would contribute to the advancement of leadership theories and the solution of the practical problems in the principal leadership.

- The studies on the aesthetic attributes of the principal leadership
 - To investigate the aesthetic attributes of the principal leadership in the integrating approach with the theories on education, school organizations, leadership and art.

- The studies on the practical methods for exercising the artistry of the principal leadership
 - To study how the artistry of the principal leadership would contribute to the leadership practice and the programs for the leadership development, aiming at improving the leadership through reflecting and realizing its aesthetic qualities.