



THE AGA KHAN UNIVERSITY

eCommons@AKU

---

Institute for Educational Development, Karachi

Institute for Educational Development

---

February 2006

# Teachers as leaders in the Pakistani context

Nusrat Fatima Rizvi

*Aga Khan University, Institute for Educational Development, Karachi*

Follow this and additional works at: [http://ecommons.aku.edu/pakistan\\_ied\\_pdck](http://ecommons.aku.edu/pakistan_ied_pdck)

---

## Recommended Citation

Rizvi, N. F. (2006). Teachers as leaders in the Pakistani context. *Quality in education: Teaching and leadership in challenging times*, 2, 525-534.

**Available at:** [http://ecommons.aku.edu/pakistan\\_ied\\_pdck/133](http://ecommons.aku.edu/pakistan_ied_pdck/133)

# Teachers as Leaders in the Pakistani Context

*Nusrat Fatima Rizvi, AKU-IED, Pakistan*

## Introduction

*There are some indispensable questions pertinent to the notion “teachers as leaders in Pakistani context”: Can Pakistani teachers become leaders in their professional milieu? If yes, how can they be helped to discover a leader within themselves? What changes are required in curricula of teacher education in order to help teachers to become leaders?*

*School Leadership for the 21st Century Initiative: A Report of the Task Force on Teacher Leadership (2001) argued, “Yet without richly qualified, dedicated, and enlightened state-of-the-art professional and political leadership, efforts to bring about genuine reform to enhance student learning are destined to suffer, possibly even to fail.” Generally there are four layers of educational leadership – state, district, principal and teacher. With the viewpoint that the quality of the teachers is the main contributing factor of student learning this paper examines ways through which the teachers can develop their leadership qualities as part of their professional development.*

*The paper first unpacks the notions of ‘teachers as leaders’ in different contexts and explains their implication in Pakistani school system. There is some discussion on the characteristics of teacher leaders and the roles they play or might play in the classroom, the school, and beyond the school. Finally it will present a review/critique of curricula of teacher education of few renowned institutes of the country (identification of the institutes will be kept confidential) on the basis of its strength and limitation in helping teachers develop their leadership qualities.*

## Teachers as Leaders

The word “leader” is usually used to refer to those who have formal key positions in an organization. Instead of considering leadership to be a trait, embedded in one’s personality the word is used to refer to someone who has a managerial or administrative position in an organization. In the school hierarchy the principal is thought to be a leader but a teacher is not.

Leadership has several characteristics. Someone’s ability to take an initiative in a situation that requires such an action is one of those characteristics. This

aspect of leadership is very much embedded in the role of a teacher as, “teaching has historically been a profession which granted some degree of autonomy in classroom (Flores, 2004, p.299)”.

Another characteristic of leaders is that they have power to affect somebody’s action, character or belief especially by providing examples for them to follow. Kerfoot (2003) noted that leaders could be distinguished from others by their ability to work in a group of diverse people and help everybody in the group learn. She said, “The best leaders have dirty shoulders because they are continually lifting others up” (Kerfoot, 2003. p. 148). No matter whether teachers are aware of their roles as leaders or not, if they are successful, they have to demonstrate their leadership qualities to make a difference. ‘Learning’ can rightly be considered as a synonym of ‘change’ and the process of learning is actually the process of bringing about change. Those who learn bring change in their perceptions, views, attitudes, and actions. Since teachers are the ones who help students go through the process of change. They can rightly be thought of as change agents. Leaders in any other field perform similar roles: helping others change their lives by thinking and acting differently. Giroux (2002) in an interview compiled by Aziz and Rizvi (2002. p11) articulated his role as a teacher as “my teaching is to provide conditions that enable them [students] to become agents, capable of governing and not just being governed, being able to take control of their own lives and how they mediate it with the larger society”. This is teacher leadership. Barth’s observation on the subject resembles that of Giroux: “Teachers harbor extraordinary leadership capabilities, and their leadership is a major untapped resource for improving our schools (2001, p.444)”.

There have been different viewpoints regarding teachers’ leadership as a means of school improvement. From 1970s to early 1980s school reforms in many parts of the world centred on the idea of assigning teachers with roles such as department chair or master teachers etc (Rowan, 1990) that required of them to exercise some forms of managerial tasks. But those changes failed to deliver the goods as it was observed that the new situation only picked up the teachers from classroom and deposited them in desk jobs where they found themselves to be detached from the teaching-learning process.

Subsequent reforms created some positions that were based on teachers’ expertise in being team leaders and curriculum developers.

The studies that were conducted to assess the impact of these reforms, however, revealed that putting teachers in formal positions do not always bring in positive change in instructional practices, nor do they contribute much towards changing

the wider school culture (Smylie, 1994). After these reforms there has been another shift in the approach, which connects teacher leadership to the classroom work and focuses on professional support that teachers can provide for their colleagues without taking new positions in the school (Shulman, 1987). Some studies (e.g. Hargreaves and Evans, 1997; Sergiovanni, 1984) found strong impact of such initiatives on school culture and considered them to be important factors transforming schools into learning communities.

Although there has been great emphasis on teacher leadership most of the teachers in many schools themselves do not consider assuming leadership in their workplaces by taking initiatives, bringing new ideas into their practices, helping others to develop and set new examples, a phenomenon that Barth (200P, p.443-444) has identified as a “sore spot” within the profession: teachers seeing themselves to be someone who have nothing to contribute to the school and simply thinking of themselves to be ‘mere’ teachers who have no leadership role in their schools.

Barth (2001) also cites Hample’s study in which he collected data from 10 schools to examine roles of the teachers in relation to their schools as leaders that is beyond their classroom and found that only 25% of teaching staff of the school possessed leadership qualities while rest of them were either “cynic”, “sleepy” or “yes- but” type who did not recognize leadership as an important dimension of their professional lives.

Today school reform movements all over the world emphasize greater involvement of each stakeholder in school improvement (Anderson, 2004). Notions of shared and distributed leadership lead the teachers to see beyond the classroom, participate in decision making and strive to be innovative and stop restricting themselves to simply following the beaten track and considering themselves tools in carrying out the tasks that have been planned for them by administrators.

## **Teacher Leadership in Pakistan**

There are some examples from different schools of Pakistan where teachers demonstrate their leadership skills by thinking and doing things differently, apart from mastering a body of knowledge and implementing curriculums, such as addressing the issues of students and their learning, curriculum, professional development of teachers, developing parent-school relationship. There are incidences where teachers’ innovative practices challenged and influenced others teachers to give up old practices and adopt new ones. Following are some

examples from Pakistan schools in which teachers pioneered some new practices in different areas of education.

## **Choosing Textbooks and Instructional Materials**

In Pakistan teachers regard textbooks to be the ultimate source of education and in which their role is simply to make students memorize the textbook. There are, however, some exceptions.

In a private school in Karachi, some teachers who had been teaching there for two to three years challenged the status quo and carved a niche for themselves by opting to have a say in the selection of books that they deemed appropriate for their pupils. They refused to be bullied into using the prescribed textbook published by the government. They nevertheless had to justify their action which they forcefully did by coming up with some very strong arguments that tore through the hesitation the school principal had in letting the teachers have their way. The teachers' reasons for going for the books they had chosen were so valid that the principal who had initially refused to accept the teachers' plea changed his mind.

This episode boosted the teachers' morale so much so that they dared to be more innovative in their teaching practice in later years. At another occasion requiring an original idea they bundled up several textbooks and culled from each book the material they thought was relevant for their lessons, modifying a chapter here and redesigning some there as well as taking help from some reference books. They even designed some instructional material on their own.

A similar approach was also observed in a rural non-government school in Mitari, Sindh. Here neither the school nor the parents of the students were able to afford to buy textbooks. Two teachers from that school with a lot of perseverance who were amply backed up by the parents of the students and other members of the community came up with the idea of developing their own textbooks.

The contents of these textbooks included folk tales, stories about the village and information about some local crops and other farming practices. Everything was presented in the mother tongue of the students. The books were handwritten. At every step in the process of writing the books the conscientious teacher were given a helping hand by members of the village community.

## **Evaluating Teacher Performance**

Usually in the evaluation of teachers' performance students' opinions about their teachers are not elicited but in a school in Karachi a teacher with a pioneering spirit saw the need for taking into account the students' views on what makes a good teacher and on what basis do the students judge their teachers. The teacher had taken a very bold step by giving a voice to the students in categorizing a teacher into a certain bracket according to their performances. She developed criteria of assessing teachers' performance with the help of students and then asked them to evaluate her performance against the criteria. She analysed students' responses and shared them with the school heads and teachers. She invited her colleagues to consider the pros and cons of including students' opinion in teachers' evaluation. Initially her colleagues strongly opposed the idea but they later accepted that the idea behind involving students in evaluating teachers' performances was to develop a shared understanding of teaching and learning among teachers and students.

## **Designing Staff Development and In-service Programmes**

There are several incidences where teachers after attending inservice teacher development courses designed workshops and courses for professional development for their fellow teachers. Some of those teachers who continuously engage with professional associations have assumed informal roles of leaders in their curriculum areas as they have learnt a lot from their experiences of the association. These teachers have become useful resource for their fellow teachers. These teachers have taken a lot of initiative to enhance culture of teaching and learning.

These are some examples of teachers' successes in their roles as teacher leaders. There has also been research in this area. Followings are the findings of two research studies.

Rizvi and Elliot (2005) conducted research in government primary schools in Karachi, Pakistan where reforms had been initiated. They reported that the teachers had been given authority in different affairs of their classrooms and also had acquired opportunities to perform several leadership roles in and outside of their classrooms. Many of those teachers were mentors and subject coordinators.

However another study recently conducted by a research team of The Aga Khan University (the author was one of the members of the team) had a very different

experience. The team observed government schoolteachers from six districts of Pakistan. They were primary and lower secondary school teachers and had professional qualifications from certificate of education to Bachelor and Master's degrees in education. The team found that the teachers had restricted roles, their activities mainly revolving around their classroom teaching. It was observed that the majority of teachers had no other role to play in their work place except implementing the curriculum in the classrooms.

These divergent outcomes of the two studies show that there are some powerful forces within the school culture that work against teacher leadership. If conditions in which teachers exercise leadership (as in the schools where reforms had been initiated) are favorable then "all teachers can lead, as all children can learn" if the environment is conducive for their learning (Barth, 2001). Teachers should also be required to equip themselves with knowledge and skills to understand the nature of the forces that prevent them from demonstrating their leadership potential.

## **Teacher Education Pertinent to Teacher Leadership**

As mentioned earlier in this paper that every teacher has potential to lead and their leadership is very important for school improvement as single leader or a group of individuals cannot meet the diverse challenges that schools face on daily basis. Assuming that leadership qualities can be learned and taught, teacher education courses can help teachers realize this ambition by nurturing the seeds of leadership and bringing them to fruition (Turnbull, 2005). These courses should help teachers anticipate what they will be required to perform in their professions and work to build on their expertise to be ready join the threshold of their work life.

A look on the curricula of teacher education courses of five institutes helps one to gauge the opportunities these courses offer to their student to develop their knowledge, acquire skills and form attitudes required for being effective leaders in their professional lives.

The teacher education institutes whose curricula were reviewed for this paper are being referred here as A, B, C and D. All the four are located in Karachi.

Generally the institutes admit local people who have completed their first degree. The information about the curricula was gathered from the institutes in the form of course outlines, course handbook, and students' prospectus, and information booklet.

Following is the discussion on the Bachelor of education (BEd) programme offered by Institute A.

- The current information booklet of the institute happened to be a decade old i.e. it was published in 1996. The booklet is a description of “courses of studies for Bachelor of education offered in 1996 and onward.” It is a matter of great concern that the institute did not bother to revise the booklet to bring it to the level of the needs of the present.
- The information booklet does not give any clue how the institute would help student teachers address the issues in a globalized and rapidly changing world. Those graduating from this institute would have a tough time catching up with the current approaches of teaching, learning and school improvement when they join their workplaces as professionals.
- In the information booklet nothing is said about the overall objectives of the Bachelor’s programme. However objectives are given for each course individually. The objectives do not entails developing teachers’ leadership potential
- The names of prescribed textbooks are mentioned in description of different courses along with there is fairly long reading list but most of the readings are of from 1960s to 1980s. As the notion of teacher leader emerged in the 1990s as an off shoots of the concepts of shared and distributed leadership, it seems that Instituted A have not incorporated the idea of teacher leadership in its courses.
- Out of the five core courses offered by the institute, one course is on school Organization and Management. The course outline shows that the course aims to prepare students to take some administrative and managerial role in the school such as developing school timetable, managing physical resources and keeping school records etc. The elements of leadership such as teachers’ professionalism, teacher learning, professional development, reflective practices are missing from the course. Also the word leadership is missing throughout the programme. However quite often they use terms managers and administrator for future roles of the teachers.

The courses in BEd programmes offered by Institutes B and D are very much similar to the courses offered by Institute A. The general objectives of the courses are not mentioned in the information booklet, only names of the courses are there. The institutes suggest prescribed textbooks for each course. From the



information present in the textbooks and the booklet it seems that they have not included teacher leadership aspects in their programmes.

However there is much evidence to consider that Institute D views leadership as important dimension of teacher development. Following is some characteristics of BEd programme offered by Institute D

- One of the aims of the courses offered by the institute is to “meet the introductory needs of practitioners who will occupy positions of influence in the educational community”.
- In the information handbook one of the anticipated attributes of the graduates of the programme is mentioned as the “ability to take a leadership role in their subject areas and in their local communities”.
- Institute D offers a course on school organization and management. Detail of the course shows that they did not specifically include teacher leadership notion in this course however other courses especially courses of curriculum studies include curriculum development, mentoring, microteaching which show that they have embedded concepts of teacher leadership in the courses.

## **Conclusion**

The notion of teachers working as leader in informal settings is relatively a new concept and it is not very much practised in Pakistan schools. However researchers (e.g. Hatch, 2005) have claimed that teacher’s credibility and expertise influence, people, policy and performance more than the teachers’ formal leadership positions. And the informal teacher leaders are more decisive factor in bringing whole school improvement and sustainable change in school culture. Barth (2001) has argued that every teacher can lead if they are developed as leaders not as followers. However, the available information about teacher education courses of some of the selected institutes do not provide evidence that they are helping their students to develop their potential as teacher leader rather the teachers are only prepared to take on day-to-day responsibilities of managing a classroom. However one institute out of the selected institutes seems to be more concerned with respect to developing teacher’s leadership potential. It is hoped that the institute will play a vital role in promoting idea of teacher leadership in the wider community. In the absence of valid statistical data, nothing is claimed categorically about the quality of teacher education courses. To be able to do so would require systematic study to

assess quality of teacher education programmes and the impact of these programmes on teachers' performances. The purpose of the paper was to underline the need that teacher education programs should incorporate a 'teacher leader component' as a means of preparing new teachers for the practical issues of school governance and the nature of the teacher leadership.

## References

- Barth, R. S. (2001). Teacher leader (Teachers as leaders and investors). *Phi Delta Kappan*, 82(6), 443-449.
- Flores, M. (2004). The impact of school culture and leadership on new teachers' learning in the workplace. *International Journal of Leadership in Education*, 7(4), 297-318.
- Giroux, H. (2002). From a basketball player to a grand educator. In Aziz, A., & Rizvi, M. (Eds.), *Educate—A quarterly on education and development*, 2(2).
- Hargreaves, A., & Evans, R. (1997). Beyond educational reform: *Bringing teachers back in*. Buckingham, England: Open University Press.
- Hatch, T. (2005) Expertise, credibility, and influence: how teachers can influence policy, advance research, and improve performance. *Teacher College Record*, 107(5)
- Kerfoot, K. (2003). Learning organizations need teachers: The leader's challenge. *Nursing Economics*, 21(3), 148-151.
- Rizvi, M., & Elliot, B. (2005). Teachers' perceptions of their professionalism in government primary schools in Karachi, Pakistan. *Asia-Pacific Journal for Teacher Education*, 33.
- Rowan, B. (1990). Commitment and control: alternative strategies for the organizational design of schools. *Review of research in education*, 16. 359-389.
- School Leadership for the 21st Century Initiative: A Report of the Task Force on Teacher Leadership (2001)*. Institute for Educational Development. Retrieved Feb 3, 2006, from [www.iel.org/programs/21st.html](http://www.iel.org/programs/21st.html).
- Sergiovanni, T. J. (1984). Leadership as cultural expression. In T. J. Sergiovanni and J. E. Corbally (Eds.), *Leadership and Organizational Culture: New*

*Perspectives on Educational Theory and Practice*. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press. 105–184.

Shulman, L. S. (1987). Knowledge and teaching: foundation of the new reform. *Harvard Educational Review*, 57(1), 1-2.

## **Contact**

nusrat.fatimarizvi@aku.edu