

**SCHOOL AS A SELF RENEWING LEARNING COMMUNITY:  
ROLE OF PRINCIPALS AS LEADERS**



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ROLE OF PRINCIPALS AS LEADERS**



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## **Certificate of Approval**

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## **ABSTRACT**

As cultural, economic, political changes are being brought, each school is expected to continue to become a self-renewing learning community. School has been an agency of the society to implement its agenda through its staff and head as one of its leaders. The school as self-renewing learning community seeks for school internal capacity to improve the learning capability of students and teachers. The purpose of the study seeks to find the importance of professional development activities of teachers for turning a school into a self-renewing learning community. The principals are responsible for the professional development of their staff and they manage the school as learning community using development as a school change agent. The researcher studies the role of the secondary school principal as a facilitator for reform efforts and changing the school into self-renewing learning community. The focus is not just on individual teacher's professional learning but of professional learning within a community context – a community of learners, and the notion of collective learning.

A principal's role in school renewal demands for creating and facilitating the conditions under which the staff can reflect upon existing learning and teaching through collaboration and training programs. All secondary schools of both genders i.e. girls and boys and both sectors i.e. public and private in the city Kasur (urban area) constituted the population for this study. Sample comprised of 295 teachers (120 from public sector and 175 from private sector, male: 182; female: 113) and 35 principals (male: 20, female: 15). The survey method was used and data was collected with the help of questionnaires as research tool.

The findings of this quantitative research suggest that the majority of the high school principals in city Kasur, encourage teachers to develop collaborative learning environment

and that they feel an obligation to offer the opportunities for professional development of staff. The findings also suggest that teachers are working under the headship of the school principals who promote culture of instructional improvement, provide opportunities for peer observation, encourage staff to work well together and arrange for the activities aligned with school goals. For all schools, in urban areas, there is need to build and sustain sufficient and strong capacity to self-renew to meet the emerging challenges over time through professional development activities and collaborative teamwork by the principal as a leader.

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I like to show appreciation for the principals of the schools that facilitated the completion of the research. I am very grateful to all the teachers who spared their precious time, cooperated fully and assisted in collecting the data by filling up the questionnaire.

And finally, I would like to show my gratitude to my parents, friends, husband and kids for their moral support.

**ATIFA AHSAN**

## **DEDICATIONS**

This thesis is dedicated to my supervisor, Dr. Khalid Rashid who has supported me all the way since the beginning of my studies.

Also, this thesis is dedicated to my parents Muhammad Yousaf & Manaza Shaheen, my husband Ahsan Bashir and my lovely daughters Areeba Ahsan and Anoosha Ahsan who have been a great source of motivation and inspiration.

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# INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Background of the Study

It is something customary that the changes are being brought effectuated and matured, in the system. School being a system is no exception to it. School has been an agency of the society to implement its agenda through its staff and head as one of its leaders. Responsibilities of the schools with the twist of the century have also been revitalized. It is no more the knowledge communication which is being stressed; it is the mastery of skills to be applied to the life situations. In view of the changing scenarios, the roles of the personalities aligned to discharge variety of duties are to be re-oriented to keep them more matched with the work and task demands.

School renewal demands for recreation and reform of the organization. The educational institution (school) as self-renewing learning community manages to improve the internal capacity through improving the intellectual capability of students and teachers (Joyce & Calhoun, 1996). In the self-renewing organization, a collaborative learning environment is created where students and educators improve their learning capabilities. Staff development and the study of change have been found essential elements in the school renewal literature of the past twenty-five years (Bruce, J; Wolf, J.; Calhoun, E. 1993 p.13). Self-renewal tends to reconstruct the existing missions and capacities of the organization (Nonaka, 1988). Yet there has been no clear cut demarcation to follow and the guidelines to be followed which are deemed essential by the stakeholders for keeping the schools self-renewing.

Senge (1990) showed a concern to define learning organizations, which helped us pick the idea of learning community. In the perspective of school reforms the term

learning community has gained a wide recognition in educational literature. Clarke & Hollingsworth (2002) contend that teachers are learners and schools are places of learning. The Fifth Discipline a book by Senge put before us in a very clear manner the definition of learning organizations as “where individuals continuously improve their competence to get the results they actually want, where they widen latest and magnanimous ways to think and to be nurtured, where joint desires are made known, and where people learn with breaks and intervals to learn in groups” (p. 3) which help the educators to plan and go for reforms in the schools. Consequently, the learning community is generated in schools where everyone collaboratively and persistently work together (Louis & Kruse, 1995), which improves their capacity to produce desired effects (Senge, 1990) through thoughtful discussion about students, teaching and learning.

The school as learning community is described as everyday life in school (Furman-Brown 1999); where every individual learns (OECD, 2001); teachers, students and school leaders develop the environment of joint caring (Louis, & Kruse, 1995; Hargreaves & Giles, 2003); and where the people find the solution to the problems through collaboration and novel skills.

The first and foremost task of the principal is to enable the teacher to deliver the content at the level of the students with ease and comfort. This needs the identification of the grey areas in the mastery of the teachers and managing for the training as the hands on job accordingly. This training should not be intermittent; it should be continuous and open to all whoever needs it. It should be taken as an investment into intellectual grooming. As per contention of (Darling & Hammond, 2009) teacher quality, quality of delivery by them and resultant learning by their students can be enriched by developing a culture of collaboration among teaching staff.

The second main task of principals is to manage for the smooth functioning of the school making the process more attuned and synchronized. The process may be administrative, academic or culture oriented. These processes need to be continuously revamped to enable the working man power equally motivated, zealous and concerned rather than going stale and stagnant. The third and the prominent concern of the school principals are to have a proper mission so that the turn out of the school may find space in the local and international market on the basis of knowledge instilled in them and the skills taught to them. They utilize school resources in a creative way and nurture a jointly agreed upon school vision and culture as a leader.

School is directly concerned with the variety of inputs to its system which no more stands the responsibility of those who run it, rather it shifts to the leadership to go and manage for self-sufficiency out of the recurrent resources. Inputs; the first element of the school, are the financial liabilities, the provision of the buildings and services, staff and their expertise. The principal has to go with it, rather he/ she has to try to improve the situation to focus on the retention of the staff as well as making them continuously grow.

The second element of the schools is the processes of the school which should remain in the progressive transition all the time. In this way the scenario becomes new for all who are concerned with it. The processes and the incentives keep the staff go in the positive direction with all concerns. Heads should share the knowledge, expertise and issues emerging from time to time regarding the teacher and the taught. Heads also take the teachers into confidence and share with them how to rely upon and generate more and more resources of their own, both academic and co-academic. As the stakeholders at school community collaborate to manipulate their own work gadgetry for day by day improvements of their programs.

The quality of the product as the third element is also a major concern for all good schools. There is also a need to look for all possible resources which may help for the

growth of the individual as a student and the product of the school. Principal's role is to keep himself/ herself aligned with the community, entrepreneurs, stake holders, employees and well-wishers of the school in making the product more groomed in line with societal needs. The heads of the educational institutions arrange a working milieu for teachers and students based on the policy decisions in the utilization of school resources.

Indicators of quality of the schools depend upon leadership which considers student and adult learning as the core function of schools, curriculum and instruction linked to school and student learning goals and a concerted learning commune for adults (NAESP, 2001). Joiner (1987 p.2) stated that the organizer should rely on the people of an organization to lead change as school leaders who promote collaboration and culture of sharing among teachers may find themselves ready to accept a change in their schools (Bryk & Schneider, 2002, Fullan, 2002; Youngs & King, 2002).

Head teachers are responsible for the professional mellowness of their workforce (IEL, 2000); as they manage the school as learning community using progress and growth as a change agent for the school (CERI, 2001, p.27). Principals as school leaders define school reform (Matthews & Crow, 2003); manage for provision of classroom resources (Sindhvad, 2009); develop people and manage the instructional program (Leithwood, Day, Sammons, Harris, & Hopkins, 2006).

Principals can make the difference in the educational community. According to Aabed (2006), it is the principal who can play an essential role to ascertain the general effectiveness of the school; therefore, attention must be given to principal recruitment, selection and training. The role of the principal is more than an instructional leader though it takes the form of an administrative supervisor also.

The staff has the direct concern and link with instruction. Staff development ensures and improves their students learning (Standards for Staff Development, 2001). Quality of instructions calls for the training pertaining to method and process of

education and its due endorsement (Gujjar, 2011). According to Geijsel et al; 2009, teachers groom themselves to professional expertise by attending several professional activities inside the school, which enables them to self- renew their skills as teachers. Capable and skilful teachers add to the usefulness of the school through collaboration with their co-workers and professionals on instructional guiding doctrines, set of courses improvement and staff improvement strategies. (Proposed Draft: National Professional Standards for Teachers in Pakistan).

School renewal and the continuous learning are only possible when a community of learners is generated, directed, supported and turns into a self- learning community. The principal's role is of an initiator; by providing teachers with learning opportunities (Dufour, 2008) and the ice- breaker to pull the teachers out of stagnation and empower them to contribute through their knowledge with their colleagues; during the workday (Joyce & Calhoun, 1996) and to move towards multidimensionality rather keeping it one-dimensional.

In developing countries school leader's capacity to play a role in reform efforts is negligible (Fullan & Watson, 1999). Being a developing country, Pakistan needs to train, support and do capacity-building of the schools as a reform effort. It is essential for the principal to create an encouraging learning environment, improve quality of instructions, supervise curriculum and ensure effective staff improvement to perk up education management at school level (Sindhvad, 2009). These roles define the principal as instructional leader and keep on improving the school at large.

The prominent researchers like (Darling- Hammond, 1990, 1996; Fullan & Hargreaves, 1992) expressed that the accomplishment of improvement efforts depend upon creating and sustaining opportunities for instructional staff learning. Fullan (1999) elucidated, "Incessant growth of all teachers is the indispensable for effectuating, improvement, and reforms. Professional development and school progress are markedly linked to each other (p.315).

A school leader concentrates on teacher improvement innovatively, through comforting actions such as teacher organization, dialogue, and demonstration through managerial composition and prospects. Professional advancement consequently turns out to be an essential part of daily routines, supposedly impossible to differentiate from regular organizational behaviours, i.e., organizational arrangement develops into a crucial instrument unswervingly mediate teacher professional growth. DuFour's opines that, "the most excellent staff improvement turns out in the place of work rather than in an intensive course" (2008).

All fore cited facts are calling for a special role which enables the staff to manage for continuous growth with their implicit and explicit resources under the leadership of the principal. The researcher feels an obligation to explore whether there are practices of self - renewing learning and how far the principals are undertaking, discharging and coming out successful in their innovative role. The study also plans to tackle the need for improving principal's capacity to assume new roles and responsibilities in the system. The urge may not match with the realities on ground. No doubt, certain diverse under weighed factors, may churn out to be a success, need to be explored in terms of their intensity and applicability.

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

School is more apt to remain in phase with the changes. Hence self renewal concept of school has become a fashion of the day. Hence this study "School As A Self Renewing Learning Community: Role Of Principals As Leaders" has been conducted to study the role of the secondary school principal as a facilitator for reform efforts and changing the school into self-renewing learning community.

## **1.3 Objectives of the Study**

This study has been premeditated to accomplish the laid down objectives:

**1.3.1** To study the school leader's capacity in school reform efforts in public and private sector.

**1.3.2** To study the stipulated roles of the Principal as school leaders.

**1.3.3** To find out the importance of professional development activities for turning any school into a self-renewing learning community.

**1.3.4** To study the perception of teachers about the principal's leadership capabilities.

## **1.4 Research Questions**

The laid down research questions aim to find and investigate into the area of the study to generate knowledge and achieve the objectives of the study.

**1.4.1** Is there any difference between the principals' capacity in public and private schools?

**1.4.2** Are the principals arranging for teachers' professional development activities and opportunities for collaborative teamwork?

**1.4.3** What are the stipulated roles of the school principals as leaders?

**1.4.4** Do the teachers view the principals as school leaders?

## **1.5 Significance of the Study**

The research is noteworthy for the reason of its laid down dimensions;

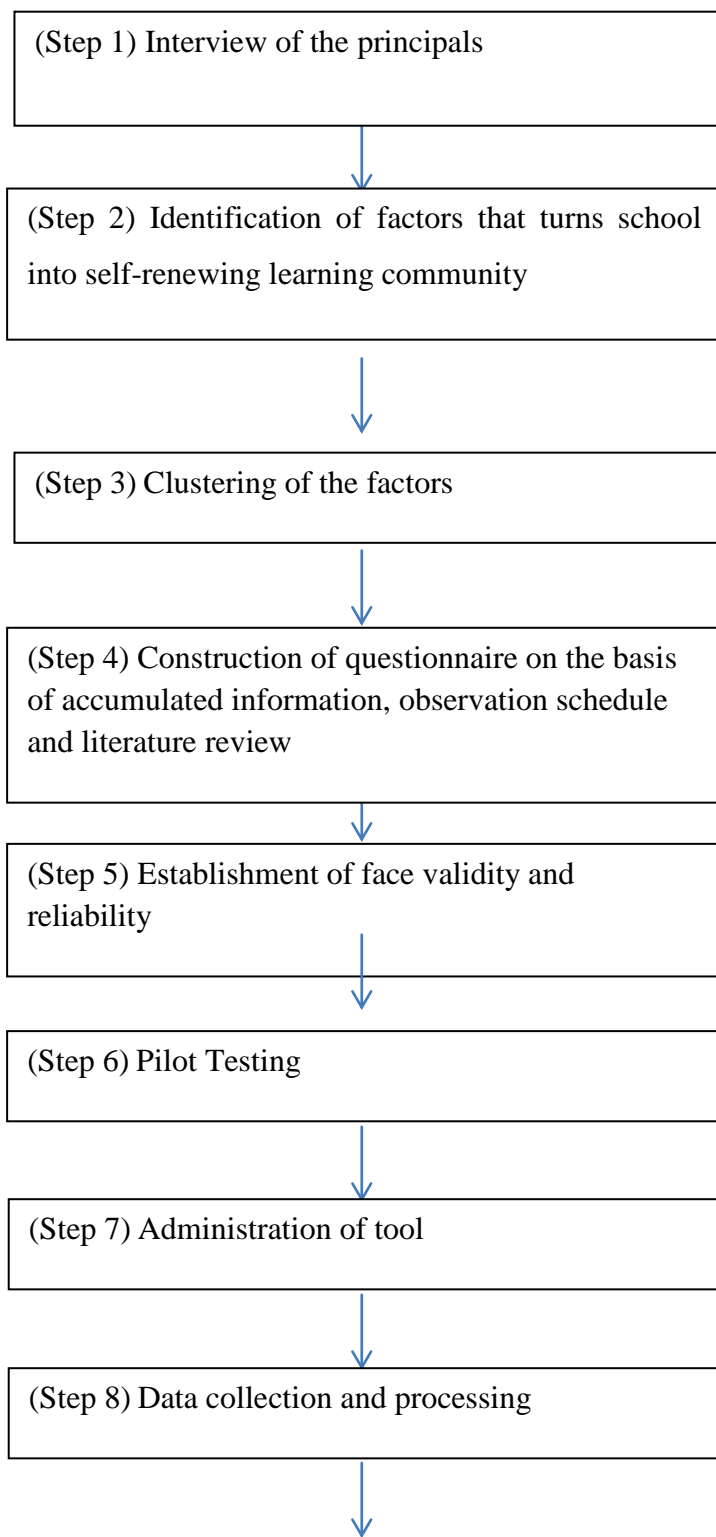
- 1.5.1** The study would divulge a deeper understanding of the role of the Principals of the secondary schools in making their school a self-renewing learning community by equipping the teachers with needed training for the development of a collaborative school climate.
- 1.5.2** The research would lead the school administration to arrange and generate a learning community via continuous development of all teachers.
- 1.5.3** The study would guide the principals as educational administrators to develop and evaluate educational programs as they will find out the need for redefinition of administrative roles and the recognition of school as learning communities. It will stimulate to breathe new life into school improvement processes for a longer period of time.
- 1.5.4** This study will be helpful for the teachers as they will try to find the ways to modify their inadequacies and update their knowledge according to the students' and societal changing needs.
- 1.5.5** This research will be a source of information for the parents as they will come to know that their child is a part of self-renewing learning community where the instructions are conveyed using multiple ways to ensure quality education and improvement in students' learning in their schools. Furthermore, the school as learning community would combat orthodox ways of teaching.
- 1.5.6** The research will be helpful for society and community by exploring the importance of professional learning activities and culture of collaboration as the parameters for turning the school into a self-renewing learning community inevitable to improve students' learning.

## **1.6 Assumption of the study**

The assumption of this research is found in the notion that the principals of the secondary school understand the concept of self-renewing learning communities. The researcher takes for granted that the head teachers are the leaders of such learning communities which engage teachers in an unremitting learning progression to run the system and create an association dedicated to ceaseless improvement.

## 1.7 Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework may be briefly depicted as given.



## **1.8 Glossary of words**

The operational descriptions of the expressions used in the study are being given in this section.

### **1.8.1 Schools**

A school is an institution developed for the teaching of students under the guidance help and direction of teachers. School is considered as a place or a learning community that promotes learning and well-being of teachers and students.

### **1.8.2 Public Schools**

The term public school has been in use right from 18th century, stretched over government schools. These schools are owned or funded by government support and under obligations to follow government statutes, decisions and notifications made from time to time.

### **1.8.3 Private Schools**

Private schools are non-government schools and owned by the general public, supposed to have higher standards. These schools seek to foster other personal achievements as compared to the government schools. These schools don't receive funds from the government but rely upon students fees to run the affairs.

### **1.8.4 Secondary School**

Secondary School describes an educational institution where in teenagers get admission after the completion of elementary education, their schooling stretches over class 8 to 10.

### **1.8.5 Self-Renewing**

As cultural, economic, political changes are being brought, each school is expected to continue to become a self-renewing learning community. The researcher describes school as a self-renewing learning community where the teachers and the students are equally empowered in a safe and collaborative surrounding under the headship of the Principal. In such community the processes of transformation, revitalization, recreation and regeneration are on-going through staff development and training programmes. Principal contributes as a transformational and instructional leader who plays a major role in breathing new life into the school by providing a set of strategies to be achieved by the teachers to generate and promote a community of learners.

### **1.8.6 Learning Community**

According to Furman-Brown (1999), learning community stretches over the eminence of everyday life in schools. Learning community has occupied the space in the educational literature in the sphere of school reform. The initiative of a learning commune is the modified form of learning organization, described by Senge (1990). The researcher describes the school as a learning community, with expanded human and technological resources that attempts to direct the course of education in new ways. The learning communities comprise group of people who share common mission and vision for building collaborative knowledge, and value activities in a climate i.e. School. According to the researcher, teachers of such learning community undergo continuous professional development activities which enable them to engage in a continual process of evolving education in school thus making it a self-renewing learning community.

### **1.8.7 Principal**

The Principal of either a private or a public school is a person who is the head or authoritative figure, who is responsible to manage resources and who has decision making power to run an institution i.e. School.

### **1.8.8 Role of Principal**

Principal is required to produce a collaborative learning milieu and afford professional development prospects for teachers (OTA, 1995). According to NAESP's (2008) Standards stating the bounds of What Principals ought to be acquainted with and Be Able to Do, the principal breeds an ethnicity of incessant learning for teachers that ensures students' learning by using multiple sources. Researcher perceives the role of principal of a secondary school as a facilitator for teacher training for turning the school into self-renewing learning community.

### **1.8.9 Leaders**

The researcher has described the principals of the schools as leaders who possess the characteristics of an instructional/ transformational leader.

### **1.8.10 Principals as Leaders**

Principal as leader tend to create a learning community where they empower their students and teachers equally. Principal has a major role in arranging for the professional development and growth opportunities. It is mandatory for efficient instructional and managerial leadership to implement change processes. Successful leaders are down to business they seek help when needed and design the instructional program and school culture advantageous to learning and proficient growth.