

Case Studies in Contemporary Pacific Leadership

Commissioned and produced by the Leadership Development Unit of the Governance Program at the University of the South Pacific in August 2007, the Case Studies in Contemporary Pacific Leadership project attracted researchers from around the Pacific region to conduct studies on leadership aspects in the Pacific.

The case study on **‘The way educational leadership should be – Insights from Kaivata High School’** was researched and compiled by Dr Ishwar Govinda Lingam based at USP, Fiji. Dated: July, 2008.

You are welcome to make use of this case study for educational and training needs, however full acknowledgement must be given to the author and the Leadership Development Unit - Governance Program of the University of the South Pacific. For further information on this case study, contact govinda_i@usp.ac.fj



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The way educational leadership should be: Insights from Kaivata High School

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Abstract

This case highlights how a non-Indigenous educational leader has made a positive impact on all aspects of a rural secondary school in Fiji. Data for the study was obtained by means of a semi-structured interview with the head of the school. Also, five senior teachers and the school manager were interviewed to gain better insights about the leadership in the school. Analysis of the data showed that the leader's daily function of planning, motivating, developing and supporting teachers have led to increased school efficiency and in turn overall school effectiveness. The case demonstrates that a good school leader whether he/she is appointed to lead any school can make a positive impact in terms of its management by encouraging all the participants to give their best in whatever they do inside or outside the classroom.

Introduction

Over the years, various concerns have been raised relating to Fijian education (Bacchus, 2000, Dakuidreketi, 1995; Baba, 1979,). Statistics for the years 1989 to 1997 for example, show that there is a significant difference in the average per cent pass rate between the Fijian and non Fijian students (Williams, 2000). More recently, these concerns have increased since the release of the major report on education in 2000. A growing concern have been expressed in the Fiji media recently about issues relating to the performance of schools run by the Indigenous Fijian community. It has been highlighted that many Fijian educational institutions are not doing well academically (Singh, 2008: 1 and 2). They have low pass rates and this trend has continued for many years. Media reports have further suggested that all school participants, including management, staff and parents, must share some responsibility for this debacle. Of these groups, the school administrator plays a key role in all affairs of the school. One media report recommended a code of conduct be put in place for school administrators. These schools face considerable challenges such as uninspiring leadership and lack of support from the community served by the school (Williams, 2000). Indigenous Fijian parents generally attend to village functions and commitments such as the village levy and church levy (Williams, 2000; Ravuvu, 1983). Some give higher priority to these matters than to their children's education, resulting in a significant educational gap between Fijians and non-Fijians.

However, in some cases where Indigenous Fijian owned and run schools have school leaders who are non-Fijians the story is different. There is great success in all areas of school life including children's academic performance. This may be due to the leadership style adopted by them in running the school.

Background

Despite the difficult context such as type of school, its circumstances, its geographical location, the local community it serves, school administrators such as principals and head

teachers can still help raise the standard of their schools. As Leithwood and his colleagues (1999:4) argued, “outstanding leadership is exquisitely sensitive to context”. In the same vein, the National College for School Leadership (2003:7) in the UK argues that leadership should be viewed as a contextualized activity”. Thus, the context in which you are affect what you do as a school leader.

Literature (for example, Prebble & Stewart, 1985) demonstrates that a good working theory in school administration is necessary for the purpose of effectively running a school. Since all schools have special characteristics, it is vital for school principals and head teachers to adopt a theory that will help them to have a good understanding of various aspects relating to their professional work. In this regard, it is crucial that school administrators are professionally prepared for the job. Undoubtedly, application of knowledge acquired from educational administration courses in everyday work will make a difference in the school’s performance. Due to the importance of leadership in securing sustainable school development, many countries have invested considerably in the professional preparation and on-going development of school leaders (Bottery, 2004). In the context of Fiji, the recent Education Commission report recommended an establishment for a Centre for Educational Leadership (Coxon, 2000). This demonstrates the need for high quality school leaders in Fiji schools. Such a Centre would be responsible for the professional development opportunities for the present as well as the future school leaders.

School administrators should closely involve themselves in the primary task of the educational organization, which is the teaching and learning process (Prebble & Stewart, 1985). In this way, they will have a feel of what is going inside the classrooms. This can be done by observing the classes at work. In any school establishment, it is not possible for the principal or the head teacher to carry out all administrative and supervisory responsibilities by themselves alone. The idea of using middle management to carry out some responsibilities is a sound strategy (Prebble & Stewart, 1985). However, the middle management need to keep the school leader informed about all that is happening. Despite work intensification, research evidence (for example, Day et al, 2000; Gold et al, 2003) suggests that school leaders can still uphold their ideals, values and work towards providing quality education for children. School leaders and teachers are expected to fulfil public roles, that is, they are responsible for promoting children’s learning . In doing so, they should at all times focus upon the best interests of the children they teach and education generally (Downie, 1990) and at the same time they need to uphold their professional work ethics.

In such pressurized time, the idea of distributed leadership (for example, Bottery, 2004) where all members of the organization were engaged instead of the school principal or head teacher alone undertaking all administrative roles and responsibilities.(finish this sentence?). Decision-making is a key factor to all of these. Generally, research literature demonstrates that effective school leaders exert a strong influence over the effectiveness of the school performance (Wallace, 2002, Waters et al, 2004). Thus, the quality of school leaders matters because they motivate teachers and in turn, the quality of teaching and learning that is carried out in the classrooms (Hargreaves, 2003; Crowther, 2000;

Day et al, 2001; Bottery, 2004; Fullan, 2001). Consequently, the importance of leadership in inspiring all school participants will lead to improvements not only in the teaching and learning process but also in all other facets of the school organization (for example, Bottery, 2004; Harris, 2003; Hopkins, 2001). Overall, principals and head teachers are the ones who determine the directions in which their school should be heading.

Purpose of the study

The aim of this study was to explore leadership in a remote rural secondary school. Specifically, the research was designed to investigate the strategies used by the school leader in bringing about improvements in children's academic performance. The study was guided by the following key research question, "What leadership strategies are being employed in the selected school to improve school's academic performance?"

Rationale

There is a paucity of local research literature available on leadership in education in the Fiji context. This study, albeit on a small-scale, could help contribute to the build up of knowledge in the area of educational leadership. The present study could provide insights about the use of various management practices to enhance school effectiveness. The answers obtained from the research question posed would help remind various stakeholders about their role in providing quality education to children in all contexts. The findings of the present study may also inform the principal stakeholder on issues relating to the professional preparation of school leaders. In addition, the study could act as a catalyst for further research on varying issues relating to school management in the Fiji context.

Methodology

A qualitative case study design was employed for the study. The case chosen for the study was the principal of a Fijian educational institution. Data for the study was gathered in October 2007 by means of interviews with the school staff, school manager and the principal. Since a small number of participants were interviewed, data analysis was carried out using 'low-tech' method, that is, analysis was carried out manually (Vulliamy & Webb, 1992). Relevant quotes from the data were presented on the basis of Rudduck's (1983) suggestion that direct quotes carry a lot of meaning in a few words. As part of research ethics, the names of the staff, principal and school have been kept confidential.

Discussion of the results

Snapshots of the leadership situation at Kaivata High School will be presented under the following headings: appointment, meetings, morning briefings, school management meetings, professional development, teaching/learning, and school/community partnership. A brief background of Kaivata High School prefaces the discussion of the results.

Kaivata High School

Kaivata High school is located about 60 km from the main urban centre in the Northern Education Division, and is managed and run by the Indigenous Fijian village community. For a number of years Kaivata High School did not demonstrate an acceptable level of academic performance. A cursory glance at past records showed that the school did not make any significant improvement despite having all the necessary facilities and resources as well as low teacher/pupil ratio. Almost all the teachers were well-qualified, but when one looked at the academic results, they were not on par with other neighboring secondary schools. The school was associated with low educational achievement. The parents, school management and various other stakeholders were not at all happy with the school's performance, particularly in the area of children's academic performance. The school was frequently criticized for not showing any improvement in school work. Also, the school persistently faced problems of all sorts, such as discipline, teacher absenteeism and abuse of school funds.

Appointment

Due to the various concerns expressed by the people, the Ministry of Education decided to appoint a new principal to the school. This time an Indo-Fijian was given the opportunity to lead the school which was managed by the Indigenous Fijian community. This was an unusual practice by the Ministry of Education. In most cases Indo-Fijians and Indigenous Fijians are supposed to head schools operated and run by their respective communities. Here at Kaivata High School the story was different. as an Indo-Fijian was given the responsibility to head the school. Because of past mal practices which had an impact on the overall achievement of the school, the Fijian community accepted the new appointment.

Mr Govin, who was recently on an in-service award at the University of the South Pacific graduated with a Bachelor of Education degree with a strand in educational administration. He was approached by the Ministry of Education to be the next principal of Kaivata High School. Mr Govin acceded to the request as this meant a promotion for him and in turn a rise in salary. The school context did not pose any threat to him as he was fairly well versed with Fijian culture and traditions. Above all, Mr Govin considered it fortunate as he wanted to ensure that his knowledge on educational administration gained from the study was successfully translated into the running of a school. Whilst undertaking his studies, Mr Govin heard a lot in his educational administration lectures about concepts such as collaboration, team work, democratic practices, participatory decision-making, cooperation, partnerships, empowerment and educational supervision. The first thing that came to Mr Govin's mind was staffing. While in the capital city, Suva, he thought it would be best to get things done at the central office of the Ministry of Education rather than making telephone calls from Kaivata High School. On the basis of normal staffing entitlements, Mr Govin was happy that the school was adequately staffed. He thought to himself that even though he was the head of the institution, it would be difficult to control and achieve much single-handedly without team work with various other stakeholders. This is consistent with research literature on educational

administration (for example, Day et al, 2000; Gold et al, 2003; Prebble & Stewart, 1985). He also realized that parents play an important part in children's education. Considering these he mapped out some ways to gain everyone's support in children's education well before the start of the school year.

Meetings

Today was Mr Govin's first day at Kaivata High School. He walked around the school and this gave him an unpleasant impression of the school. He thought to himself about the need to carry out a major facelift of the school environment. Through personal reflections, Mr Govin knew very well about the competing priorities at school. He thought it would be wise to direct his energy in such a way to avoid overload and burn-out. Mr Govin planned well for the first day. A staff meeting was conducted. At the outset he said, "I come with the winds of change, to bring about a better and effective school where the children of this society can have their fair share of the national cake". This was Mr Govin's message to the staff in simple and precise terms. He clearly spelled out to the staff members about the school policies, teachers' professional responsibilities, school goals, importance of planning etc, and above all he said "we are posted here because of the children's education and we need to keep this in mind at all times and as such we have to provide the best service possible to all our clients...school work is our top priority ...our main responsibility is to create a conducive school climate where all our children can learn successfully...reflect at the end of the day...did you give your best". At the end of the meeting he reminded all about the need to work as a team and the need to follow the General Orders-a guide to civil servants in their professional work. Also, he suggested to the staff members about his 'open-door' policy. He mentioned that his office was going to be always open for any advice or consultation.

School assemblies were organized every week. The teacher on duty conducted the assemblies. This was a new practice in this school. Teacher on duty was supposed to find out about any additional announcements to make from the principal. Assemblies were very well conducted by my staff. "This builds their confidence to speak in public" remarked Mr Govin. A teacher commented that Mr Govin's presentations in the assemblies were always well received by staff and students. He "sounds business-like...voice is loud and clear".

Morning briefings

Every morning from Monday to Friday, Mr Govin conducted briefing sessions with his staff. This kept the staff informed about the various facets of the school organization as well as the day's program. Mr Govin was very frank and open about things he discussed with his staff. He used a collegial approach in dealing with the school matters. Instead of 'telling decisions', Mr Govin discussed with his team issues before coming up with a 'best' decision. Comments by Mr Govin such as, "Teachers, you are resourceful people, feel free to contribute your ideas however trivial they may be, it may just do the magic" and "Its you who are the greatest asset of the team...teachers who have a heart, those who deep down are prepared to do more even in the face of difficulties" really

encouraged the staff to positively contribute to the development of the school. Such comments and open discussions made all of the staff happy and at the same time encouraged staff togetherness and felt part of the school family. A teacher commented that the “two way communication...our views are heard...and we do not feel threatened” are good administrative practices. Another staff commented that “his talks and the power of reasoning motivate staff”. “Briefings are very effective as it focuses on the day’s work...this is new to me and I never experienced morning briefings before” commented another teacher. With the passage of time the staff morale and staff participation in all affairs of the school increased considerably.

One morning when Mr Govin made a quick tour of the staff room he heard some teachers say that the past principal’s used to impose decisions on the staff. Mr Govin maintained a close contact with all his staff both teaching and ancillary. He was approachable to all staff and students alike. He cared for his teachers’ welfare.

School management meetings

A school management meeting was called to welcome Mr Govin as well as to discuss important matters concerning the school. The welcome ceremony was good. Mr Govin got the opportunity to clarify his roles and responsibilities as well as the school management’s roles and responsibilities. All professional matters concerning teachers and the education of the children were the principal’s responsibility. The demarcation of roles and responsibilities was outlined very tactfully by Mr Govin. He said this would be in the best interest of the school organization. He then provided them with copies of School Management Handbook: A Guide to the Functions and Roles of School Management in Fiji. This handbook outlined clearly the roles of principal’s/head teacher’s and school management committees. This was the first time for most them to see such a publication which clearly outlined the duties of key stakeholders. “Now we are heading in the right direction, we were not fully aware of our roles and responsibilities...this will keep us on our toes,” responded Mr Teki, the School Manager. Mr Govin agreed with the School Manager and also reminded them to be conversant with various policy directions of school decision making, planning and financial management. “As a member of the school committee you hold an important position as such it is important that you are committed to our school’s vision and mission.” said Mr Govin. He concluded the meeting by saying “It is fair to say that children need your presence more than your presents in formulating good sound character... schools can do so much, your part sadly is sometimes neglected”.

Professional development

He also reminded all that the school was a learning organization and the need for everyone to continue to learn in order to improve all facets of the school should be the top priority. A request came from the Curriculum Development Section of the Ministry of Education for a teacher to attend a workshop on “Values Education”. Mr Govin kindly acceded to the invitation by sending a teacher to attend a week long workshop. This he thought was a way to develop teachers. However, before letting Mr Manasa go, he asked him to later run a session at the school for the benefit of the remaining teachers. Towards

the end of the second school term, Mr Govin received an invitation to attend the Principal's Conference. Instead of him attending, he requested Mr Riko, the Deputy Principal to attend. He thought developing others is a way forward. This became a tradition in the school where teachers share knowledge and skills acquired from short in-service programs upon their return. Not only this, teachers also began to assist each other in school work. All staff members slowly became involved in the key management activities of the school such as goal setting, decision making, and supervision. In so doing, Mr Govin created opportunities for others in the school to take up leadership. Research literature demonstrates the need to provide professional opportunities to other participants in the school so that they can also develop themselves (Day et al, 2000; Gold et al, 2003; Prebble & Stewart, 1985).

Teaching/Learning

One day as Mr Govin sat down at his desk, he reflected on the school's organizational pattern and thought about making some changes for the benefit of school. The question that he now asked himself was, "How can I use this concept of supervision to help the teachers at Kaivata High School to do their job better?" He then decided to have a meeting with the H.O.D's. This meeting was specifically to consider ways to help staff improve their performance. Before he could come up with a strategy, the H.O.D Language proposed the idea of in-class supervision. Everyone was happy with this arrangement. A simple form was devised for the purpose. "You should show a genuine concern to improve your colleagues" said Mr Govin. The other night, he thought that it would be wise to delegate the H.O.D's to look after the academic matters of the school and from time to time get some progress reports from the H.O.D's. He realized that it would be extremely difficult to carry out in-class supervision all by him. Small interest groups were formed to carry out in-class supervision. Mr Govin thought empowering teachers would be a way forward. Literature demonstrates that the involvement of middle management is a good strategy (Prebble & Stewart, 1985).

Looking back, Mr Riko, could see a vast improvement in all areas of school work. The staff working relationship which hitherto had been very poor improved considerably. One of the teachers made the following comment to Mr Riko: "Govin knows about good governance...you see now the school is running well...things are well streamlined. Ha! ha! no one can play around with him...he knows his work". Teachers were on time to school and even the children came to school on time. As a point of principle, Mr Govin was always the first person to arrive and the last person to depart from the school. He thought modeling the desired behaviour will set an example from which teachers and pupils can learn. After some weeks, Mr Govin saw all the teachers made a point of arriving to school on time. Teachers became more interested in their work and some went out of their way to conduct extra classes on Saturday's. Mr Govin was around on Saturday's to help teachers in their work. He negotiated with the School Management to provide lunch to the staff who volunteered to conduct extra classes on Saturday's and during the school holidays. The internal examination results reflected a good performance by all the students. The highlight was a good percentage pass in the external examinations. This was a magnificent achievement for the school since its establishment.

“Our products, the students are going to be our best advertisement. Let us continue to churn out worthy outputs” commented Mr Govin. Other teachers also commented on school’s academic achievement. For example, “through team work our academic progress is excellent”, “the results is best ever for the school...the evening and morning prep time supervision have made the difference”. This shows that effective leaders can influence the overall success of the school (Wallace, 2002; Waters et al, 2004).

School/community partnership

The Inter-house Athletics meet was drawing nearer. Mr Govin thought that this was the best time to get the parents support. While doing his studies, he read an article about school-community metaphors such as school as an organization, the school as a learning community and a community-developing school. He thought this as a grand opportunity to implement these great ideas and in particular the one relating to a community-developing school. He brought the matter up in a staff meeting. All the teachers unanimously agreed with the idea. They were all elated as in the past they found it difficult to control over 400 pupils. A special school assembly was called and Mr Govin informed about the Inter-house Athletics meet and the invitation to all parents to support the program. The children became very excited and looked happy as never before such an invitation was extended to the parents. Mr Govin provided some ideas to Mr Riko and asked him to plan the day’s program with the H.O.D PEMAC.

At the opening of the Inter-house Athletics meet, Manasa, the village headman, was the chief guest. Mr Govin approached him weeks ago and also briefed him on some of things he could talk about during the opening of the program. One of the items mentioned by Mr Govin concerned school goals. Mr Manasa made an excellent presentation. Apart from English, he used the vernacular language and this made a big impact on the parents and teachers alike. Everyone came to know that one of the goals of the school was to be responsive to the concerns of the community. It was a great day. Parents, teachers and the pupils had a good time. The most exciting event of the day was the relay between the teachers and the parents. The parents won this event. Kanace, the gold medalist made the difference. Mr Govin thanked everyone and pointed out that the school needed the community and vice versa to make any progress. He said “people make the difference”. He also quoted a statement from one of his educational administration course readings by Bottery (2004), “In the process [we] create [an] institution which [is] alive, buzzing with the thrill of learning, a joy to be in”.

Conclusion

The use of good management practices ensured success not only in academic performance but also in many other areas of school work. The school has gained good results in the national examinations and sports. “This is just my second year here and we hope to maintain this glory and at the same time endeavour to continue to channel our energy towards attaining academic excellence”, commented Mr Govin. The students of Kaivata High School were motivated, encouraged, and assisted by the teachers to prove their worth through academic achievement. “We have decided on these goals together,

teachers, and our students are increasingly becoming aware that to succeed, we all must have tremendous perseverance and will to work extra hours” divulged Mr Govin. He went on to say, “The increasing demands of work and extremities in rural areas, calls for even greater commitment on our part as teachers to educate and prepare the rural students to those challenges by inculcating the value of positive attitude to hard work”. Towards these ends, our goal at Kaivata High School is “visible and achievable through my team of dedicated staff” claimed Mr Govin.

Kaivata High School is fortunate to have a devoted educational leader. With appropriate knowledge and skills, together with business-like approach the leader brought about necessary transformation in the school organization for the good of all the participants. Practices which were yielding negative results were discarded. Mr Govin’s initiative through various suitable interventions, such as better form of school and class organization, staff and pupil management and teaching practices demonstrate that to diminish the inequities that exists in our education system, educational leaders in schools should streamline school operations and be committed to the job. This case is a shining example of a school leader with his team of committed teachers who have responded well to the educational needs of rural children.

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