

Grounded in Reality-Pragmatic Leadership Makes the Difference! – A Case Study on a School

N. Prabha^{1*}, B. William Dharma Raja²

^{1*}Research Scholar (Reg. No: 20214011042010), Department of Education, Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Tirunelveli – 627012, TamilNadu, India, Email: prabha.navaneethan@gmail.com

²Professor & Head, Department of Education, Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Tirunelveli -627012. TamilNadu, India, Email: widho7@yahoo.com

***Corresponding Author:** N. Prabha

^{*}Research Scholar (Reg. No: 20214011042010), Department of Education, Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Tirunelveli – 627012, TamilNadu, India, Email: prabha.navaneethan@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

A head teacher has multifarious duty to perform as a guide, facilitator, friend and philosopher. More than that, she is a kind mother to the students and teachers. Head teacher needs to be kind enough to go beyond the mistakes and try to correct them in all possible ways by connecting the staff and students at a human level. The founder-principal of Prasanna Matriculation Higher Secondary School solely impacts the human resource management practices in the school. The paper used a qualitative research approach incorporating interview method and researcher observations. A teacher and a student were interviewed to bring out this piece of writing. This paper discusses the well-rounded leadership style of the founder-principal, with the stories of a teacher and a student outlining the life-changing impact of the human touch and flexibility rendered towards them. A former student's reminiscence of the unique attributes of the principal is woven through the paper.

Notion of leadership

Leadership is a process by which an executive can direct, guide and influence the behaviour and work of others towards accomplishment of specific goals in a given situation. Leadership is the ability of a manager to induce the subordinates to work with confidence and zeal. According to Keith Davis, "Leadership is the ability to persuade others to seek defined objectives enthusiastically. It is the human factor which binds a group together and motivates it towards goals."

Effective leaders take a personal interest in the long-term development of their employees, and they use tact and other social skills to encourage employees to achieve their best. It is not about being "nice" or "understanding" – it's about tapping into individual motivations in the interest of furthering an organization wide goal (W.C.H. Prentice).

Effective education leaders know how to manage and direct change in actual fact whether teaching in the classroom or leading a school or helping to improve education systems. They listen, guide and motivate their workers using change as a positive tool to leverage innovative thinking and to inspire lasting positive reforms i.e. to explore innovation and inspire actions. They are the heart of inventive, meaningful and sustainable change in education. Impactful leaders work with integrity and are accountable to those they serve. Most importantly, they use their skills to support equity, inclusivity and fairness to ensure the well-being of all at their institution.

Inception of the School

In the year 1989, the institution was established. It is almost 35 years of existence. It has a traditional legacy on providing co-education from Kindergarten to Standard XII, offering education in English medium with the syllabus prescribed by SCERT (State Council of Educational Research and Training). The school is designed with an avowed intention of providing a high quality education with life skills and producing meritorious results in the Matriculation and Higher Secondary Board Examination. The present stature of the

school is because of the value-based leadership of the founder-principal combined with her commitment to bring out the best in her students and teacher in an inclusive manner.

Value-based leadership

The school's foundational merits are the founder-principal's integrity, commitment, passion and warmth. The principal believes in instilling discipline in her students. She tirelessly strives to attend to the needs of the school beyond work hours. She sets an example for prioritizing school and children above all. As the principal of the institution, she treats all her staff equally. All the human resources such as teachers, office workers, scavengers, securities, drivers and gardener experience her motherly guidance and warmth.

The human-connect

The principal tries to know the family background of every child and teachers and shares a bond with them. Her unconditional and impartial love touches the lives of every child and staff. Her warmth touches the parents as well. If parents fail to provide adequate care to their children, the principal meets them. When there are conflicts among parents, she conveys the need to overcome their personal differences to ensure that the child grows up in a congenial atmosphere. She encourages parents to be a good role model for their children by giving up their egos for the sake of their children's wellbeing. The principal advises the children not to worry about the bad atmosphere at home and encourages them to try to come up in life through their education which can solve many problems.

"Only those teachers who can read the pain in the faces of their students can lead them in good path."

The principal firmly believes in the above lines and enables her teachers to equip themselves with the skills to understand the untold pains of students.

Amicable Leadership

The principal never forgets to recognize and appreciate the great endeavours of the teachers. As she does for students, she ensures the teachers' health and nourishment. She does not resort to dictatorial style of leadership. She is a democratic principal. She is all ears to teachers' innovative ideas. She is kind and easily approachable. Not only the professional growth but also she looks after the teachers' personal growth. She ensures comfortable and efficient teaching ambience. At times, she addresses the mistakes of the teachers firmly. However, she always ensures they realize the need to correct themselves by guiding and supporting them. In the special occasions of the school such as Annual Day, Sports Meet etc., she scrutinizes every segment of the programme with keenness and curiosity towards the overall quality assurance. Being an amiable principal, she is leading the institution towards greater heights.

Positive-disciplining practices

The principal does not reiterate the error committed overtly or covertly. The principal never resorts to harmful punishment. Frequent moral advice through stories from her life experiences is her way of conveying the message to the students. This enables the students to realize their mistakes and self-correct their behaviour. She always advises the teachers to treat children with utmost kindness.

Teacher par excellence

The principal demonstrates commitment and enthusiasm in teaching which inspires young teachers to learn from her. While handling classes, she is always standing and never takes her seat. When it comes to teaching, there is no limitation of time. Grooming the teachers' skill is her prime duty. The principal ensures wholesome growth and development of children and teachers. This is the primary reason for the timeless quality sustained by the school.

Linguistic Leader

The founder-principal is a passionate English Teacher. She surpasses in English grammar and strives to impart the knowledge to the teachers and students. The principal wish to ensure the language proficiency of all her teachers'. In addition to English, the principal is fascinated with Hindi. She has learnt Hindi and conducted Hindi classes to the students and teachers. Hindi teaching is her secondary joy. She transfers her flair for languages to her students and teachers. As an English educator, she always promotes the creative writing among the students and she encourages them to write their own paragraphs, essays, articles, reports, etc.

Exemplary English Teaching

The principal has an admirable way of teaching the concept from the basics. She lays the foundation of the topic and then explains the complex concepts in simple, understandable terms. Before teaching 'Direct-Indirect Speech', she gives lots of exercises using simple sentences. It helps the listener to comprehend the concept easily. She also kindles the curiosity of the students by encouraging them to identify more examples. The secret to her students' success in grammar proficiency is her consistency. She misses no opportunity to

transfer her passion and knowledge to her students and teachers. After she finishes the topic, the next ten days, students get home assignments on the same topic. Consistency in giving exercises, immediate corrections and the custom of discussing mistakes that come up during the correction together promotes the holistic approach in teaching and learning. The principal also builds up the conversation in the previously taught topic. This is her distinct quality which reinforces the learning.

Teaching at students' level

Based on the IQ level of the students, the principal changes her teaching style. She uses her study materials, manuscripts and modules that are meticulously prepared by her. Her commitment to improve English Grammar is commendable. She has collated her English resources to a print-ready version and intends to bring them out as a book in search of publishers to collaborate with. Along with her passion for English teaching, her special attention to late bloomers is notable. She is aware of the struggles of her children. Hence she fine-tunes her teaching to the level of every child. Such well-balanced, grounded approaches are her hallmarks that have shown consistent results in the region through the school.

Weekend Remedial Classes

Not only does the principal stays beyond school hours every day, but also on Sundays, she finds energy for remedial classes. She treats all the children equally with motherly affection irrespective of their educational or economic status. Because of such an authentic connection, children look forward to attending the remedial classes. As she is aware of the family struggles, only after ensuring that the students have had their breakfast and lunch, she proceeds with victuals.

All-round development

The principal gives the same importance to both curricular and extra-curricular activities. An additional period for playing is often the reward she bestows upon her students for any remarkable achievement. This shows her empathy towards her students as well as her ability to understand the heartfelt needs of her students. No gift can match the joy of an additional period to play, on school days and she is aware of that. Instead of excessive importance for scoring high marks, the principal promotes quality education by placing equal weightage on curricular and extra-curricular activities that brings massive success to the institution.

Story of a Student

A brilliant and obedient student passed Higher Secondary Examination with 92% marks. She learnt grammar well and won many prizes in several grammar competitions. She was versatile in vernacular and English language. She took part in Speech and Elocution competitions since class I and won many prizes. She shined in extracurricular activities like dance, drawing and sports. She took part in competitions held inside and outside the school and received many accolades and certificates. In an unfortunate turn of events, her father had to undergo a bye-pass surgery following a heart attack and he was advised not to work like before. This adversely affected the family income. Her mother decided to transfer her to another School. When the school management came to know about this, they immediately came forward to continue her studies at free of cost. This motivated the student to cheerfully continue in the same school and excel in all subjects. She was naturally talented and she studied hard and made her parents and school management proud. She learnt Hindi since Class 4 and became a Hindi Pandit while she was in class 9 itself. She completed Tamil and English typewriting (lower) also in the same year. She was outstanding in Sports and games as well. She was a kho-kho player and represented the school in Zonal level competitions with high spirit and enthusiasm. During the Pandemic, she was unable to pursue her outdoor interests. However, she learnt the basics of Japanese from a place near her home. When she was doing Standard X, she was diagnosed with an Auto Immune Disorder of Rheumatoid Arthritis. This disorder turned her life upside down. She could not even walk normally; she could not go wherever she wanted to go. She could not even sit for a while. She suffered from severe pain always. She could not sit and study or even lift the book. She could not go to school. Her parents' steadfast and unwavering support and her self-belief motivated her to face the challenges boldly with courage and confidence. After a few months, she started to walk slowly. She joined school again to continue her Standard XI. Her situation turned worse in two months. Her health didn't allow her to come to school regularly. However, she studied as much as she could from home. Her confidence took her to the next level despite the body pains. She went to Standard XII regularly. Despite of her physical pain, she scored 92% in XII public examinations. From childhood, her dream was to become a medical doctor. Her physical health restricted her from succeeding in NEET (National Eligibility cum Entrance Test) examination. She joined Naturopathy Medicine and achieved her dream of becoming a doctor. The school leadership offered compassionate support for the student by reaching out to her and accommodating her unique needs. She has emerged strong despite her struggles because of her grit and the flexibility and the student-cantered Human Resource Management practices in the school.

Story of a Teacher

A teacher was working in a private School in Chennai. She lost her husband due to a sudden illness. With one girl child to support, her future was uncertain. Her mother, unmarried sister and her daughter were living.

The high cost of living and lack of support from other family members made it difficult for her family to survive in Chennai. She decided to relocate to her mother's native place, a small village named Puthiamputhur, South India. Her relative told her about Prasanna Matriculation Higher Secondary School in Puthiamputhur and about the vacancy for PG Assistant in Zoology. She spoke with the principal over the phone. Her demands from the management were decent salary, free accommodation and concession for my child's education. Principal got back after month after discussing with the correspondent. Not only did she receive consolation and kind words from the management but also acceptance for all her demands. Soon after relocation while adjusting to the changes, school management played a vital role in mobilizing resources and supported her family to the fullest. During the pandemic, she and her family faced financial struggles, and the management rendered support for her family by providing the things they need. She gradually came out of her family's struggles and depression and feels safe and secure.

To bring to an end

Based on the observations made and experiences of collecting the information, four aspects of competencies for school leadership have been identified. The first and foremost are personal and social skills, and then come managing skills, which are followed by leading skills and transformative skills. Leaders don't wait to be told what to do and when to do it; they individually come up with good ideas and turn their visions into reality.

A stupendous finding is that the principal's managerial ability, empathetic understanding, vast knowledge, and values such as integrity and compassion exert a noteworthy influence on the progress of the school. By communicating vision effectively, empowering employees, making informed decisions, and learning continuously, leaders can lead their human resources towards achieving institutional goals and foster a constructive and affirmative work culture.

A principal's efforts and dedication help promote a safe and productive learning space, ensuring that the students are supported to reach their fullest potential. The school leader constantly updates their knowledge and skills and sets an example with the right attitude to inspire others. Through strong leadership, perseverance, and compassion, the principal can leave a lasting impact on the students, and all other employees at school. This is well demonstrated in this case study.

"Where darkness is the infinite loop that misleads the path and light is the eternal clearance, education is the medium that takes someone from infinite darkness to infinite light." By providing quality education and a favourable atmosphere, the school leader can lead all the human resources from murk to radiance, enabling them to enlighten their own lives and add glister to the lives of others.

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