

Curriculum Leaders Accommodating to Taiwan's Educational Reform in the Unfreezing Phase

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Abstract: With the two major curriculum reforms in Taiwan, the importance of curriculum leadership has become more prominent and has received more attention. However, there is less research and development on curriculum leadership in Taiwanese schools. In this context, this paper combines the characteristics of the most crucial "unfreezing" phase in Lewin's change model, and provides a direction for developing school leaders' curriculum leadership in the context of the new curriculum reform in Taiwan through a guiding framework consisting of six dimensions. It is hoped that it will help curriculum leaders to carry out curriculum reform more confidently and fill some research gaps.

1. Introduction

1.1. Two Major Curriculum Reforms and Curriculum Leadership Development in Taiwan

Two major curriculum reforms have occurred in Taiwan since 2000. The first was a "9-year Consistent Curriculum" implemented in 2001. It was the height of globalization and education began to circulate as a commodity [1]. Since then, Taiwan's curriculum has shifted its attention from the teaching of basic knowledge to the enhancement of students' learning abilities. With this came a gradual focus on curriculum leadership [2].

Another major curriculum reform in Taiwan is the "Curriculum Guideline of 12-year Basic Education", also called the "New National Curriculum", released in 2014 and implemented in 2019. Its emphasis is on the cultivation of students' core literacy and the development of a school-based curriculum. As can be seen, Taiwan's second curriculum reform is on a larger scale than the first, covering from the first grade of elementary school to the twelfth grade of high school. This is the first time that Taiwan's schools have been given such a high degree of independence to develop a school-based curriculum, with the percentage even accounting for one-third of the total credits [3]. In response to the trend of curriculum reform in Taiwan, the importance of curriculum leadership has become more prominent, requiring a shift from administrative-led leadership to teaching-centered curriculum leadership.

Unfortunately, there has been, however, little discussion and research on the professional development of curriculum leaders during Taiwan's educational reform period [4]. Clearly, the development of curriculum leadership in Taiwanese schools is lacking. What is questionable is

whether the curriculum leadership of Taiwan's school leaders can meet the current demands of change.

1.2. The "Unfreezing" Phase of Change

Lewin's change model divides change into "unfreezing", "changing" and "refreezing" phases [5]. When school curriculum leaders "unfreeze" anything, it means they replace outdated concepts and practices with fresh ones. The significance of this phase in the context of curriculum reform is in the requirement that curriculum leaders have a thorough understanding of the new curriculum to precisely pinpoint the discrepancies between the previous and current curricula [6]. If the "unfreezing" phase is managed effectively, the "changing" and "refreezing" phases merely require less guidance from the curriculum leader [7]. Thus, "unfreezing" is a critical step for curriculum leaders to make successful curriculum changes, which is why this step was chosen for this essay.

2. Guiding Framework to Develop Curriculum Leaders in the "Unfreezing" Phase

2.1. Evaluation to Determine the Direction

During the planning stage of a new curriculum, curriculum leaders in Taiwan first need to conduct a comprehensive evaluation of the school in light of the "New National Curriculum". At this point, SWOT can be used to analyze the school's internal strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats to help curriculum leaders navigate the direction of curriculum reform in their schools in alignment with external educational trends [8]. It is important to note that this direction of change needs to meet the requirement of students without adversely affecting other parts of the curriculum, thus avoiding conflicts of interest [9].

Additionally, to identify the direction of curriculum change from a multifaceted macro perspective, the organization of a curriculum development committee by curriculum leaders is necessary to know students' fundamental skills and to grasp the needs of both students and parents [10].

2.2. Creating a Vision to Enhance the Drive Force

After curriculum leaders set the direction of curriculum reform, the next difficulty is how to create a vision to gain the recognition and support of followers. In Taiwan's second curriculum reform, curriculum leaders must be a persuader, construct a relevant vision, and ensure that the vision is reflected in the curriculum. Not only should they actively provide guidance and clear direction for their followers, but they should also discuss the curriculum goals together. This will allow teachers and other staff to fully understand the trends and influences of curriculum change so that they can more readily accept and acknowledge the changes.

More importantly, curriculum leaders should have a clear understanding of what the drivers of curriculum change are and leverage it to increase the driving force. Therefore, curriculum leaders should tap into the unique value of each follower, articulate their roles and missions, as well as nurture and motivate them accordingly [10].

2.3. Minimize Resistance

Once the vision is clear, the next step is to minimize resistance and lay the groundwork for curriculum reform. In fact, those so-called "changes" can easily be met with resentment or even resistance from teachers or other staff, which is a problem that curriculum leaders must face [10].

Only by understanding who is resisting and why they are resisting can curriculum leaders in Taiwanese schools find ways to reduce this. As the second curriculum reform in Taiwan has placed

higher demands on students, accordingly, the professionalism of teachers needs to follow suit. It is easy to see that the teachers in Taiwan resisted the change perhaps because they felt that they were not competent enough to meet the requirements of the reformed curriculum. Or perhaps it is due to anxiety about the unknown, fearing that change will result in the loss of something for them. In such cases, curriculum leaders must be empathetic and emotionally intelligent to truly listen and address the concerns of their followers to ensure that they have a sense of engagement and belonging in the change process [11].

Additionally, curriculum leaders can help manage resistance by involving stakeholders who have benefited from the change [8]. Of course, creating a sense of "urgency" and emphasizing "necessity" occasionally is also essential.

2.4. Creating a Positive School Atmosphere

The creation of a positive atmosphere is critical during the new curriculum reform in Taiwanese schools [1] [12]. Curriculum leaders should think about how best to support the entire school to create a harmonious, open, and collaborative school climate.

Firstly, curriculum leaders need to lead by example, continually strengthen themselves, as well as maintain dedication and professionalism to infect their subordinates. Having done this, the curriculum leader also needs to be a good coordinator. It is important to coordinate the allocation of resources, including manpower and facilities, as well as to utilize resources such as community, parents, specialists, and retired educators whenever possible.

Furthermore, communication needs to be valued. Allowing all staff members to speak and exchange ideas freely and equally is what builds a network of trust to promote a positive atmosphere in the school. During the communication process, if conflicts arise, they need to be resolved promptly. As long as curriculum leaders can maintain an atmosphere of smooth communication and coordination, most problems can be solved [10].

2.5. Promoting Teacher Professional Development

Teachers, as the central force within the school, are key to promoting effective curriculum reform [10]. To comply with Taiwan's new curriculum reform policy, teachers' professional development must be ensured. Curriculum leaders should provide more relevant opportunities for teachers and encourage them to actively participate in curriculum development and professional advancement. This can help teachers to be psychologically and technically prepared to cope with the curriculum reform.

In addition, peer-to-peer learning is an integral part of facilitating teachers' professional development. Curriculum leaders can organize teachers to learn and absorb each other's experiences by modelling teaching and sharing in dialogue. It is important to note that teacher professional development is a long-term process that does not just exist at the "unfreezing" phase. Curriculum leaders should continue to guide teachers to improve their professional knowledge and competencies in order to lead sustainable curriculum reform [13].

2.6. Delegating Authority to Teachers

An effective curriculum leader should understand the skills and interests of each subordinate and give them autonomy to perform the tasks that best suit their abilities [8]. With the new curriculum reform trend in Taiwan, curriculum leaders should delegate authority to encourage and guide teachers to participate in curriculum development and leadership. This is the embodiment of distributed curriculum leadership [14], which can improve the efficiency and quality of curriculum development

[15].

To increase the motivation of teachers, they can be allowed to decide their meeting topics. Through different types of thematic meetings, curriculum development meetings, etc., meaningful dialogues and interactions can be conducted to trigger teachers' shared feelings about curriculum development, thus reaching a consensus with the new school curriculum. In this case, the new curriculum becomes a "curriculum for all members of the school" but not just for the "curriculum leaders" [1].

3. Conclusion

From the "9-year Consistent Curriculum" implemented in Taiwan in 2001 to the "New National Curriculum" introduced in 2009, its coverage has expanded, the proportion of school-based curricula has increased, and the demand for curriculum leadership has grown accordingly. It is fair to say that the reform is strong and significant. To be an effective curriculum leader in this context, one must first evaluate and analyze the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats within the school to decide on the direction of curriculum change. It is then important to be clear about how to create a vision to gain acknowledgement and support from all the staff to increase the drive for curriculum reform. Next, curriculum leaders need to understand who is resisting during change and why they are resisting in order to take targeted action to minimize resistance. Moreover, teacher professional development is a top priority for curriculum leaders to grasp along with creating a positive school climate. Last but not least, curriculum leaders should pay more attention to distributed leadership, which means involving capable teachers in curriculum development and leadership.

4. Reflection

The guiding framework for developing curriculum leaders is rather idealistic. Yet, it is not an easy task to do all of them in the context of Taiwan's political culture.

Firstly, Taiwan has a multi-party system with a large number of political parties [16]. It is challenging to achieve effective deep change in different socio-cultural contexts. This is usually due to the interests of different stakeholders and their inconsistent expectations and demands.

Moreover, the birth rate in Taiwan is low. According to a report by the National Development Conference of Taiwan, by 2035, Taiwan may have the lowest total fertility rate in the world [17]. The low birth rate has led to a gradual decrease in the source of students and schools are facing a gradual under-enrollment problem. In this context, the success of curriculum reform is crucial to Taiwan's schools, and may even be a matter of "life or death". Curriculum leaders will face more pressure from teachers, students, parents, their superiors and other stakeholders, and it will be a great challenge to effectively promote curriculum reform in such an adverse situation.

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