Building Supportive Relationships for School Improvement

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Abstract

The role of supportive relationship in caring and supportive manners expressed by different groups of people is extremely significant for improving school. Through supportive relationships, students feel that they are respected and their concerns are heard and such relationships enhance student autonomy. Moreover, positive relationships really have impacts on student achievement and behavior adjustment. The relationships would help students feel confident and motivated to try harder and perform better and to reduce negative attitudes towards schools. In regards of supportive teacher-student relationship, it helps engage students more in the learning process. In addition, supportive relationships are the predictors to reducing and protecting sexual risk behavior of the young adults. The study aims at examining the supportive relationship built by teachers with administrators, colleagues, students and students' parents that enhance school improvement. The results indicate that supportive relationships between teachers and each group are very important especially for the school improvement. Teachers express a sense of caring, encouragement for their colleagues and are open to new ideas, suggestions and commitment. Moreover, teachers tend to share teaching experiences, materials and collaborate with their colleagues with a sense of trust and teamwork. Building supportive relationship with school administrator would also ensure school improvement because it helps teachers become more active in teaching. Moreover, teachers share leadership with administrator. Teachers' supportive relationship really encourages students to get more involvement and interaction in classroom activities. The sense of care by teachers motivates students to learn and satisfies their learning. Therefore, school administrators should raise the awareness of supportive relationship especially among the four key teams to promote teaching and learning, and school improvement.

Keywords: Supportive Relationship, School Improvement, Teachers' Supportive Relationship

Introduction

Supportive relationships are playing a pivotal role to build a nurturing environment in schools in which all members: students, teachers, staff, parents and administrators are known, appreciated and cared about. As educators, we have experienced the strengths of connecting with all these groups of people to offer better teaching and learning.

Supportive relationships are described as caring and supportive of autonomy. Students feel that adults know them and care about them, be friendly, warm and even spare some time with them. Moreover, students feel that their concerns are heard and respected though they fail to follow rules or regulations. Treating students with care and respect is not sufficient in supportive relationships but allowing them to have their own decision is adding to the value. Allowing them to have their own choices in learning would prepare them for their own lives in the future as well as to attain respect between teachers and students (Giani & O'Guinn, 2010).

School improvement is an educational change aiming at enhancing student learning outcomes and streng-thening school's capacity to management changes (Hopkins, 2001). Student learning is an important indicator to school improvement. When the ideas of school improvement are raised, the main purpose is to promote learning environment and learning outcomes, thus learning achievement. All these have to do with effective instructions. Therefore, teachers are required to perform different roles to bring about changes to students. Of course, teachers involve greatly in their task-oriented performance, but they should involve in the discretionary performance too. That means they do not perform their role in the classroom only but also beyond the classroom settings. These extra-roles should share leadership characteristics within the school culture and environment.

Many studies provide evidence that if students feel that they belong to the class and receive close relationships especially with their teacher, their academic outcomes including working harder in school, more time spent on homework and better grade would be achieved (Birch & Ladd, 1997; Roeser, Midgley & Urdan, 1996 and Murray & Greenberg, 2000). However, the lack of supportive relation-ships may result in reducing the engagement, if not actual disengagement, thus limited performance (Agarwal et al., 2012). A qualitative study by (Alaie, 2011), among 31 out of 37 students who failed a college biology exam pointed to college professors who play important roles in order provide supports to meet the unique needs of the students. The college professors did not have strong personal relationships with the students. Moreover, there was a lack of understanding about the individuals' academic needs and a mismatch between students' and college's expectations in school. The study looked into the importance of relationships between teachers and students through the results happened to the students when such supportive relationships were not present.

According to the review of previous papers, a number of factors influenced by teachers contribute to student learning achievement (Richardson, 2011; Liberante, 2012; Wilkinson, 2013 and Fidler, 2001). This paper will explore whether building supportive relationships would contribute to student learning achievement which is considered as the predictor of school improvement. Due to school is a complexity of administrators, teachers, students and parents, thus the construct of the

supportive relationships built around these key people will be examined if they could enhance school improvement (student learning achieve-ment).

The Need of Supportive Relationships

Through supportive relationships in regards of caring and respect, students feel that they are respected and their concerns are heard. Caring and respectful relationships are important because through this, students feel valuable, capable and worthy of being heard. Another importance of supportive relationships is that it fosters students' autonomy. Students are offered with authentic choice in learning to make them ready for their future personal lives and gain respect between students and teachers. Students still need structure and support especially in setting lives expectations. As educators, we need to provide supports and help them to achieve their high expectations they have set. These supports may include with feedbacks, explicit instruction, checking the progress, checking to see what students need to achieve their expectations (Giani & O'Guinn, 2010).

Supportive relationships have positive effects on students' achievement in terms of better grades and higher graduation rates. Students who perceive such relationships feel belong and close with their teachers; thus, they tend to work harder and receive good results (Birch & Ladd, 1997; Roeser, Midgley & Urdan, 1996 and Murray & Greenberg, 2000), feel confident and motivated to try harder and perform better (Murray & Greenberg, 2000), and to reduce negative attitudes towards school (Birch & Ladd, 1997).

A study was conducted on the supportive teacher-student relationships in early college high schools by looking into the perceptions of students, teachers, and principals. According to the interview with the principals in regards of the importance of teacher-students relationship, the results indicated that relationships enhance student engagement in the learning process; it is the foundation of schools' work; it builds trust and it provides rigor that teachers must know their students. Moreover, the interview with the principal from Stephenson ECHS in relation to the relationships connected with trust, the principal said that "we're building strong relationships with the young people and their parents to ensure that trust maybe gets lost in their larger setting." The principals believed that the students did well in school because of the relationships between teachers and students. In regards of the principals and teachers' comments, teachers cared about their students personally and academically and the findings also align with the comment from Ongaga (2010) that this supportive relationship helps students build their academic confidence (Bulson, 2015). Moreover, supportive teacher-relationship influences students' behavioral adjustment and academic attainment (Hughes, 2012).

Another study conducted on supportive relationships and sexual risk behavior in adolescence indicated that supportive relationships especially with parents become the predictor of the decrease of the sexual risk behavior. The increase of such relationships of parents with their children was associated with low sexual risk behavior for adolescents. That means parents play significant roles to help their children not to engage in sexual risk behavior. Moreover, the parent connectedness and supportive relationships are useful for reduction and prevention of risk. Therefore, to help parents

understand their roles in adolescence sexual risk behavior, parenting job, and the peers' influences, the effects of such behavior on these relationships should be taken into account (Henrich et al., 2005).

The report in relation of supportive relationships and active skill-building strengthen the foundations of resilience shows that though the children experience the hardship of poverty, parental abuse, war, etc., only relationship with a supportive parent, caregiver, or other adult that would allow them to do well in lives. Such relationships would provide them with scaffolding, and protection as well as to help them plan, monitor and regulate behavior and adapt to changing environments (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2015).

The result of the study conducted on the interaction between supportive and unsupportive manager behaviors on employee work attitudes shows that supportive behavior shown by managers to employees enforces more satisfaction and engagement. Employees would be more committed to their responsibilities and workplace. The findings would suggest that job satisfaction reduces turnover and managers should give clear instruction, provide them support as much as possible and listen to their staff's wellbeing and development interest (Han et al., 2016).

Four Existing Types of Supportive Relationships

Based on the current researches related to relationships built by teachers among the stakeholders including students that influence school improvement, it informs that supportive relationship really contributes to the development of school especially the student learning.

1. Supportive Relationships among Teachers

Building a supportive relationship among teachers would contribute a safe, secured, and friendly working environment. Education trends are moving into a direction that educational psychology is more applicable to instructional practice that teachers are required to have the knowledge and capacity to deal with different conditions and situations of students.

1.1 Teachers demonstrate a sense of caring, encouragement for others and are open to new ideas, suggestions and commitment

Teaching today is not done in isolation. Teaching is not done as in the past to only transfer knowledge and skills to students, but also to observe students learning because they come from different backgrounds in terms of learning ability, languages, and cultures. Technologies influence greatly to teaching today. To understand the changes in education as well as the innovative development of technologies, teachers are required to work actively with others (colleagues) to share their methods of teaching, materials and even share emotional and cognitive support with one another. Building supportive relationship within their group would allow them to offer better quality teaching and learning. The role of self-efficacy encourages employees to take initiatives in their career. Teachers with high self-efficacy tend to have closer relationship with other teachers among their team and they create a culture of openness to new ideas, risk taking and a climate of distributed leadership. Moreover, teachers tend to have a sense of caring for others especially the young teachers so that they would contribute to building the school in the long run (Paramasivam, 2015).

1.2 Teachers demonstrate a sense of sharing

and collaboration: Share their teaching experiences, materials, and demonstrate a sense of trust, and teamwork

Leadership is about influencing the subordinates to perform delegated tasks better or more effectively to achieve the performing goals. Teachers seem to influence their colleagues in terms of instructions: share new teaching strategies, sharing teaching materials with one another, and enhancing one another to achieve instructional goals of the institution. Teachers' relationship really impacts the behavior of teachers' organization citizenship behaviors towards students, colleagues as well as the institution. Teachers tend to have more collaboration within their colleagues in which issues of safety, trust and relationships necessarily built. They show their willingness to cooperate in a number of activities which they can work together collaboratively. Firstly, join the team building activities. Teachers have more activities to get to know one another, especially the new teachers so that they can build up relationships and learn to go through challenges together. Secondly, they join the team teaching. This would provide teachers the opportunity to share knowledge about students as well as to better support them. Team teaching would make teachers feel that they have safe, more comfortable ways to share ideas and learning and to feel that teaching is not done in isolation. Last is meeting students' needs. Whenever teachers have more collaboration with one another, they tend to know students better and apply better teaching strategies to meet the students' needs. That means they become like a family which is very helpful for students to learn more effectively. They are willing to clarify ideas, share teaching experiences and strategies to help

students learn better. They also have different lengths of teaching and life experiences so that they can share with one another (Paramasivam, 2015).

2. Supportive Relationship between Teachers and Administrators

Concerning the quality of teaching and learning, teachers need support from their supervisors to enhance their preparations, creativity and instructional leadership. Thus, building a supportive between administrators and teachers are crucial.

2.1 Teachers' perceptions on student engagement

Relationships among different groups are made to contribute to the achievement of the stakeholders, including students. The relationship between teachers and administrators influences the student engagement in school, hence, student achievement. Teachers who had a stronger relationship with administrator seem to be more positive on student engagement meaning that if principal has more access to teachers, this would contribute to building teachers' confidence, trust and perceptions on students' academic and school engagement. Moreover, trust from the administrator to teachers accepted as a factor contributing to effective teaching. Due to the administrator is the teachers' supervisor in terms of relationship and work and teachers are the ones who produce the output: teaching (enthusiasm, commitment, sense of care and preparation), effective teaching contributes to better achievement of the students (Price, 2015). The interactions and relationships between teachers and administrators could produce changes in development due to meaningful challenges and relational supports enhanced. This type of relationship could enhance development

as they are the key to mutual engagement (Pianta, Hamre & Allen, 2012).

2.2 Administrators and Teachers Share Leadership

Teachers do not only transfer the knowledge to students, but they do share things with others especially with their supervisor and administrator which are beyond their role in the classroom. Student achievement was based on the shared leadership between administrator and teachers (Louis et al., 2010). The stronger relationship made with teachers, the higher achievement of students resulted. Whenever teachers had a sense of belonging, they tended to be more committed, enthusiastic, and well-prepared for their teaching for the school goal achievement.

Building supportive relationship between administrator and teachers creates very positive working environment in a sense that pressures on teachers may not be much or none. Moreover, the administrators become resourceful in terms of materials as well as emotional, cognitive and mental supports for teachers. Relationship makes the administrators and teachers become closer and encourage teachers to employ shared instructional strategies among the team. Due to closer relationship, administrators are able to make suggestions, provide constructive feedbacks, sometimes even participate in teaching classes to demonstrate teaching techniques, and praise teachers for their hard work and contribution to the school improvement.

3. Supportive Relationship between Teachers and Students

Students need care and attention from teachers for them to learn well. Building supportive relationship falls on the shoulders of the teachers to enhance their interactive communication for a better understanding of needs of both sides. The relationship built would bring a positive consequence especially for teaching and learning.

3.1 Student involvement, interaction and student achievement

Supportive relationship helps students feel more secured and safe interacting with their teachers. Teachers in this sense are approachable and more helpful. There is a positive relationship between student involvement, interaction and student's achievement. Strong relationship helps teachers to have more confidence in their ability to encourage students to get more involvement in classroom activities. Moreover, teachers use more of the students' participation methods in classroom to achieve the classroom objectives. In addition, they are also good at motivating students to engage them actively in classroom activities. They are able to interact with students and offer a great learning environment of trust and mutual respect, then students' learning enhanced (Achurraa & Villardonb, 2012).

Making meaningful relationship with students made them feel good about school and they attended classes and tended to work harder. The results also indicated that some teachers even spent their lunch time to work with students on their daily basis in order to help them with their homework and assignment. Some teachers even gave extra make-up assignments to students whenever they had failed to complete them, in an avoidance of giving them a zero mark. This supportive relationship allowed students to have a second chance and made them work harder to complete their tasks. The findings showed that making relationship with students enhanced student

academic achievement. First, teachers seemed to be more committed and dedicated to their student learning. Second, teachers treated students fairly in class with ethnicity. There were no racial stereotypes or biases occurred. These teachers interacted with students with care, nurturing them fairly in classes where no one was left behind. These actions really motivated students to attend in a very positive learning atmosphere (Richardson, 2011).

3.2 Student satisfaction and motivation

Student motivation could be of a powerful drive towards learning achieve-ment. One of the factors contributing to the student achievement was motivation (Fidler, 2001). Without motivation, students would feel that there is nothing they have to learn or to engage in class activities. However, students who achieved well in the academic seemed to have more satisfaction in their academic life. These students too helped promote other students' interest and motivation to learn. As student learning satisfaction rises, learning failure seems to fall. Furthermore, learning satisfaction enables students to learn continuously as well as motivates them to help others to participate in the course. Students care about their relationships with their teachers and respond with greater engagement and effort when they believe that their teachers care about them and are supportive to them. One way that teachers convey these qualities is through their discourse with their students in the classroom. Classroom discourse structures concerns the manner in which teachers engage student in learning, promote intrinsic motivation, and balance appropriate challenges with skill levels (Mojavenzi & Tamiz, 2012). Teacher-student relationship produces positive student achievement and behavior. Time spent with students to observe their needs were critical for teachers in order to follow up and help them to achieve their educational goals. Therefore, it is stated that the relationship between teachers and students is the foundation for quality teaching and learning (Liberante, 2012).

4. Supportive Relationship between Teachers and Students' parents

Building supportive relationship between school and students' parents is crucial because parents are part of the school improvement. Students' parents may contribute greatly to the curriculum and instruction development, further development of the school and their children performance at school. Teacher had positive communication with students' parents and this relationship enforced higher level of student participation and achievement. Teachers worked hard to meet with the students' needs and they also spent more time building relationship with students to support their instruction as well as students' learning. Moreover, relationship with parents brought positive impact on children learning because they were the ones who cared about their children. Students' parents intended to have teachers provide care and attention that they also provided to their children at home. Therefore, the relationship between teachers and parents in this sense shows that they shared a common vision and goals that impacted on student's motivation, commitment and achievement. Due to having a common vision, goals (expectations) for the children learning, teachers and parents developed a sense of trust; hence, this supportive and trusting relationship which was based on effective communication helped to achieve the ultimate goals, student achievement (Wilkinson, 2013).

Implication of Supportive Relationships Enhancing School Improvement

Building supportive relationships among teachers, administrators, colleag-ues, students and parents really promote school improvement. The findings indicate that teachers build more supportive relationships with others to promote their teaching and learning. Teacher's relationship with colleagues is important in bringing about changes in student development and growth. Through the relationship, teachers tend to care for one another; they help others to grow and to receive new knowledge, skills, experiences, suggestions from them in return so that they would perform better. Moreover, teachers learn to share and collaborate more with their team. They share their teaching experiences, materials and develop a sense of trust among teachers especially in collaborative teamwork. The relationship between teachers and administrator is also a part of school improvement because whenever administrator's relationship with teachers is higher, teachers seem to have more confidence, trust and perceptions on students' engagement. Furthermore, teachers share their responsibilities with the administrator in providing positive learning environment. Teachers who share a sense of belonging with administrator are more committed, well-organized and energetic (enthusiastic) for the sake of the school as well as student learning. Teacher's supportive relationship built with students is very critical because it arouses students' motivation, satisfaction, their involvement, interaction in learning activities. Whenever students get more engagement in classroom activities, their learning grow accordingly. Teachers motivate students to learn and care for their teaching to meet the students' needs. Teacher-parent relationship is a contributor to effective teaching and learning. Teachers play an important role at school to meet the students' need and parents are the ones who care about their children. They motivate and encourage personally their children to engage more actively in school as well as through the communication with teachers.

School administrators should raise the awareness of supportive relationship especially among the four key teams found in this article in order to promote teaching and learning, and school improvement. As an educator, a teacher should build up supportive relationships with others, his or her colleagues, students, administrators and students' parents for the sake of better teaching and learning. Teaching is not only to transfer knowledge and skills to students but also required teachers to go beyond the teaching tasks, is to connect with others to make teaching more powerful and effective. If supportive relationships among the four key groups shown, there will surely be school improvement.

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