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EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION OF SCHOOL LEADERS

The American University in Cairo

EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION OF  
URBAN AND RURAL SCHOOL LEADERS

A Thesis Submitted to

Graduate School of Education

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for

The degree of Master of Arts

By Mohammed El Sayed A. Wahed

Spring 2012

## EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION OF SCHOOL LEADERS

### **Abstract**

This study explores the impact of effective communication by the school leader on the performance of the rural and urban school in Egypt. It examines the power of effective communication in terms of creating a vision of learning, developing a school culture, promoting instructional programs conducive to the student learning and encouraging staff professional growth. The target sample is made up of principals, teachers, students, and parents from selected urban and rural schools in Egypt. The data collection includes interviews with selected urban and rural principals and focus groups comprised of teachers, students and parents. The semi structured interviews focus on the various aspects of communication used by school leaders to create a vision of learning, to develop the school culture, to promote instructional programs for student's learning, and to encourage professional development of teachers. Responses from all participants address each of the aspects of communication used in the identified schools and provide the findings which suggested specific recommendations concerning these topics.

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## EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION OF SCHOOL LEADERS

### **Chapter One - Introduction**

The researcher's involvement with the school administration and the leadership profession over two decades has encouraged a desire to perform a study of leadership and its use of the communication process. This communication process and skills have been extensively researched as a means of enabling school leaders to lead their school establishment more efficiently. In fact, it is known that successful schools are the natural outcome of successful leadership policies dependent on effective communications. La Plant (1979) expressed the idea that ideal communication produces lasting outcomes affecting all corners of the educational process. According to Pitner and Ogawa (1981) "superintending is communicating" (p. 49). They studied a number of school leaders on communication skills and concluded that an essential element of the school leader's job is the ability to communicate effectively with people. In another study by Mazarella and Grundy (1989) with a sample of school principals based on interviews and surveys, it was revealed that effective school leaders are particularly distinguished as communicators and have the skill and aptitude "...they need to interact well with others; they know how to communicate" (p. 18). For this study, by utilizing the method of interviews, effective communication skills and practices of the selected school leaders of urban and rural schools in Egypt are examined in order to identify and explore the lines of effective communication they utilize to convey their vision of learning, their development of a school culture, the promotion of instructional programs conducive to student's learning and their facilitation of professional development of the school faculty.

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### **Problem Statement**

The effective school models focus on shared visions and goals, effective communication, high expectations of all learners, accountability, learning communities, and a stimulating and secure learning environment. Lack of effective communication between the school leader and the other participants, including teachers, students, and parents, impedes the school's performance. According to Patrick and Frankel (2004), communication encompasses more than speaking. It is also written communication as well as communicating with behavior. The personal communication skills of the school leaders, including verbal and non-verbal ones, open door policies, and regular meetings, can pave the road to effective communication with the other participants. Much has been studied about the diverse channels of communication that school leaders use with teachers to share objectives, visions, and goals at school.

The communication skills of rural and urban school principals of Egypt are the focus of this study. In Egypt, rural and urban populations present great differences such as the degree of education for women. According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) report on the Millennium Development Goals in Egypt, due care needs to be dedicated to programs that enhance female education and awareness, since indicators reveal a strong relationship between mother's education and children's success. The data in this report showed that mortality rates in rural Upper Egypt were 64% higher than rural Lower Egypt since postnatal mortality in rural Upper Egypt is twice the rate in rural Lower Egypt. The data in this report showed that death rates at all ages in various rural regions in Egypt are highly affected by the mother's education. While the UN report states that the ratio of literate females to males in urban areas is 87:93, the ratio in rural Lower Egypt is 52:76. In brief, the rates of illiteracy in rural areas are higher than those in urban areas. As a consequence of the illiteracy level, the

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percentage of early child marriage in urban to rural areas is 9:22 (UNESCO, 2002). In general, according to the World Bank data, in 2011 the percentage of illiteracy was 40.6%, most of which was focused in the rural region (World Bank, 2012).

Education in the rural areas is a major factor which has tremendous impact on all areas of life. Rural schools as well as urban schools and the effective use of the communication process by leaders in those schools are the target of this study. Not only do the locations of the schools differ but also the communication tools and mechanisms employed to operate the schools are different. In urban settings, for example, the use of technology for communication has become the norm, not the exception to the rule. In rural settings, on the other hand, technological means are in the basic stage of implementation. It will take time for communication in rural schools to reach the level of sophistication that communication has already reached in the urban schools.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is two-fold. First, it explores the impact of the principal's utilization of communication in the rural and urban school communities and, second, it examines the various tools of communication used by the rural and urban school leaders to convey their vision of learning, to develop a school culture, to promote instructional programs conducive to student's learning and to facilitate professional development of the school staff members.

### **Research Questions**

To address the issue of effective communication of urban and rural school leaders, the following questions will guide this study.

How can the vision of learning be shaped by the effective communication of a school leader?

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What role does the effective communication of the school leader play in developing school culture?

What tools of effective communication used by leaders promote instructional programs conducive to student's learning?

How can effective communication of the school leader promote the professional growth of the staff members?



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### **Chapter Two -- Literature Review**

This section describes the literature relevant to the research purpose and questions of this study. It is organized into five sections: (1) communication and the role of school principals, (2) communication and vision of learning, (3) communication for the development of school culture, (4) the effect of communication on the promotion of instructional programs conducive to student's learning, and (5) the importance of communication in the professional development of teachers.

#### **Communication and the Role of School Principals**

The literature review is consistent on the role that the communication plays in the daily life of school principals. There are studies that support that effective principals are good communicators. A study conducted by Marzano, Waters and McNulty (2005) found that effective principals establish strong lines of two way communication throughout the school community. It is important for the principal to ask questions, be truthful, and encourage feedback from members of the school community (Bolman & Deal, 2002). Additional studies identified the major roles of effective school principals in decision making and building productive relationships with parents and the wider community (Leithwood & Riehl, 2005). The principal interacts with students, staff, and parents on a regular basis. Research by McEwan (2003) found that successful principals are communicating one hundred percent of the time by listening, speaking, writing, and reading. Often the principal will use written communication to parents, students, and staff. The importance of correct grammar and spelling is crucial (Holman, 1997).

It is known that the role of the school principal demands essential dispositions of skills and cognitive schemes. According to Leithwood and Steinbach (1995), common dispositions among principals include a great passion, zeal, and enthusiasm for the education of children and for a

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child centered school. The enthusiasm and passion are shared with the school community and are buttressed by the ideology of care, values of social justice, and the equitable education of all students without any sense of discrimination, favoritism, or bias.

One of the leadership roles of successful leaders is to show awareness to the needs and aspirations of their colleagues, staff members, the parents, and the students served by their schools. They are depicted as skilled communicators with highly cognitive flexibility to listen carefully to other ideas, which they apply to their problem solving. Bolman and Deal (2002) warn about conflicting values that may emerge in the leadership process as being difficult to manage. On the other hand, the work by Leithwood and Steinbach (1995) and Wong (2002) agree that the emotional sensitivity of leaders requires attention.

A prominent strength of the effective principals is the sense of ethics and includes treating people with respect, exhibiting honesty as a policy, and demonstrating and modeling ethical behavior on a daily basis (Whitaker, 2003). The effective principal does the right thing, keeping in mind that the student's welfare is the bottom line (McEwan, 2003). As confirmed by Begley and Johansson (2003), the values and the morals of school principals strengthen their role as school leaders.

Work-related communications is another pivotal area in the role of the school principal. Bridges (1977) stated that around seventy percent of the manager's time involves face- to- face communication with others. For example, principals deal with continuous states of emotions. Irritated parents, excited students, and rebellious staff are familiar scenes encountered by the principal. School principals must know how to firmly communicate their academic and administrative decisions to parents who may not be co-operating or who lack formal education.

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The face to face communication with others constitutes a logical component in the role that the principal must perform on a daily basis.

Cheng and Townsend (2000) see teaching in the 21st century as more intricate than it has ever been because of the numerous challenges shaped by modern modes of technology, economic globalization, and social-political life. In an era of such rapid changes, principals are expected to play many roles and put into practice numerous tasks and responsibilities related to teaching, curriculum changes, educational improvement, students' learning experiences, professional growth, and interactions with parents and with the community. Others expectations that are set on the school principals' shoulders are to guide and implement programs that nurture and develop the high performance of their teachers and students. Jantzi and Leithwood recognized six aspects critical in the practice of leadership :(1) Identifying and articulating a clear vision, (2) Encouraging the recognition of group goals, (3) Providing individualized enhancement, (4) Providing academic and intellectual motivation, (5) Providing a proper model, and (6) Setting high performance expectations all of which involve effective communication. (1996, pp. 514-515). Walker et al. (2000,) developed the basic framework and stated the six pivotal areas of leadership that are outlined below:

(1) Planning for the future strategic direction and policy environment in addition to ensuring school community contributions to the practice by including related aspects of policy from the social, educational and political setting in the school.

(2) Matching a certain unity among applicable curriculum, teaching processes, school community, and extra-curricular activities.

(3) Enhancing and caring for the sharing of knowledge and lifelong professional growth for teachers.

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(4) Establishing a co-operative team administration philosophy through effective communication and paying attention to utilizing human, physical, and financial resources competently to achieve the objectives of school development, student accomplishment, staff development, and resources management.

(5) Setting up quality assurance and responsibility systems in their school communities that provide feedback to students, teachers, and others through channels of effective communication with a view to securing school improvement.

(6) Extending communication channels between the school and the surrounding and global communities to enable their school communities to contribute to the wider society and its development (pp. 13-17).

Coping with this conception, Beane and Apple (1999), Furman and Starrat (2002) and Woods (2005) presented the issues facing leaders who desire to be democratic principals and the challenges of communicating that desire to their school community. Research has identified the main concerns and priorities of democratic school leaders as: (1) maintenance of an open stream of thoughts that enables people to be as fully knowledgeable as possible, (2) utilization of critical reflection and feedback in addition to investigation to assess thoughts, concepts, crises, dilemmas, and policies, (3) support of the wellbeing of others and the 'common good' and (4) care for the dignity and privileges of the whole citizen and of minorities (Moos, 2008, pp.231).

School leadership tasks can be summarized in this way. Leadership is setting and discussing directions even though schools in some systems are governed in some detail when it comes to outcomes measured by standards, inspections, and tests. They must identify the ways to accomplish these outcomes themselves. Effective communication enables school leaders to make demands and signals from the outer world clear and to select the way by which they want to

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respond to them. It is a challenge to school leadership to interpret indicators and make them into narratives about differences which form the grounds for the subsequent decisions in the community (Weick, 1995 & 2001).

Principals, within a critical assessment of perceptions and perquisites of their work, have selected four concepts that form challenges to the regularity of activity that communication is believed to bring about. They are: talk, distributed leadership, professionalization and knowledge management. Gronn (1983 & 1985) showed through two noteworthy studies that the work of administrators is endorsed through talk. Talk engenders understanding and yet mediates between structure and agency, affecting both. Talk occurs during conversations, interactions, and meetings with others and these shape one of the distributed facts of work. Administration is regarded as talk. This comes from the work of Gronn (1983) but reflects other research that extended back to that of Mitzberg and comprises many others from Sergiovanni to Leithwood, who identified the work of the administrator as disjointed, chaotic, and incongruent (Gronn, 2003).

The image is enhanced by the principals who spend much of their day moving from an issue to another and in interactions with a great variety of people in the process.

### **Communication and Vision of Learning**

Effective principals are those who endorse a notable vision. In his study McEwan (2003) concluded that less effective principals offer excuses, while highly efficient principals envision a successful school that has fulfilled its mission. They are able to stress the prospect of a high achieving school and to encourage their school community to buy into that vision. Fullan (1997) found out that effective principals set up and communicate clear objectives and encourage the school continually toward attaining these objectives. Most school leaders understand that while

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they help establish the school's vision, they must also promote an environment that allows teachers to make decisions conducive to ownership in the vision (Beck & Murphy, 1996). That is to say, stakeholders supply the input that the school leader requires to effectively create and assemble a vision.

Principals are required to set direction. Evidence reviewed by Leithwood and Riehl (2005) suggested that successful leadership creates a compelling sense of purpose in the institutions by developing and communicating a shared vision of the future, helping build agreement about related short-term goals, and representing high expectations for colleagues' work. They agree that direction setting is closely linked with prerequisites for responsibility and shared visions emphasizing learning over the lifetime. In guiding the educational process, many related issues emerge to explain the direction of the organization. For example, democratic principles and ideals are emphasized throughout debates about school directions. The school leaders make certain that those principles guide the implementation of institutional objectives. Simply having vision and mission announcements on the wall is not sufficient for successful leadership. Fulfilling planned goals in an accountability context therefore require guidance and development which sets up the school's ability to release policy responsibilities and develop the involvement of senior staff members and other teachers in the decision-making process; this is done by distributing leadership among all members of the team (Law et al., 2010).

Leithwood (2005) classifies school leadership as a mission distributed in the entire school community for it is based on a tenet of leadership characterized as opportunistic, resilient, responsive, and context specific not prescribed by roles, which are inflexible, hierarchical and status driven. This concept of leadership is not hierarchical, but federal and engages clarity of direction, structures, and enhancement. Concerning school leadership as a distributed task,

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school leadership is an action that is extended through school community. “Schools that are desirous of continuous growth and advancement are required to harness their human and social assets that are their main potentials, generating and sharing the leadership opportunities that give the aptitude to attain this” (Leithwood, 2005, p. 11). Widely distributed school leadership is much more influential with schools and students and is reflected in the school vision. In addition, personal traits are not distinctive factors of the variation in leadership effectiveness. Setting direction for the school is one of the main functions of school leaders. It is also understood in this way in the research of Leithwood and Riehl (2005), where it is found that successful principals set and communicate the direction for their schools. “Successful leadership creates a compelling sense of purpose in the organizations by developing a shared vision of the future, helping build consensus about relevant short-term goals and demonstrating high expectations for colleagues’ work” (Leithwood, 2006, p. 620).

Principals, in setting and negotiating direction for schools, have a great impact on the teachers, the other followers, and students in one way or another. The types of influence and power differ from one situation to another and from one context to another. Christensen and Jensen (1986) recognized that schools employ a model of power that includes four forms: direct power, indirect power, consciousness-controlling power, and institutionalized power. Direct power means persuading other people to implement tasks they would not have done under other conditions. This kind of power is usually linked with sanctions of some sort (Dahl, 1961). Indirect power is exercised when the principal sets the agenda for the professional discussion in schools (Barach & Barat, 1962). Consciousness controlling power is a broad range of influences that include storytelling, narratives, sense-making and other ways one can use to try and get other people to change their opinions or refine their understandings (Lukes, 1974; Weick, 1995

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& 2001). 'Institutionalized power' captures the influences that are laid down in the structures, measures, and social technologies that are working (Barach & Barat, 1962).

In sum, the vision of learning can be disseminated across the school environment using the proper communication skills. Hoyle, English, and Steffy (1998) addressed skills for successful school leaders in their book *Skills for Successful 21<sup>st</sup> Century School Leaders: Standards for Peak Performance*. The authors listed skills needed for success as visionary leadership, policy and governance, communication and community relations, organizational management, curriculum planning and development, instructional management, staff evaluation, use of research and data, and the ethics of leadership. At the same time these leaders must be able to consider and to articulate what is best for the school in order to make the right decisions (Whitaker, 2003).

### **Communication for the Development of School Culture**

Weldy (1979) identified the influential school principal to be the leading individual in any school. Through his/her leadership the tone of the school is established, a healthy and safe environment of learning is set up, and the standards of professionalism and the spirit of teachers are raised. The principal is the key factor of any successful, innovative, child centered, and reputable school environment. Effective principals seek out and create opportunities that actively engage the community as reflected in the school culture (Beck & Murphy, 1996).

School leaders impact the school culture. The leadership provided by a principal directly affects the climate and culture of a school, which in turn affects student achievement (Sergiovanni, 2001). Effective principals pay attention to the culture of the school and focus on creating a collaborative work environment (Fullan, 1997). Studies by Marzano et al. (2005) found that effective principals fostered shared beliefs and a collegial sense of community within



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the school that ultimately impacts student achievement. In order to impact the school culture, school principals must be able to envision a successful school, act with integrity, and communicate this vision through relationships with the school community (McEwan, 2003). Principals, who are effective, work to create a positive environment and believe it is their responsibility to do so (Whitaker, 2003). They understand that local citizens want a school that reflects their values and works to shape a positive culture (Sergiovanni, 2001).

Leithwood and Riehl (2005) built collaborative school culture by creating structures to encourage participation. Schools became effective professional educational institutions. They recognized the school leader's role in creating a school culture with a sense of collaboration by distributing leadership or developing broad based governance structures, and de-privatizing teaching practices.

There are communication factors that may improve the school culture and climate. La Plant (1979) indicates that the communication process would favor and inspire the principal to lead by example. The school community would be empowered by decisions that are made in a timely manner. To ensure that community and parents are informed about school strategies and various programs, the school principal communicates encouragement to participate in school life activities. In this direction, the leader of the school according to La Plant would promote listening to the ideas and suggestions of parents in order to prevent the emergence of dissenting groups of parents and community members.

La Plant (1979) also referred to the communication lines between the school principal and governing bodies such as the district office. It is a fact that good and healthy relations between the principal and the higher administrative bodies would reinforce and fortify the school culture and climate.

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According to La Plant (1979) the flow of communication in the school should reinforce the relationships between staff members, students, and parents. For example, effective communication would help members of different groups feel that their work is meaningful and important. With clear lines of communication, the principal becomes more concerned with giving credit and recognition for the diligent efforts of all. He also stated that through an environment of openness, mutual confidence, and co-operation, principals become peer reviewers of the professional development and school amelioration programs. In regard to students' effective communication in the school, the school leader would support students' involvement and participation in the school decision making and development programs.

Nurturing a social environment through social events and gatherings can help the principal to know his staff members more closely and can deepen their sense of mutual cordiality and belonging to the school. In summary, La Plant (1979) strongly believed that effective communication skills of the school principal build up a school culture that is sensitive to and supportive of those of different social, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds.

Gimbert and Fultz (2009) emphasized the importance of school leaders to nurture positive relationships, set clear expectations, hold sensible views of beginning teachers' performance, have in place significant mentoring program, and provide sincere enhancement to beginning teachers to increase and maintain skills for successful classroom instruction all of which invited the new teachers to become part of the school culture. Schools principals at this point play a prime role in ensuring beginning teachers' development by offering the necessary training and support as well as observing their sense of adaptation with the school culture during their early years.

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Moreover, leadership is organizing and developing communities with and beyond the school culture. Schools are institutions held together by structures, but if they are to be influential and successful they need to be run as communities held together by a shared sense of identity and by common norms and communication structures. Classrooms and schools are social fields where education and learning occur. Loyalty and devotion to the organization are not by any means an automatic starting position for any institution; building and enhancing loyalty and commitment is therefore a leadership task and mission. If staff and students show complete loyalty to their organization, leaders have to exert diligent efforts to transform the organization, which is characterized only by a formal structure, into a community with welcoming culture, which is characterized by all members being sufficiently committed to the ethos of the community (Bourdieu, 1990; Wenger, 1999).

### **Communication on the Promotion of Instructional Programs Conducive to Student's Learning**

The instructional programs in terms of design, implementation, and assessment are the tools of school success. According to Marzano et al. (2005), effective principals continuously monitor the impact of school programs on student learning, and they use this information to inform future practice. Student learning is central to the direction planning activities of all successful leaders in all countries since children are the central focus of the educational process. The most obvious tasks of a principal are to direct, plan, set goals, reinforce, supervise, and assess. Through communication, an effective principal can direct and plan improvement in curriculum and teaching, get across the goals of the district, evaluate the program outcomes, deal with staff

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concerns, plan for their professional development, and supervise and direct custodial services (Hoyle et al., 1998).

Effective principals understand what good teaching is and they recognize it as a critical factor in successful instructional programming. Findings of Marzano et al. (2005) reinforce the belief that effective principals are knowledgeable about the current curriculum, instruction, and assessment practices, and are involved in the design and implementation of the instructional program. According to McEwan (2003) effective school leaders are knowledgeable about teaching and learning and serve as instructional leaders within their buildings. They believe it is critical to be up-to-date on the best practices in instruction and assessment and to seek out opportunities to learn more about good teaching (Beck & Murphy, 1996). Not only do effective principals understand what good teaching is, they also recognize that their primary goal is to improve the effectiveness of their teachers by sharing this understanding (Whitaker, 2003). The instructional leaders are able to tell the difference between activity and achievement, and can help teachers improve their practice by providing professional development to benefit student learning (McEwan, 2003).

Leithwood (2006) identifies school leadership as a process that comes in priority directly after classroom teaching as a pivotal impact on pupils' learning. School leaders enhance the processes of teaching and learning implicitly and directly through their influential impact on staff motivation, dedication, and working conditions through various interactions and communications. Enhancing instructional leadership is a prime concern. Pragmatic proof also reinforces that instructional leadership at primary and secondary levels is likely to be different (Johnson & Holdaway, 1990). However, leadership functions connected to learning, teaching

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and curriculum define a school principal's instructional leadership. This is supported by literature spanning the last 25 years. For instance, Purkey and Smith (1985) suggested that influential, or high achieving, schools are managed around the main goal of teaching. The significance of instructional leadership carries on in concert with the supremacy of transformational leadership. Research has concluded that transformational leadership when not escorted by instructional leadership may not be influential on school performance and accomplishment, as measured by the quality of its pedagogy and the achievement of its students. The basic notions encompassed setting and communicating directions, developing people, redesigning the organization and managing the instructional program (Hallinger, 2003; Marks & Printy, 2003).

La Plant (1979) says that communication helps promote teaching and learning and helps reinforce continuous lifetime learning by deepening respect for students and for their learning. On the other hand, Leithwood and Riehl (2005) concluded that successful schools are the outcome of great principals who take full responsibility for leading teaching, and learning. Walker et al (2000) noted that principals direct programs to create unity and consistency across the curriculum and achieve a common ground between the curriculum, teaching and learning. Together with their school communities, they ensure that all students experience a broad, objective, sensible, and applicable curriculum through official, casual, and extracurricular activities.

McEwan (2003) disclosed that effective principals know how to collect meaningful data, but more importantly, are able to critically discuss, analyze, and use it in a meaningful way to improve instruction. The most recent programs of school leadership have incorporated the use of

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data for school improvement planning. In recent years, an educational international movement has established specific criteria which include effective communication to measure school improvement based on either quantitative or qualitative data concerning instructional programming as well as other identified factors. Principals have become critical consumers of information for the decision making process by understanding the limitations of individual pieces of data. School principals are results-oriented and realize that translating high expectations for academic achievement into effective instructional programming for their students will provide greater opportunities in the future. To conclude the entire school community in this process, they must clearly articulate the goals and the processes which will make them effective.

### **Communication and the Professional Development of Teachers**

Effective principals are talented at building relationships. As McEwan (2003) states, “Relationships drive school improvement” (p. 54). School leaders understand that to have a successful school, they need to focus on the people within the school, not the programs (Whitaker, 2003). By maintaining the focus on people the successful principal indirectly promotes the development, implementation, and growth of high quality instructional programs. The ability to establish personal relationships with all members of a school community is central to the work of a school principal. These relations convey a sense of caring and appreciation. This constant attention to relationships allows school principals to build up emotional bank accounts. They know how to bring out the best in those around them to foster relationships that empower people and help them thrive (McEwan, 2003). Caring is a way of showing respect for teachers and students involved in this process. Principals may express caring through challenging people to grow personally and professionally. Marzano et al., (2005), McEwan (2003) and Whitaker

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(2003) found that effective principals demonstrate and engage in a variety of relationship-building behaviors with teachers, students, and parents on a daily basis in an effort to keep their relationships positive and growing.

Additional factors in the relationship between principals and the school community involve respect for staff members' relentless efforts, and high collegiality among staff aspiring for innovation, creativity and co-operation, enhancement of integrity, responsibility, and involvement with extracurricular community (La Plant, 1979). Principals work with or through people to reach goals which frequently are directly related to instruction. They must create relationships based on trust with their staff members. For example, relationships can be reinforced through scheduling time for individual meetings, providing personal and professional growth opportunities, encouraging dialogues, and modeling trust. Through communication, professional development of staff members may be designed and developed. For instance, involving staff in assessing current policies and practices of school and proposing changes to move the school forward could empower school members. Staff members feel their individuality and importance as factors of development since the principal confides in them, promotes their professional growth, and has them as a source of instructional and emotional support. The school staff members and the principal, then, can be depicted as a ship crew and the captain who share responsibility for their survival and success.

A critical group which requires special professional consideration is the new teachers who are added to the school each year; they affect the dissemination of the instructional program. The school principals, school administrators, mentors as well as senior teachers provide a multifaceted prospective on the performance of beginning teachers (Brock & Grady, 2007).

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Their viewpoints on the novice teacher's efficiencies are essential to buttress the quality of teaching and learning for both students and teachers. Principals and teachers are also loaded with numerous expectations that society places on them. Ballantyne et al. (1998) argue in their research on principals' perception of competent beginning teachers that there are many ways that they perceive a beginning teacher's efficacy and that it is principals' own perception that precedes their judgment of efficacy. Research by Cheng and Cheung (2004) has shown that the school's perceptions may vary from the perceptions of others, and these may have positive or negative impacts on beginning teachers' teaching and learning.

School leaders are responsible for facilitating the transformation of beginning teachers from a pre-service teacher preparation program into the school educational setting (Gimbert & Fultz; 2009). Throughout this process, school leaders are required to figure out beginning teachers' points of strengths and areas for improvement and to provide great support and training to address identified needs (Melton, 2007; Peltier-Glaze, 2005; Protheroe, 2006). School leaders are realistic about beginning teachers' attentiveness and provide enhancement and training through positive communication that encourages these teachers to develop and maintain skills for effective classroom instruction (Cheng & Chung, 2004). Novice teachers are required to fully comprehend their tasks and duties, as well as their team position in the school context in order to be influential. They are required to be aware of their tasks in terms of classroom management and the execution of curriculum and instructional plans (Brock & Grady, 2007).

Care and attention to the induction of the beginning teacher into the profession is essential, so it is widely recognized that support is essential for beginning teacher success (Kaufman, Johnson, Kardos, Liu, & Peske, 2002). In the beginning years, the school leaders



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play an important role of interaction with the beginning teachers that would have a positive impact on the quality of the beginning teachers' know-how, self-assurance, efficacy, and efficiency. This creates a two-step issue for school leaders: they are required to enhance beginning teachers as they promote student success and accomplishment and to enhance the potential of those teachers. Professional development must address both issues. Kaufman et al. (2002) emphasized that beginning teachers need careful orientation and guidance concerning curriculum, instruction, and essential appraisal measures as well as to bridge theory and practice in the construction of high-level learning environments. Gimbert and Fultz (2009) emphasized the importance of school leaders to nurture positive relationships, convey clear expectations, hold sensible views of beginning teachers' performance, have in place significant mentoring program, and provide sincere enhancement to beginning teachers to maintain and increase skills for successful classroom instruction.

School leaders should recognize the importance of encouragement and empowerment as positive tools to enhance beginning teachers (Melton, 2007). Cheng and Cheung (2004) found that beginning teachers' sense of awareness and efficacy is better when their self perception and that of their school principals are united. This must be communicated clearly. Research has also stated that these are the prime concerns for many beginning teachers. A consistent and unified amalgamation between theory and practice is prerequisite for beginning teachers to engender skill knowledge (Bromfield, 2006; Stansbury, 2001). The process of professional developmental and growth from a novice teacher into a talented one can last for many years, but the most crucial and challenging ones are the early phases of growth (Stansbury, 2001).

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While the new teacher's need for quality professional development is great, the effective principal recognizes the importance of continuing support and development for established teacher as well. Leithwood and Riehl (2005) asserted that by providing support for individual colleague's ideas and initiatives, promoting intellectual stimulation, reflecting on existing practices, questioning granted assumptions, considering new practices, and modeling important values and practices by promoting and sharing these practices and their outcomes, principals contribute to the growth of all school staff. The explicit and implicit actions of the school principal have direct impact on the construction of teachers' professional identities and growth. Successful principals are reported to enhance staff in time of crisis, to praise good work, and to engage staff in critical discussion. Ideal principals are reported to mentor their colleagues, in addition to modeling the values and instructional practices that are considered productive for their schools.

Findings from a study conducted by Jackson (2008) stated that the school principal plays five key roles in promoting the retention of teachers: (a) caring listener, (b) supportive advocate, (c) respectful colleague, (d) open-minded team player, and (e) enthusiastic facilitator (p. 112). These roles are reinforced in well designed programs of professional development for all staff. A basic theme that turns up from the literature focuses on school leaders' expectations and standpoints and their communication to faculty and staff (Bodycott, Walker, & Kin, 2001; Melton, 2007).

Walker et al. (2000) described the role for principals in the development of both leaders and teachers. They felt that principals must endorse and facilitate lifelong professional growth for teachers and for themselves. They must pay due care to sharing advanced professional knowledge. The importance of professional development supporting principal leadership

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practices in the areas of leader and teacher professional growth had a positive influence on the school's configuration, unity, and organization. Leadership practices include developing teachers as leaders, aligning professional development programs with school development needs, and utilizing coaching and mentoring to enhance the quality of teaching. Integration among leadership practices includes strategic trend analysis and professional development.

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### **Chapter 3--Methodology**

The purpose of this study is two-fold. First, it explores the impact of the principal's utilization of communication in the rural and urban school communities and second, it examines the various tools of communication used by the rural and urban school leaders to convey their vision of learning, to develop a school culture, to promote instructional programs conducive to student's learning and to facilitate professional development of teachers.

In this research study the qualitative constructs of vision of learning, school culture, instructional programs delivery and staff professional development are defined as follows: vision of learning is the capacity of the school leader to effectively communicate and share a picture of practices that promote a school culture of teaching and learning, staff collegiality and growth, and community empowerment leading toward high academic achievement. The school culture of urban and rural schools is operationally defined as a healthy academic environment that supports teaching and learning through standards of teacher professionalism, shared beliefs, a safe learning environment, and a collegial sense of community. In this study, promoting instructional programs through communication is perceived as the capacity the school principal has to effectively communicate the design, development, assessment, implementation and evaluation of formal and informal curriculum programs to support the teaching and learning environment of the school and student achievement. In regard to professional development of staff members, this study defines it as the capacity of the school principal to effectively communicate the design and implementation of plans to professionally assist and develop the school staff on diverse areas of instruction, personal growth, and school and community relations skills.

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### **Description of the Site**

Two schools were selected for this study. One is located in a rural area. This rural school is geographically located in a small village in Menofia governorate in the north of Egypt and has approximately 250 students and 35 teachers. It is a co-educational school. The other selected school is an urban school located in Cairo with an enrollment of approximately 600 students and 80 teachers. It is also a co-educational school.

### **Participant Description**

The target sample of the study is composed of school principals, teachers, students, and parents. The site selection automatically determined the sample selection. It was convenient and purposeful in nature. Each selected site constitutes a cluster that provided the participants of the study. The school principal of the rural school is a 50 year old female who was formerly a psychology teacher. For the urban school, a 50 year old female former math teacher is currently the school principal. Both principals have significant years of experience in education. Rural and urban school leader interviews were conducted to provide information to enable the researcher to understand the communication processes utilized by each of them in their respective school environments.

### **Instrumentation**

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The qualitative instrument to collect the narrative information from school leaders was a semi structured interview. The school leaders were interviewed individually. The findings of the literature review provided the platform to design the items for the interview. These questions addressed the vision of learning, school culture, instructional program for learning, and professional development of teachers. For the validity of the interview questions, three school leaders including a school principal were asked to review and comment on the proposed topics derived from the literature review.

The focus group session with teachers, students, and parents were based on the questions used in the principal's interview. Although the questions were worded differently, the content was based on the same four aspects included in the research questions: vision of learning, school culture, instructional programs for learning, and professional development of teachers.

### **Data Collection Procedures**

Each school was contacted by the researcher prior to beginning the process of interviewing. Based on the school administrator's decision, the researcher visited the school to inform the principal and staff members about the research purpose and questions. Once the permission was granted, the researcher, with the collaboration of the principal, prepared a timeline for the interview of the principal and the meetings with teachers, students, and parents. For the interview of the principal, the interview consisted of five questions on their ways of communicating the vision of learning, the development of school culture, the promotion of instructional programs for learning, and the professional growth of teachers. The interview time depended on the length of the responses given by the school principal. For the focus groups of

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teachers, students, and parents, the researcher and the principal determined the exact date, time and number of participants for each group. The questions used with these groups to guide the discussion addressed the same areas as those used with the principals.

In terms of the timeline for data collection, the study was conducted over three months. The two schools were visited during that period of time. At each school approximately three weeks were used for interviewing the principal and for conducting the meetings with the focus groups formed by teachers, students, and parents.

### **Data Analysis**

The data were collected to determine responses from the principals and each of the focus groups for each of the four areas of the study: vision of learning, school culture, instructional programs for learning, and professional development of teachers. Attention was directed to a broader discussion of the perceptions of all participants of the role of the principal within the identified school community. These responses were collected and reported as findings.

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### **Chapter 4 -- Findings**

#### **The Rural School**

##### **Description of the School**

Located in an area adjacent to the villagers' houses and fields, the five floor school holds, according to its official records, 260 students distributed across the three high school stages. The number of male students slightly exceeds that of the females. The school classes are coeducational, so it is worth mentioning that boys and girls are not separated in any of the nine high school classes. The capacity of each class varies between 20 and 30 students according to the students' educational majors and divisions. The school classes are airy and well ventilated since the school is located by the fields. However, it has a library, computer laboratory, science laboratory and multimedia room none of which are well furnished or fully equipped. The school has a spacious football playground and an adjacent garden where a small mosque has been set up for religious rituals and prayers.

##### **Description of the Principal**

The fifty year old female principal has served as a school principal for two years. Her university study in psychology allows her to apply psychological theories with both her job



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perquisites and her students. It also makes her more aware of her students' needs especially during the critical stages of adolescence. After being selected as a principal, she enrolled in a diploma program in leadership to prepare herself to carry out her job more efficiently. She is highly involved in the community surrounding her school. Tragedy struck her life when she lost her only son at the age of 16 few years ago. As a result, she decided to focus attention and efforts on all her students.

Her personal resilient traits fully empower her to gain the trust of the people who approach her and her passion for education seems to be contagious; this enhances her school and fosters her students' and staff members' potential.

The principal affirms the concept that school leaders should be well prepared academically, professionally, culturally, and technologically since they are in place to upgrade education. She thinks that any society is thought to be fortunate as long as education reflects its social objectives. Her ideology of successful educational leadership reflects the effective communication between her and the surrounding community where her school is located.

### **Communication and the Role of the Principal**

As a principal she believes in mutual trust and understanding, she keeps thinking out of the box to bring about untraditional solutions, and she makes students the prime focus of her concerns. She believes in lifelong learning for herself and her followers. Her main commitment is to communicate effectively with the all participants especially parents since students are regarded as the product of the surrounding community. Such communication is mainly organized by the principal and the board of trustees that includes various sectors of the surrounding community. So as long as the board of trustees is effective, the principal's success is guaranteed.

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The school principal believes that she should be in good contact with the society outside her school and be aware of the events that take place there in order to share the joys and disappointments of the community. Even with the school campus, a principal should not be isolated or distant; she has to be involved with her staff members' and students' social events.

Teachers believe that as a leader the principal never gives up, but she is keen on finding a solution to all problems she encounters at school and she uses many strategies to do this. Due to lack of the governmental financial support, she keeps on searching for donations from affluent society members to buy some essential educational gadgets and didactic apparatuses. Teachers acknowledge that she maintains perfect relations with other schools that enable her to borrow some of their computers and other appliances to help with the severe shortage of tools in her school. Since the school is rather new, the principal has started a campaign to allocate money to supply the school with the gates as a means of protection against theft; she has the support of the civilian community headed by the village mayor because of her relentless endeavors. She also keeps in contact with companies and businessmen in the province where the school is located to seek their help in supplying her school with the numerous needs and to overcome the obstacles that impede an effective educational process.

Parents and students say that their school principal is always reachable and keeps talking to them about the school in general and teachers in particular. She highlights the importance of regular and punctual attendance at school, so she decided to make the students attend for four days a week and allow two days to give them a chance to study and revise their lessons. In fact she is keen to find solutions to all problems, especially the very serious problem of the high rate of absence. She founded a certain box for complaints and suggestions. She exhibits the principle of role modeling and honesty. She keeps her promises according to her ability to do so. In fact

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she is confined by the government perquisites and regulations; however, she is sometimes unable to meet her promises when matters are out of her hands. For example, she promised to update and equip the football playground but she got insufficient financial allowances. Both parents and students have a common feeling that their principal is “a clever jockey without a horse.” The scope of her ambitions is limitless but she does not have a budget to implement her programs. They acknowledge her persistence and they appreciate her willingness to try new and different approaches to achieve her goals.

The students lament the fact that they do not have computer lab, well equipped science labs, a well furnished library, and a room for multimedia; however, they accept this as she keeps trying to obtain sufficient financial donations. She sometimes pays from her own pocket to meet the needs of the school. Examples include when she bought a gate to secure the school building and when she bought trees for the school garden. They feel that she is always working to make their school a better place for them to learn. Her ideology of successful educational leadership reflects the effective communication between her and the surrounding community where her school is located.

The school students have a strong conviction that she is devoted to giving them a high quality education although most of them do not pay the school fees and many of the parents are not cooperative enough; however, she is relentless and perseverant and never gives up asking parents for positive enhancement of the school for the sake of the students.

### **Communication and Vision of Learning**

The principal’s effective communication with the participants of the educational process, teachers, students, and parents, creates a unique educational vision based on democracy in decision making instead of dictatorship and despotic views. Her effective communication asserts

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her vision of learning as a collective work not an individual endeavor which is based on equality not prejudice and positive participation and inclusion not seclusion or exclusion to create a cordial school environment and to avoid problems that could detract from the ultimate vision of the school. Her awareness of the democratic structure of the surrounding community fosters her mission and validates her vision of an effective education that benefits the surrounding society.

The main tools that the principal uses in communication are humanitarian relations and bonds and parents' participation in most events, crises, festivals, decisions, dilemmas, needs, successes, development plans, and infrastructures. The principal possesses the vision of collective leadership that involves all parts of the educational process, even students to create feelings of unanimity and harmony and to dispel those of discord and antagonism.

The principal's vision of collective leadership and decision making has helped her get a radical solution to the high rate of absence that most of secondary schools generally face; she has held a meeting with the students and discussed the matter openly with them in a session built in mutual respect and trust. She asked them about the number of sessions that they are in need of weekly, the teachers whom they rely on to excel, the nature of the best schedule they aspired to, and other educational subjects. Using this information, she developed a new schedule for the school. On this basis, she put an end to the high rate of absence in her school. Her school is the one in the educational zone that has the lowest absence rate and offers high quality education to the students.

The principal's traits and qualifications as a leader are apparently reflected in her vision which is based on mutual trust. The school principal, the teachers declared, was not appointed by the educational directorate, but she was elected by the school staff members. It was assumed that the elected principal would diminish or even discard any role of all ex-rivals for the school

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leadership position, yet the principal trusted them more and delegated some of her tasks to them not as a sign of fear but as a broader vision that school leadership should be based on trust and collaboration. Her vision of trust made her aware of the psychological spheres of her staff. She depends on good intentions and mutual trust between her and her teaching staff. She pays due care to the feedback reflections of her staff members and students on whatever decision she makes.

The principal's vision of a collective leadership is based on trust and conviction that her success as a principal depends on her followers' support and enhancement. She believes that if she is doomed to fail, it will be because of her personal defects and from failure to gain the trust of those around her in the school community. As a result, the staff members participate and exert great effort, for they love her personally not because of fear or oppression. To gain her followers' trust, the principal asserts the value of role modeling. She is the first one to arrive and the last one to leave school every day. To maintain the value of punctuality, she imposed a financial sanction upon herself for arriving ten minutes late one morning. She never states a principle and does otherwise. During the elections she asserted that she never aspired to the position as a principal but she regards herself as a servant to the whole school, so when she won the elections she did not oust the losers but got them near her as deputy principals to help their school by using their experiences. She asserted the cordial side of the principal and really made others feel their importance by giving them significant roles at school. The successful school principal is honest, and once she promises, she has to meet her promise or she could lose her credibility.

The rural principal cares for receiving feedback and evaluation through regular meetings and casual debates and discussions so as to exchange views regarding the educational process at

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school. She needs to trust the caliber of her staff members' perspectives, for they are extremely beneficial.

The staff members and the whole teachers have a unanimous opinion on the personal traits of their principal; she enjoys high degrees of self composure, emotional intelligence, and resilience that really enable her to be the right captain of the ship crew. On their side, the school teachers see themselves as a strong force to enhance the principal's success. They believe that their principal never gives up and believes that passion for work is contagious. Her followers were startled when she carried out the building maintenance and the school garden despite severe financial situation. The teachers declare that their school principal enjoys full agreement and harmony with the board of trustees and parents who share clear and specific vision of the school based on providing a proper education and reflecting the supreme values of their community.

The teachers believe that their principal relies on the principle of role modeling. She participated in the works of school maintenance and building platform in front of the school playground. She is aware of the psychological spheres of her staff. She depends on good intentions and mutual trust between her and her teaching staff. She is not prejudiced or partial. She positively responds to each teacher's circumstances on a basis of mutual reverence and respect. She never minds holding urgent meetings to discuss some of the educational matters at the request of one of the teaching staff; this is in addition to the school's regular meetings. She encourages teachers to express their assessment and feedback regarding her decisions. Finally the teachers believe that she carries out the comprehensive vision of the ministry of education through creative thought hand in hand with her distinctive personality. Both the students and parents are fully convinced that the school principal has a marvelous educational vision to make her school the best among all schools in the province. They do feel her trust and do their utmost

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not to let her down. Through her role modeling principle, she deepens the feeling of belonging to the school. It was crystal clear when she facilitated their attendance on certain days and gave them the chance to participate in setting a proper lecture schedule and to choose excellent teachers for the lectures. However, she expelled some of the students who did not keep to the new attendance regulation.

She displays high degrees of emotional intelligence, for she is rarely irritable and keeps herself composed in times of crises. She is near all of them and they feel that the students' wellbeing is her prime concern. She might pay any of them a visit at home in case of illness or some event that might affect their attendance at school. She enjoys the ethics of leadership, for she is tidy, co-operative, thoughtful, idealistic, and supportive.

### **Communication and the Development of the School Culture**

Mutual respect is pivotal to any successful school principal. The school principal is tactful enough not to censure or blame a teacher or even a student in front of his peers, but behind closed doors. She never derides or disparages her followers' efforts however negligible or trivial they are. Such treatment bolsters and fosters students' sense of responsibility and value and the staff members' belonging and dedication to school; in addition, it reinforces a school culture build on cordiality and highly valued ethics. The principal seems to be that sort of a perfectionist leader who insists on mentoring, supervising the performance of others, and working hand in hand and shoulder to shoulder with them. She works relentlessly and never believes in lucky breaks.

The school principal seems to be fair and impartial; she does not discriminate, for all her staff members are the same and are weighed by the same balance. She believes that a principal should not be prejudiced for or against anybody. In her perspectives, a successful principal needs to

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celebrate, console, reward, appraise, censure and punish all the same way and should give everybody his or her value no matter how near the person is to the principal's heart.

As a leader, the school principal insists on making a family like school through creating a common goal and working together to reach it. The leader and her followers often eat together during the breaks and lesson intervals and they organize football competitions between teachers and students, and sometimes parents, to create a cordial atmosphere that enriches the feeling of community and family. To create a more co-operative atmosphere, the principal distributes leadership among teachers so that everyone has a role to play under her supervision. She constantly focuses on the image of her school to be a symbol of intimacy and devotion rather than animosity and antagonism. Her thoughtful decision to approach her rivals during the school elections and offer them essential tasks is a sound proof of her discerning leadership.

The school principal believes that high quality education is the direct outcome of a safe school environment where the ethics and values of the surrounding society are applied. She has a certain tenet that delinquent wrongdoers are not punished but oriented and guided to change their deviant course to work in harmony with the school symphony. One day, some incidents happened outside the school gate among students. At once, she summoned the students and carried out a prompt investigation with all the involved parties. Then she summoned the parents of the students who went out of her office friends hand in hand after hearing her reactions to the situation. She was extremely happy that she could create friendship among both the students and parents when she was able to reconcile them and to assert to them the values of peace and collaboration rather than those of discord and animosity.



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As a school leader, this school principal believes that school crises are her own and she does not revert to traditional life styles until she finds a solution, even radical solution, to whatever obstacles her school encounters. One of the first secondary classes caused huge trouble and numerous disturbances to such a degree that teachers agreed that most of the students were recalcitrant troublemakers. The principal decided to put the class under control and changed its location to be in front of her office. She regularly paid visits to the class and started to assign numerous incentives for any tiny positive gestures made by any student there. Day by day, this class became the ideal one in the entire school. She stated an astute sentence that “the best understood language in the world is that of love and trust.”

The social participation role is one of the principal’s duties. Being in a rural society some clashes could happen between students of different villages or families. Some of them might show pride of his origins or kinship. Such attitudes caused some disputes among student, so she did not hesitate to call parents to a meeting to discuss the problem that hindered their children’s acquisition of knowledge at school. In fact their reactions were extremely positive and in turn they created a cordial atmosphere among their children.

The school teachers noted their principal’s sense of devotion to the whole group and her desire to create a cordial culture out of their school. As a sort of support, the principal founded a financial fund where all teachers, administrators, and even workers participate monthly to share during each other’s social events. She positively responds to each teacher’s circumstances on a basis of respect and trust. They added that she often approaches and tackles her students’ problems mainly because they are adolescents and their emotional and passionate reactions precede their sensible decisions.

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The school teachers asserted their point of view that their school principal cares for the well-being of her students as they remembered her role during the epidemic of bird flu and that of swine flu when she invited specialists and physicians to school where symposiums and debates were held posters were displayed to help the students understand the epidemic and understand how they could reduce their own risks. The teachers alluded to their principal's national sense during the revolutions and her decision to invite politicians and activists in civilian affairs to organize debates and discussions on the current and future events and anticipation in the political and social arena.

The teachers referred to their principal's insistence on creating a democratic culture in her school as she listens to their ideas and suggestions regarding the educational process. Some teachers remembered her positive step to carry out student union elections. However, a teacher added "We didn't feel a tactile effect of the students' union, for there is no budget to put its action in force."

Communication depends on social interaction and direct dialogues through cordial and cooperative school community rather than technology. There is no website for the school, because there is a poor computer lab at school. Her followers feel that she desires to create a safe environment at school free of violence, so she is keen on solving any problem that could disturb the peaceful atmosphere of the school.

The principal applies the supreme values of her society. According to her teachers, the principal keeps recognizing the efforts of the distinguished teachers through certificates and honorary expressions of appreciation rather than rewards due to the lack of resources. On their side, the school teachers see themselves as a critical factor to enhance the principal's success. The followers believe that their school reflects their social values, for it is based on the principles

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of respect of elders as shown in the mutual respect between students and their teachers, participation through the students' union, and religious awareness through the school mosque where students do their prayers.

The school teachers praised the unique sort of collaboration and solidarity between their school and the surrounding houses in the village; they added that people in the surrounding community endorse their school because of the decent disposition of the principal and neighborhood awareness of the vitality of education and community members' devotion to the school. As a result they offer all sorts of support to make the school more successful.

The school teachers referred to the social side of the principal's nature. She is socially distinguished and is aware of participating in social events of the staff members, parents, and even students such as consolations, marriages, births, engagements and social aid. She is clever at sharing ideas with others, for she listens carefully to her followers and fully trusts them, perhaps because they are of the same age and experience. She believes in the potential of her followers and encourages them to participate in decision making and assessing her own performance.

The principal maintains good relations with parents and the surrounding community members, for she is aware of the social norms of the small community which she belongs to and of the importance of reflecting the social values at school. The parents reminded each other of the positive role that school principal played when a quarrel erupted after the school day among students due to some clashes during a football match. Despite her insistence on keeping the school environment safe, cordial, cooperative, and inspiring to success, the principal sometimes ignores social care programs to enhance and support her students outside the gate of the school.

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Some students could face huge social crises; however, the principal does not try to interfere since rural communities despise such interference.

She is also a good listener to parents. To tackle the problem of the high absence rate at school, she kept listening to the parents' suggestions till they reached the idea of a certain schedule held on certain days. Parents welcomed their sons' and daughters' return to school which reduced their reliance on private tutors. She also held elections of the students' union at the beginning of the school year believing in the students' roles in participating in decision making at school. She invited parents to attend a festival declaring the winners and naming the student president of the school.

The students and parents affirm that their school principal pays due care to their feedback and perspectives on her decisions. They remembered her extreme happiness about the students' punctuality in the aftermath of her attendance decision when the other school principals continued to suffer from the huge absence rate. She regards the students as her sons and daughters, so they never hesitate to talk to her as she opens her heart to all of them and tries to tackle their problems at school. They feel that she is flexible and does not have any of the despotic or dogmatic views of some principals.

Parents and students declare the fact that the school principal enjoys excellent relations with the school community simply because she is one of the village dwellers. She keeps asking parents to attend regular weekly meetings on Thursday; however, some of the parents do not attend because of their labor commitments and obligations. They see the principal as fair and unprejudiced to some extent. However, they sometimes feel that she is rather partial to her village students. She prefers that the school students' president to be one of them. Sometimes she offers them more support, but in general they feel that she is impartial. They admit that she treats

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all students decently and cordially. She encourages her students to participate in making decision just through the box of suggestions and complaints since the students' union council has not been put into effect.

Most of the students and parents see their school as a safe educational environment that offers them a good education, and they think that most of their teachers at school are reliable. The students assert that their school reflects the values of their rural community in some aspects: "We never flirt with the girls at school since we regard them as our sisters, we respect the elderly around us represented in teachers, administrators, workers, and guards" and another one added that "...we never quarrel at school with each other or with teachers except for some slight differences."

### **Communication to Promote Instructional Programs Conducive to Student Learning**

As a principal, she sets a distinctive goal focusing on a quality education despite the paucity of resources to upgrade the level of the surrounding community. The students' final results reinforced her efforts last year for most of her students joined the faculties of medicine, pharmacology, politics, economics, languages and engineering. She expects more success this year; in the long run, she hopes the school will make a quantum leap in preparing students for great success in the surrounding community.

As a principal, she puts the students as her first priority. She is keen on giving them the best education. Directly after receiving a whispered complaint against the physics teacher who was unable to get the students to understand specific laws and theories, she sent a petition to the director of the educational zone to send the physics inspector once a week to offer the high school students a three hour session to upgrade their levels. On her side, she made the situation acceptable for the teacher who was happy to get more experience from his senior inspector. In

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fact, she insists that all inspectors enter classes and transfer their experience and knowledge to both teachers and students.

As a principal, she trusts her staff members, students, parents, and members of the surrounding community. Based on her desire to help all students, she keeps offering incentives to the distinguished students and in a parallel path she never leaves low achievers behind since she insists on helping all students to reach their maximum potential. Unfortunately, as a principal, she has nothing to do with the various curricula at school, for they are centralized and set by the experts of the Ministry of Education. Some of them are set according to the directions of the political regime of the country and others as attempts to catch up with the scientific strides around the world. She said “If the matter were in my hand, I would alter most of them to the benefit of my students.” She added “What I actually do is to follow my teachers’ lesson plans, assess their performance and act sometimes as a pedagogical principal.” She asserts the importance of holding debates with the senior teachers and inspectors concerning their instructional supervision, setting a rigorous scheme of examinations to guarantee the highest degree of credibility and transparency, and collecting data concerning the students’ final results to see how much they are benefitting from school and to decide on her own levels of progress at the same time.

The school teachers assert that their school principal pays due care to the students attendance and punctuality. She listens to ideas and suggestions from her staff regarding the educational process. She is a good listener to parents and through listening to their suggestions, she put an end to the overwhelming problem of the high rate of absence. She cares for the quality of education and has decreased the teaching load of her senior teachers so that they could have time to offer consultations and guidance to both novice teachers and students.

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To keep make the school outstanding, the school principal has to be creative and think out of the box with some degree of risk taking. To reduce her students' boredom and get their utmost results, the principal has decided to reduce their attendance time, to enable them share the schedule mapping, to change the separate sessions and lectures and workshops sessions, to reduce the break time, and to offer them a day or two days off each week. As a result her students attend the lectures and workshops in full capacity and her teachers are given enough time to take a breath and be well prepared and equipped to for the lectures where they are encouraged to do their utmost. This shows a high degree of mutual trust between the principal and both her students and staff members. What made her scheme pay off was the parents' degree of malleability and reliance mingled with the principal's sense of duty towards her students. This encouraged her to tackle the severe problem of attendance.

She sees her students as her prime concern for they should receive a quality education, so she gives them the freedom to set a suitable lecture schedule and even select the teachers in charge of each lecture; she is not meticulous or picky in dealing with her students. In fact, she keeps discussing their attendance rates, classroom needs, incentives and penalty regulations, break times, arrival and departure times, their lessons schedules, and even their uniforms. Nobody can fail to see how effective such communications are on running the educational process. She is somewhat tolerant of them and keeps her office open to be reachable to all of her students. She acts as an educational guide to her students and occasionally holds orientation sessions to them to consider their future academic and labor opportunities. However, she does not carry out any amendments or alterations to various curricula since all of them are centralized and set by the ministry of education.

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As a sign of her devotion to her school students, she pays attention to their spiritual side. The school teachers approved her decision to exempt orphans and needy students of the school fees despite her numerous financial crises because they are not responsible for their families' dilemmas. She feels it is her role to find solutions and allocate the financial resources without adding to the burdens of these students.

The school principal feels that one of her crucial commitments is to be constant in her efforts to solve all the problems which her school faces through effective communication. She does not give up. Her school is rather new and in a bad need of numerous appliances and equipment to support the instructional program. She stated "First I addressed the ministry of education and received a reply that the school is to be put in a plan and within an indefinite time those in authority would consider such needs." In fact, according to the principal, red tape and government convoluted procedures are the main impediments of success, so she decided to depend on herself and her surrounding community away from the government's detailed and lengthy procedures. Through contact with the board of trustees and parents and reliance on her own and followers' potentials, she equipped the school playground, made new gates, started a library, equipped science labs, furnished the computer lab with three computer sets as a start, erected platform for the school morning line media, and planted trees in the school garden. The school principal shows pride in such efforts and accomplishments.

The school teachers asserted their principal's role as an instructional leader. To put an end to the high rate of absence at school, she held a meeting with her students and asked them about lesson schedules which they desired and their favorite teachers. Some teachers admitted being offended because of that type of democracy; however, they approved the students' choice as it would benefit their knowledge acquisition. The teachers added the principal's situation toward



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the chaotic class that had moved to be beside her office and her incessant visits there. They approved that step since it paid off. The teachers agreed that the prior concern of the principal is her student's wellbeing. They remembered her decision to make the inspector share in the educational processes in classrooms in addition to the instructional supervision.

Influential communication with parents reinforces the educational process since any school is affected by the values and culture of its society. As a principal she pays due care to the value of participation and parents' positive involvement for all matters related to their offspring. Parents and students have a strong conviction that she is devoted to providing students with a high quality education although most of them do not pay the school fees and many of the parents are not co-operative enough; however, she is relentless and perseverant and never gives up asking our parents for positive enhancement of the school. She cares for the students as the main products of the school so she is keen on providing them with qualified teachers and a safe learning environment; however, she is not the one who selects the teachers who are appointed by the government; moreover the principal has no power to decide or amend the curricula since they are centralized and mapped by the ministry of education. There is little technology at school and as a result there are no assignments via mail, no website, no technological aspects, no multimedia rooms, no smart boards or any form of technology.

The students and parents assert that the school principal keeps talking to them about the teachers' performance and thinks that they are the main tool to evaluate the effectiveness of teachers at school.

### **Communication to Facilitate Professional Development of Teachers**

For all the above mentioned positive sides of the rural principal's effective communication, professional growth of her staff followers and her own is the main area where she feels she can

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do little. She has nothing to do with professional development of her followers since it is the responsibility of the Ministry of Education that carries out futile professional development programs as a routine like procedure for promoting teachers to higher positions. However, as a principal, she admits that her job is mainly an academic endeavor, so she needs certain training in IT, computer applications, and management systems. Although professional growth programs are the responsibility of the Ministry of Education, she informally organizes some workshops in summer while teachers are free to make demonstrations of certain lessons under the supervision of their seniors and inspectors. Yet, she admits “that this is not enough.”

The school teachers admitted that the principal does not carry out professional development program to upgrade the teachers’ performance at school; however, it could be carried out informally by some senior teachers and instructional supervisors at school without the supervision of the principal during summer vacation. The ministry is entitled to carry out such a mission. The teachers see the absence of professional growth programs as a huge defect but it is out of the principal’s hands. They feel that there is no academic role carried out by the principal in this side.

Neither parents nor the students were knowledgeable about the professional; development of the teachers.

### **The Urban School**

#### **Description of the School**

The urban school is an international private one located in Cairo. It provides education based on the American curriculum. The school is integrated from pre-k to grade 12. The total number of students at school is about 500. The school is managed by a female principal who used to work as the head of math department at the school. The school is spacious and is enhanced by its

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various playgrounds, gardens, and a theatre hall. The school classes are air conditioned and well ventilated. They are coeducational holding about 20 students. Most of the school students rely on the school bus for the school is located on the outskirts of Cairo. The school is equipped with up-to-date laboratories for computer, physics, biology, chemistry and with a well furnished library. The school has a high-tech internet access which is regarded as the main tool of communication between the parents and the school. Most of the school students are Egyptians.

### **Description of the Principal**

The principal of the urban school has held this position, her first principalship, for almost a year now. She has been working in education for more than 20 years either as a teacher of mathematics or as head of department, but she believes that being a principal is a totally different responsibility. It is constantly multitasking and requires shifting roles at a moment's notice. Unfortunately, she added that she did not have enough time to work with the former principal in the transition. Although the former principal is a very helpful person but he was establishing himself in a new position and it was difficult for both of them to contact each other for help or consultations. However, he has kept in touch through email and mobiles whenever it was possible. What helped her was the decision she made four years ago to develop her career professionally; she acquired an "Educational Leadership Diploma" and continued her development by currently being enrolled in yearlong series of workshops which address concerns faced by school principals.

### **Communication and the Role of the School Principal**

As a new principal, she expressed many thoughts about what she feels her role should be. The principal started the interview stating that as a principal she spares no efforts to create a sense of belonging and to provide a clear direction for all involved—students, teachers, parents,

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and community. As the leader of her faculty she demonstrates her appreciation of the expertise of the teachers and allowing them latitude to try new approaches; this has empowered them to develop these approaches into action plans that can be implemented at a later stage.

As the educational leader, she believes that the most effective technique is to delegate responsibility to a teacher, take the risk, and trust his/her no matter what the result is. The teacher feels that his/her opinions matters and feels comfortable enough to try new methods that will help him/her to grow from a follower to a leader. For example, one of her math teachers was about to leave the school because of some class management problems. She carried out clinical observation visits to her classroom; she listened to the teacher's suggestions, and encouraged her to share her ideas. She then supported the teacher as she implemented those ideas. As a result, the teacher gained confidence and became better in less than a semester which has increased both the students' and the teacher's capacity for learning and success.

Recognizing the needs of her students, the principal stated that she allows free conversation with the students of different ages and encourages them to express their opinions. This year she encouraged the students to participate in setting goals and developing action plans on a daily basis. Each classroom selected a certain goal for the year and displayed it in the hallway for all to see which has created awareness and ownership for the students.

Based on her belief that the principal should build some strong relations with parents, the principal stressed the importance of keeping parents well informed of what and how their children were doing in school. Data folders which showed student's progress records were sent home on a weekly basis. Parents viewed the data folders and responded every day. Other methods for parents' communication include phone calls, conferences, and complimentary notes to stay in constant contact with parents which the principal feels is very important. She wanted

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very much to include in her school year agenda some “Parental Guiding Sessions” held by psychology professors at the university, these were to be attended by teachers and parents together. Unfortunately the financial department did not fund this program.

She feels that a very important point about students is not how the students generate high test scores but how much they are motivated to come to school every day and how that would lead to the improvement of their scores. She is very concerned about this issue.

To stay in touch with teachers, she does a lot of observing through walking around in the morning and doing clinical observations with the help and support of the different heads of subject departments. In addition, she has encouraged the use of many surveys either sent to parents, teachers or students. This year, she added an evaluation form for the performance of the academic dean, vice principal and the principal herself. She feels as principal that she needs to have input from all members of the school community.

The teachers have different views of the role of their principal. School teachers started their talk asserting that their principal is conscientious and active. They remembered her pivotal role to help their school to be accredited few months after she was appointed as a school principal. They remembered her diligent care to make everyone at school fully aware of his/her role so that her endeavors could pay off. Some teachers added that their principal is truthful, empathetic, but very tense; as a result, channels of communication are strained between the principal and her teachers. Some teachers feel that the principal’s role is diminished by the school owner. One of teachers stated, “We feel that her reforms plans are impeded by the owner who does not empower her to make any single decision, so we believe that she acts as an executive secretary rather than a leader.” She could not dismiss the school students earlier during the disturbances during and after the revolution without asking the owner for permission. The principal was

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sharply criticized for her passive role to enhance the teacher's requests for medical insurance, transparent policy of salaries and sanctions, prior notifications, and legally written contracts. However, some of the school teachers hailed the principal's attempts to foster her followers' interests such as medical insurance, valid and legal contract, prior notification, transparent financial affairs related to salaries, sanctions and incentives, and definite recognition of their of their performance. This group saw her working in the role of spokesman for them and their interests.

Although some of the teachers see the principal as a serious, inflexible, and distant leader, others admit that she is a role model for she is punctual and knows how to hold people accountable. Some added that she knows how to make people work. A third group stressed that she mainly trusts the seniors but she does not delegate tasks, for she is a perfectionist. A number of the teachers lamented the fact that their principal is distant and unapproachable; they rarely find any access to her either because she is highly tense or keeps shouting at her students attempting to keep order. The teacher denied that she asked them any questions for she delegates some of her instructional tasks to the academic head of teachers whom they find easier to reach. The teachers do not feel that their principal, despite her ethical values, is aware of their needs and problems. They question her approach to interacting with them. They remembered how she sided with one of the students against his physical education teacher during a minor clash that ended in the teacher's dismissal from school for the student's sake. The principal does not have face to face communication with her teachers since she rarely meets with them to discuss their needs and aspirations. Many of the teachers do not feel any positive change has been carried out by their principal: they are not enabled to give critical reflection or feedback, and they are not aware of the philosophy that is pursued by their principal.

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The parents unanimously agreed that they felt a severe change during the first few months after the previous principal stepped down. They see the new principal performing in ways that are different from what they had grown accustomed to with the last principal. Yet they feel that the current principal is serious and fears failure. They see that her success during the first few month of her work to get her school accredited is a positive mark added to her record. Most parents agreed with the idea that the principal is regarded as a student centered for the school students are her first priority. On asking parents if the principal has any of the leadership traits, most of them answered that she is conscientious and well-mannered, yet, based upon their children's comments that she does not have a high degree of emotional intelligence or sociable interaction for she keeps sitting behind closed doors. Parents do not believe that the school principal believes in risk taking or thinking out of the box since most of her decision cannot be put into practice without the owner's approval. Despite these criticisms, they feel the principal's role to supplement the school science labs, computer labs, and the library as reported by their children is a very positive action and is in keeping with their understanding of what a principal should do.

The students discussed the role of their principal as a link with their parents and the community. Some students admitted that they do not think that she keeps at good terms with their parents, for they feel that the relationship with parents depends on how near the parent is to the owner or to the administration, so, according to the students, the principal's role is distorted by the egregious interference of parents and their influence on the owner. They think that some parents have the full right to interfere in the school policies in an audacious way, and against her nature, the principal does not dare to respond. Perhaps this is because some of them are

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privileged by the owner. One of the students commented that if he were her, he would not accept that interference.

Some of the students said that they are fully convinced that the principal is trying to know about their needs but she ignores the right access to each one of them. Finally, one of them said “She found that we aspire to some extracurricular activities and trips, so she organized a trip to a place called Fugnoon.” In addition, she organized a fund raising event for the sake of some hospitals and orphanages. They admitted that they really enjoyed the trip and the most enjoyable part was the principal’s disposition which was entirely different from that at school.

Students assert that she is an excellent principal in most ways in most ways especially those related to ethics and conscience but the main drawback is her excessive petulance that blurs her leadership style. In fact she wants to make several reforms at school; however, she does not have access to the students whom she puts outside the area of her trust. In fact the owner does not give her any possibilities or authority to carry out her goals. Yet, she is so keen on applying didactic technology at school as seen in well equipped computer labs, science labs, data shows, smart boards, assignments via website, etc.

The students continued saying that what really annoyed them is that the principal does not have any real authority to make decision; however, she does something according to her own potential but is really hindered by the interference of the school owner. They believe that “The owner should possess but not govern.” Then, some of them asked “Why does she not really involve us in making decision concerning the educational process?”

### **Communication and Vision of Learning**

During the interview the school principal highlighted the importance of having a vision of education aiming at enhancing the school and students. Her vision of education is based on



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communication and participation since education, according to her "...is not a one man show but a joint venture where all participant need to share positively to accomplish success." The school principal stated her philosophy of education that is based on empowering others to make decisions, to set goals, to carry out plans freely, to have the power of making mistakes, and to share leadership. Her concept of leadership rests mainly on distributing tasks, so leadership is extended among the whole school community.

The principal has a comprehensive vision of education based on effective mutual communication and participation between the school and the surrounding community. She trusts the potential of her students and staff members; she sees her school problems and crises as if there were hers personally; she works to create a school environment that reflects the values of society; she believes in risk taking as a transformational leader; and she is committed to enhancing her community as well as her students.

All teachers agreed on the high ethical side of the principal who tries to recognize her followers' efforts to encourage and punish on equal basis, to foster extracurricular activities, to equip the school library with relevant books, and to keep enhancing the science labs all of which are important parts of her vision for the school. They added that for all her attempts to apply a certain vision and a defined mission of the school, they feel that these printed documents are "stuck on walls rather than in the minds and hearts of the school students and staff members." The recalcitrant nature of students impedes her efforts. Most students feel that they are better able to reach the owner through their parents which is a major obstacle for the principal. In addition, most of the students are fully aware of their effective power and influence at school. Teachers are sure that her vision of learning is negatively affected by the higher authority of the owner. In addition, some teachers are skeptical stating that the principal is doing her utmost not

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for the sake of her followers or students but for the sake of her own interest. The real goal is to keep her position, to embellish her status, and to secure her success.

The most bewildering answer was that of parents who even did not try to discuss the principal's vision of learning. Most of them believe that it is the school vision not that of the principal or it is the international education vision of learning. Their question is really worth asking to learn whether the vision of learning is attached to a person or a system. Whatever the answer is, such vision, according to one of the parents, needs a principal who has effective communication to facilitate their assimilation and understanding of the vision.

Students were not able to interpret the principal's vision of learning. They kept asking if it is the paper stuck on the front wall of each class beside the white board. The students kept being antagonistic at that point wondering even if she has a vision of learning; the principal cannot get it across to them since there are no channels of communication with her students. When asked if the principal is keen on asking questions, listening to others, or keeping in contact with her teachers and students, they answered that that they rarely dare talking to her and if she happened to be accessible there is no time to ask questions and receive answers. The students believed that the principal may deliver her vision of learning to the senior teachers and teachers but not her students whom, according to one of the students, she does not trust. Others believe that the principal's vision of learning is centered round using up-to-date didactic technology at school which eventually would upgrade their educational levels, yet they desired if the instructional side of her vision merged with the personal and social one.

### **Communication for the Development of the School Culture**

As a leader, the principal believes that her prime concern is to create a healthy and safe environment conducive to providing her students a quality education and raising the spirit of her

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teachers. She believes that a certain school culture should be vivid in the hearts and minds of her follower. For her, she intends to maintain a collaborative work community based on trust and collegiality. She focused on the principles on integrity, accountability, citizenship, belonging, and effective communication. Enabling others to participate and collaborate in a family like community where tasks are distributed among all is her perception of an effective school culture. Her main target when she was appointed as a school leader was to ensure the sense of community through communication and to encourage decision making and the freedom of positive criticism and feedback. She asserted her need of community when she said during her first meeting with her staff “If I succeed, it will be because of your support.” She meant that good and healthy relationships between herself as a principal and her teachers and students would reinforce the school culture and climate. A school culture based on openness and mutual support and confidence is the corner stone for any successful institution.

For her, the moment she was selected as a principal, she wanted to create a positive culture because she believes that it is the most important element for growth and improvement, in addition to the fact that it paves the road to create a successful learning environment. The former principal was a strong leader who was loved and respected by all. During her first week of work, she held a meeting for all school members asking for their patience and support in maintaining the school because she did not want to compete with the former principal in any way. After the meeting, she was very happy to hear encouraging sentences such as “Don’t worry; you can do it”, “We all love you, we are going to support you.”

She believes that ethics of respect and role modeling lead to a distinguished and highly successful school which has an established culture of respect and caring. She believes that school community is not that of the school campus but it get beyond to include a wider community with

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the same sets of rules and values respected by the school. Some charity events, organized by the principal to raise certain funds to hospitals and orphanages were really successful and reflected the students' awareness of their community members. Planting the seeds of devotion, belonging, commitment, and loyalty is one of the major tasks of the principal to establish a unique school culture. "The glamorous image of the school students and teachers during the accreditation visit never leaves my mind," the principal added.

Certain traits, as a school leader were identified by the principal who emphasized the importance of the principles of equity, impartiality, and empathy to establish an efficient school culture. She pays due care to building positive relationship with parents based on mutual effective communication and respect. She stressed the importance of listening to others for she believes that "If you do not listen to whispers, you will not be able to withstand cries." Through the principle of role modeling, she never let problems accumulate to be a like a mountain impossible to remove, but she is keen on finding prompt solutions by enabling her followers to share decision making and thus reduce the impact of problems on the school culture.

On the other side, the teachers affirm that in case they reach her during certain incident or emergency, they feel that she moves promptly to put an end to any sort of emergency. They reminded each other of the situation when the scheme of school evacuation in case of fire or emergency event was carried out after the revolution. They asserted that she deals with her followers through mutual respect. She is in fact a role model of diligent care which adds to the culture of the school.

The same paradoxical views were expressed during meeting the focus group of teachers of different grades who stated that the principal is honest and truthful but sometimes she declared earlier due dates of certain tasks to make sure they are to be handed in on time. They added that

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she does not take into consideration the opinions or feedback of teachers. Some teachers feel that the principal is not reachable, for she seems busy around the clock; however, in cases of emergency she is keen on listening. They feel that the principal is handicapped since power is in the hand of the owner. All of the factors affect their perception of the school culture.

The school teachers feel that she trusts them but she does not trust students. In fact she does not differentiate between well behaved students and provocative ones. She severely censured one of the best girls simply because she was out of uniform. The students feel that the main reason behind the principal's excessive tense and apprehensive nature is that she has an overwhelming panic of failure or comparison to the former principal.

The teachers, on the other hand, assert their conviction that she deals with her followers through mutual respect. She is in fact a role modeling of diligent care. She strives to create a safe environment where medical care is guaranteed in campus. She is cordial especially when she happens to find time to show her true nature. She launched the event of secret friend, dish party, and peer guidance. She is keen on evaluating the efforts of her followers through thanking letters, souvenirs and on occasion financial incentives. However, according to some of teachers, the school principal does not create an outlet for the students' potential due to the absence of extracurricular activities. Such absence is totally detrimental to the whole educational institution and its culture.

They added that they feel that she cares for everyone and they value this trait; however, she does not know how to get them beyond this feeling, for the tense atmosphere at school blurs their feelings of cordiality and begets some feelings of antagonism, animosity, and confrontation. Despite her strong efforts to keep order, the teachers feel that the main drawback at school this year is the lack order which creates an environment that damages the school culture.

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The parents' responses on were also paradoxical. While some believe that she is fully aware of the adopting principles of social justice and mutual confidence, others lamented the fact that the principal cares more for the programs of education rather than the students themselves.

The first party of parents believe that she creates a school culture built on cordiality, cooperation, diligent work recognition, effective participation at school, and healthy and safe atmosphere of learning; they gave examples of the events of fundraising for hospitals, the cooperative traits their children show during carrying out their school projects which reflect the school culture values in addition to the high sense of care to make the school environment safe and healthy. However, others did not appreciate the school principal who called for just two parents' meetings and who rarely replies to their complaints. They commented on the principal's inability to keep her self-composure since her image was reported by their children. They doubted that the school principal maintain an atmosphere of cordiality and friendship at school wondering how can such an atmosphere be established when their school lacks all sorts of extracurricular activities, fun days, sports tournaments, competitions or collaborations with other schools, and field

Parents lament the fact that both parents and students at school do not share decision making and mapping future strategic plans of the school, actions which would greatly increase their feeling of belonging and support. They repeated their children complaints that the school principal is shut behind her door, and the only means to know of her presence is her loud shouts at the students during the intervals between lessons to keep orders. She is not accessible to them or to their children. Although all of them agreed on her high degree of respect and morals, they criticize her for her inability to build bridges of effective communication and trust with the school students. However, parents are fully aware of the diligent efforts the principal do to work

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hand in hand with her teachers for the sake of their children's wellbeing. These contradictions suggest similar discord within the school culture.

The students proclaimed that their school principal hardly cares for their feedbacks or opinions on some decisions she makes at school. They feel that "There is a double faced mirror where nobody can see the other side. When we talk, we feel that we talk to deaf ears. We kept asking for a canteen, more extracurricular activities but in vain." They added that "We have the feeling of confrontation instead of collaboration." Another one added that "We enjoy the feeling of being stubborn and really we miss her if a day passes without shouting". Some of the students declared that they feel that she lacks the experience of tackling serious problems. A surprising comment came when some of them admitted smoking sometimes inside the school campus saying "Instead of calmly addressing the problem and talking to us as elderly, her threats and tough warning created a sense of confrontation." These descriptions present a negative impression of the culture within the school.

The students' responses reflected more paradoxical opinions of the principal, for some of them think that she rarely listens and keeps shouting at the students without discussing even minor issues. She once shouted at an ideal girl who happened to sit behind the door which was roughly opened by the principal simply because she did not sit at one of the sides.

Students started to talk of some culture of discrimination saying that when one of the guards found a cigarette end beside a group of the high school students in the playground, he got a seven day cut in salary as a punishment when he informed her! Another episode happened when a young student insulted a guard who was fired simply because he reacted to the boy's insult. A third episode occurred when a student in the high school quarreled with a physical education captain, the Captain was expelled and the boy received no punishment. The students added that

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they feel that students in the American section are more distinguished in their treatment than those in the national one. Even in her contact with teachers, they feel that she keeps good terms with many teachers but not all of them. Some student played truant and did not show up in a session of Arabic and she shouted at the Arabic teacher in front of them in a tactless way. One of the students commented “I think this derisive way is improper in front of students.” Some of the students sarcastically commented that they do not feel that the school reflects certain social values; however, according to some of them the school reflects the main principle that “The customer is always right!” The students feel that these actions present a school culture that is not welcoming or accepting.

Most of the students feel that she believes in delegating many of her roles to her supporters represented in seniors, captains of physical education, and floor supervisors, but she insists on stepping in to keep discipline by shouting and creating a tense atmosphere at school. They recommend the principal keep her self-composure and stability, to listen to their opinions and feedbacks, to discard the principle that “Customers are always right.” During any clash at school, the teacher is considered mistaken when parents are there. They added that the principal needs to assert freedom of expression, the principles of democracy, and discipline bases during the early stages so as not face conditions of disorder or lack of harmony during the high school phase.

On talking about creativity, the students declared that they do not feel that she is creative or consistent in facing problems at school. Sometimes when they are late, she just follows the traditional way to keep them during the first lesson then let them go to their classes the second session. Of course there are other ways to tackle the problem but she does not try to find out other innovative schemes. Students noted that their parents complain that she does not listen to



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their suggestions or complaints. The students went on to say that the principal is not reachable and they really hesitate to approach her, for she is moody and they do not anticipate her reaction.

Some of the students are completely against the full right of some parents to interfere in the school policies in an audacious way, and against the principal's nature; this, may be because some of them are privileged by the owner. One of the students commented that "If I were her, I would not accept that interference." Students then started to talk about their right to have an access to make decision and to put the students' union into force. They added that they do not think there is mutual trust between both sides, for she does not listen to them and they feel that she is dogmatic and stubborn and lacks emotional and social intelligence; however, sometimes they feel that the principal is near them. This incident happened during fund raising that she really fostered. The students assert that she wants to make several reforms at school; however, she does not have access to all the students.

Most of the students feel that she cares for everyone. However, she does not always know how to help them understand her actions. They sometimes feel a tense atmosphere at school which blurs their feelings of cordiality and sometimes begets some feeling of antagonism and animosity between them and their principal. One student disagreed saying that he feels that the principal is so caring and he reminded them of a clash between him and the Arabic teacher and how the principal interfered to support the student without humiliating him or the teacher.

Some students stressed the scheme of exaggeration and hyperbole used by the principal in talking to the parents even about minor issues; in fact, they believe that she is picky, for such minor incidents can be reported to the parent as if they were felonies. Some students stressed the unsociable side in the principal's character simply because she does not discriminate who she shouts at. They say that they know of the principal's presence through her incessant shouting.

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After providing many examples of situations that they felt reflected the culture of their school, the students summarized some of urgent steps which are needed to be taken to create a cordial environment at school and improve their relationship with the principal:

- The principal should work on refining the principal's treatment of the students and building a relationship based on mutual trust.
- The principal should model self composure and stability.
- She needs to care for collecting data and analyzing them to be aware of the needs of her students and teachers.
- She needs to listen to the students' opinions and feedbacks.
- She needs to treat the students the same way she treats their parents!
- She needs to discard the principle that "Customers are always right". The teacher is right but totally mistaken when parents are there.
- The principal needs to assert the freedom of expression and the principles of democracy.
- The principal should care for sports tournaments and extracurricular activities.
- The principal should give students a chance to map the schedules.
- The principal should lay discipline bases during early stages so as not to face conditions of disorder or lack of harmony during the high school phase.
- The principal should not be irritable and should utilize emotional intelligence.
- She should create innovative solutions and proposals in case she encounters any obstacle on the way.
- The principal should found communication bases with other schools through educational courses, sport tournaments, academic competitions, mutual visits and supervision.

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- The principal should not make the financial matters her first concern for the students have a strong conviction that they are treated as a financial source. They reminded each other of an incident when one of the students was not able to get the official transcript simply because her parent was abroad and she was supposed to pay her final installment at school. One of them added “We need to feel that our school is a nonprofit institution.”
- Finally she needs to know how to change her students’ viewpoints and to put their recommendations into force to create a common ground between them.

### **Communication to Promote Instructional Programs Conducive to Student Learning**

The school principal began her comments by stating that “I am a student centered principal.” For her, the main concern for any school principal is the students for whom everything should be devoted. She believes that the ideal principal is the one who knows the both cognitive and psychological needs of her students. She believes in the triangle of success shaped by the teachers, parents, and principals who should work together to provide a high quality learning experience for all students. Instructional leadership, mentorship, professional development programs, and clinical observations are held to upgrade the instructional abilities of teachers for the wellbeing of all students. Regular assessments of the teachers’ performance reflect the quality of classroom instruction and the ability of the students to assimilate knowledge by their teachers they help maintain the quality of the instructional program. Believing in and showing trust in the teachers’ potential is pivotal to maintain their high performance in classes. The principal stressed her main role at school is to share in planning curriculum and following up it execution and influences on both the students mental and personal skills.

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Technological didactic gadgets are essential to facilitate students' learning for they are the main features of the age. The principal sees that the traditional teacher will vanish soon, and the whole instructional processes at school or home should be entirely controlled by up-to-date telecommunication inventions.

On their side, the teachers agreed on the principal's insistence on collecting regular data on the curriculum, the students' acquisition of knowledge, teacher performance, and semester exams and results; however, they do not know the utility of such data as a result of the absence of transparency.

They admitted that the principal does not interfere in setting the curriculum but the teachers' academic head is the entitled one to perform such task. Nevertheless, she values technology as an effective gadget of education, e.g. data shows, smart boards, electronic assignments, dependence on the internet, and up-to-date didactic technological appliances. Paradoxically, some of the teachers commented that "Although the principal is relentless and spares no effort, they do not feel that she has caused any quantum leap at school."

Parents, on their side, seemed to have little concern for the instructional plans since they are fully aware the principal shows great care in selecting teachers and setting the optimum curriculum for each subject at school. They feel that this is a positive effort to maintain a productive instructional program. Yet some parents wondered if the principal would hold an orientation meeting at the beginning of the year to describe and discuss the content and objectives of the school curricula. They agreed that the principal is keen on giving distinguished education to their children. Some parents criticize the principal's excessive reliance on the internet and the school website rather than direct contact through phone calls or assignment booklets with their children.

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Students stated that she cares to give them quality education; it was apparent when she accepted the petition of five students to study calculus instead of mechanics to meet the prerequisites of a university they hope to join. They added that she is keen on giving them a quality education, for they believe that she has a clear vision of education. They think that she carefully selects teachers who are highly qualified. In fact she is so keen on applying didactic technology at school represented in well equipped computer labs, science labs, data shows, smart boards, assignments via website, etc. The students added that they feel that we they are the focus of her concern and her first priority. She changed the English curriculum entirely in grade 12 to upgrade language potentials. However, they complained that they have no access to know how she cooperates with teachers in mapping the curricula or how she develops some of the professional growth plans. The students praised her recognition of hard work and her trust of some teachers who really deserve her trust. Some students assert that she does not really care to involve them in making decision concerning the educational process; however, others admit that she sometimes asks about their feedback and perspectives on some teachers or curricula.

### **Communication to Facilitate the Professional Development of Teachers**

The urban school principal addressed my question regarded the effective communication and professional development of teachers. First, she emphasized on the importance of lifelong learning programs for teachers to keep up-to-date. Then she talked about her endeavors at school to develop her teachers starting by assigning certain instructional tasks to the senior teachers and carrying out clinical observation programs. The principal referred to her insistence on making her teachers share in the planning of the curriculum and the assessment of its influence on the students. Then she described how she and the senior teachers endorse novice teachers' retention at school during their first year. The principal stressed on the importance of the summer

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workshops organized by senior teachers where teachers exchange lesson demonstration in a way to exchange certain skills and tactics.

The teachers expressed their satisfaction for the summer workshops that are carried out by the principal and the senior teachers in addition to clinical supervisions carried out by the principal, the head of teachers, the mentors, and the senior teachers. However, other teachers criticized such workshops since they are not taken seriously and reminded them of the professional workshops carried out by professionals in the field of education. Others recommended the idea of sending the school teachers to specialized workshops at schools of education at universities or specialized educational training centers. All of them commented that such a decision is out of the principal's hands.

On the whole most teachers approve the professional development plans carried out through the whole year by the principal or the senior teachers through clinical observations, and instructional supervision that occur in an amicable atmosphere.

Both parents and students answered that they have no ideas about the professional development programs that are carried out at school.

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### **Chapter 5-- Conclusion**

Effective communication in terms of sharing the vision of learning, developing a school culture, promoting instructional programs conducive to the students learning and encouraging staff professional growth is the motivating force for any successful school leader. It is important for any school principal to set clear goals and draw a road map based on effective communication and productive relationships with students, teachers, and parents. Successful leaders spend most of their time listening and speaking to others. Such interaction enables the leader to create a harmonious environment conducive to a successful educational institution.

The key components of successful leadership are developed through effective communication that aims at planning for the future strategic directions, establishing unity between curriculum and teaching, endorsing the sharing of knowledge and the life learning process with faculty, exchanging feedback with others, and extending interactions with the surrounding communities. Through effective communication, leaders can direct and plan improvement in curriculum and teaching, evaluate the program outcomes, deal with the staff concerns, and direct professional development plans.

During the interview and the focus groups held at the rural school, facts related to the communication style used by the leader became apparent. This communication style enables her to get the best out of everyone around her. In turn her followers were made to feel that their principal cares for their wellbeing and has a risk taking nature which she uses for their sake. Behaving as a role model for everyone, the principal gives an example of silent effective communication which her followers observe and respect. In fact such actions by the principal encourage her followers to become leaders later on. It is really a sign of trust that she delegated

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some of her responsibilities to her followers under her supervision. The cordial and supportive environment that the rural principal has created is based on the principle of sharing and respect.

The rural school students' responses to the questions about their school principal reflect the impact of her effective communication on all of them. For the students, their principal's main concern is their wellbeing. They remembered her risk taking stance when she decided to make lecture schedule for them for just four days a week and how she allowed them to select their teachers during the lectures. The students like their principal and do not hesitate to enter her open door. Her insistence on listening to the student's feedback and reflections on her decisions either through direct communication or the box she made for any complaint or proposal has made her leadership pay off. Being a psychologist, the rural principal has been able to reach into the minds and hearts of her students with her display of justice, respect, and trust for all. Her insistence on offering the carrot before the stick and praising any positive action has encouraged her students to exert greater efforts to meet her expectations. In their turn, all teachers there are keen on empowering their principal not because they selected her during elections but because of her empathetic nature that feel for each one of them. This leadership system was based on transparent positive communication.

The curriculum itself forms a serious area of complaint by the students, the teachers, and the principal herself who desired to be involved in the selection and development of the curriculum one day through effective communication with all other participants of the educational process. Both the principal and the faculty expressed regret for the limited professional development programs that are rarely held to upgrade the teachers' levels.

Having visited the rural school, I had mixed feelings. It is really ironic to have a principal who is talented, empathetic, diligent, sociable, and approachable with few financial and



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technological resources to make her efforts pay off. The principal herself admitted being crippled by complicated governmental procedures that restrict her. The centralized policies of education have made her unable to make decisions in many areas, especially in the areas of curriculum and professional development; however, through effective communication with her teachers, students, and members of the surrounding community, she is able to get the best out of them.

The main topic that is seen in the urban school is that of paradox. What the rural school lacks is abundant in the urban school. Didactic gadgets represented in computer labs supplied up-to-date means of telecommunications, advance sciences laboratories, a well furnished library, air conditioned classed, comfortable means of transportations and playgrounds; however, the lack of effective communication is what teachers, students, and parents complain of in the urban school. The comment of one of the students, that “There is a double faced mirror between me and the principal where we cannot see each other.” accents the concept of a lack of communication. Students believe that she always exaggerates minor incidents especially in front of their parents, and parents sometimes prefer contacting the owner who is more approachable to them.

Although the urban school principal is empathetic, highly ethical, and well educated, she is not able to reach her students because of the methods of communication which she uses. She is perceived to care more for the instructional side without considering her students’ needs of extracurricular activities. The students desire to have more democracy and to have direct communication with the principal who was a completely different person when she accompanied them during their only field trip this year. They desire their students union to be put into practice and they wish to be involved in making decisions which affect them. They want their school to mix pleasure with business and their principal to think out of the box. They finally want their school and principal to treat them as human beings rather than as financial resources.

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In fact there is wide spread belief that the principal cares for and deals with the programs not people. The principal in fact loses the sympathy of her teachers who think that she is not approachable and helpful. Most of them complain that she does not try to show her commitment to some crucial issues like medical insurance, salaries, or notification forms. The common complaint against the principal is her tense nature, which many teachers attribute to her fear of failure and fear of comparison with the former principal was believed to be strong and was beloved by all. Both teachers and students do not dare to approach the principal because they cannot predict her reactions. Teachers believe that she will not support their position if they experience difficulties at school.

Still, the principal is sometimes keen on strengthening some channels of communication with her staff members but by using mere social gatherings. The urban school principal is in fact a student centered leader; the school curriculum, training novice teachers, updating labs, and instructional supervision are her priorities. She insists on recruiting the best teachers to her school; she organizes professional training courses to empower them; she delegate some of her authority to the subject supervisor and head teachers; she is keen on appointing some senior teachers to work as mentors to the novice ones, and she is meticulous about utilizing technology at work.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings of the literature review and the visits to the rural and urban schools, it is recommended that programs for the development of school based leadership be made available to principals that will allow them to build their skills to communicate effectively with their school community on both pedagogical and collegial bases. Programs for owners of private schools should be made available that would encourage the use of professional educators to

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develop, implement, and maintain school policies related to curriculum and instruction as well as professional development and that would empower them to act freely and to expand their potential to create a new educational culture.

It is also recommended that effective communication among all the participants in the educational arena should be the base for designing and implementing any school curriculum so that each province would have a special curriculum section added suitable to the unique environment and culture of the area instead of having all using the centralized curriculum with no customization to address the culture and traditions of students in the entire country.

It is recommended that professional development sessions be made available for principals that support the implementation of the following principles and practices. Principals need to nurture their leadership traits and implement the trends of good communication by encouraging others to ask questions and to give feedback and reflections on the decision made in the school community. School principals need to build productive relationships with parents and the wider community, to carry out cognitive plans, to deepen their ideologies of care by adopting social justice and equitable education for all, to avoid any sense of discrimination and bias, to be aware of the needs of all his followers, and to rely on the principles of respect and role modeling. The school vision and mission should be fully absorbed and assimilated by everybody at school through the effective communication and endorsement of the principal who sets clear goals and works in concert with his followers to achieve them.

Orientation workshops and guidance programs should be carried out by schools' principals during summer vacation or at the beginning of the school year to foster effective communication between parents and the school.

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Finally it is recommended that further study be done on all areas of communication used by principals in a wider variety of schools, i.e., rural schools, urban schools, international schools, private schools, experimental schools, language schools, and other government schools. Greater emphasis should be placed on the examination of the effectiveness of a greater number of specific types of communication, e.g., verbal, written, nonverbal, electronic.

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### Appendix

#### Questions for Principal Interviews:

- Describe a normal day in your school.
- What type of communication tools do you utilize to disseminate your vision of learning?
- How do you communicate the traditions and values of your school's culture?
- How do you communicate decisions about the instructional programs and their relationship to student learning?
- What methods of communication have you find effective in encouraging and supporting the professional growth of your staff?

#### Questions for Focus Groups:

- From your viewpoint, how do you describe a normal day for your principal?
- What are the communication tools your principals use:
  - To disseminate his vision of learning?
  - To communicate the traditions and values of the school?
  - To discuss instructional programs and their relationship to student learning?
  - To encourage and support professional growth for staff?

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