



Preservice Teacher Leadership

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Within every school there is a sleeping giant of teacher leadership, which can be a strong catalyst from making change.

(Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001)

Why implement teacher leadership systems?

Teacher leadership is spreading across the United States. Leadership is being distributed more broadly in an effort to improve teaching and learning (Bierly, Doyle & Smith, 2016). It is believed that a cadre of teachers may have more impact in less time than a single principal (Bierly, Doyle & Smith, 2016). Teacher leadership systems also create additional career pathways for teachers which may attract and retain effective teachers (Iowa Department of Education, 2015). The NEA (2011) asserts that to retain “Gen Y” teachers in the profession, they need to participate in decision-making, collaborate with others, receive in-depth feedback and support, and have the opportunity to take on new roles and responsibilities. Although teacher leadership has been gaining favor over the past twenty years, and teacher leadership systems are being developed, teacher leadership is not well defined (York-Barr & Duke, 2004).

How can teacher education programs prepare first-year teachers who are ready to participate with, and become, teacher leaders?

I raised this question as I observed the changing landscape of PK-12 education in Iowa. In 2013, House File 215 established the Teacher Leadership and Compensation System. This bill provided funding for school districts to create teacher leadership programs that allow classroom teachers to take leadership roles as instructional coaches, model teachers, and curriculum and professional development leaders, with many still teaching in a classroom. The goals of this new structure for K-12 education are to attract and retain effective teachers, promote collaboration, reward professional growth and effective teaching and to improve student achievement by strengthening instruction. By the fall of 2016, every school district in the state of Iowa had been approved for funding and implementation of this system. Many states and districts across the country are developing thriving teacher leadership programs. For teacher preparation programs, this means that we are preparing college students to enter a new educational system that college professors have never experienced.

This question led to a semester-long sabbatical, which focused on how teacher education programs can prepare their students to enter, and lead, in teacher leadership systems. My work included six weeks immersed in teacher leadership systems within schools. I engaged with a small, rural district with declining enrollment, a moderate sized suburban district with stable enrollment, and a large suburban district with growing enrollment. I was able to observe and interview teacher leaders, administrators, and classroom teachers. I also gathered data via a state-wide survey regarding how to best prepare our candidates in teacher education programs.

What is Teacher Leadership?

Read the following definitions. Select the one that you believe best defines teacher leadership. Or circle words and phrases to create your own definition. Or write your own definition.

Teacher leaders transform their classrooms, schools, and profession, activating teacher growth and achieving equity and excellence for all students.

-Kentucky Department of Education, 2015

A teacher that both teaches students and collaboratively leads colleagues to improve their practice.

-Leading Educators, n.d.

A teacher leader is a professional educator, who, through transparent practices, acts as a change agent to build capacity in self and others to increase effective educator practices and improve student learning.

-Tennessee Department of Education, 2015

Definition of Teacher Leadership: knowledge, skills and dispositions demonstrated by teachers who positively impact student learning by influencing adults, formally and informally, beyond individual classrooms.

-Center for Strengthening the Teaching Profession, 2009

A teacher leader is defined as a teacher that both teaches students and collaboratively leads colleagues to improve their practice. They work with other teachers and with school, district, and state leaders to advance goals connected to improving student outcomes. These teacher leaders have clearly defined roles, responsibilities, and key competencies for success. They have demonstrated effectiveness with students and mastery of key teacher leadership competencies.

-Leading Educators, n.d.

Teacher leaders are, "experienced professionals who have earned the respect of their students and colleagues and have gained a set of skills that enable them to work effectively and collaboratively with colleagues. They work closely with principals who have been trained to develop and implement effective mechanisms of support for teachers and teacher leaders.

-National Education Association, 2011

The term teacher leadership refers to that set of skills demonstrated by teachers who continue to teach students but also have an influence that extends beyond their own classrooms to others within their own school and elsewhere. It entails mobilizing and energizing others with the goal of improving the school's performance of its critical responsibilities related to teaching and learning. This does not occur because of the role of the leader as boss, but rather because the individual is informed and persuasive.

-Charlotte Danielson, 2006

What skills do our candidates need?

Information from the field and the survey identified a clear path to teacher leadership preparation for pre-service teachers. They need to grapple with the idea of leadership and their own skills. They need an introduction to teacher leadership systems. They must be able to participate in genuine collaboration, and must have extraordinary communication skills to do so. They also need to be prepared to engage in “enlightened teaching.”

Leadership

What is leadership? What leadership skills do I possess?

Teacher Leadership

What is teacher leadership? How are teacher leadership systems structured? What roles are present in teacher leadership systems?

Collaboration

How can I use group processes for professional learning? How do effective teams work?

Communication

How can I communicate for effective dialogue with my colleagues?

Enlightened Teaching

As I interviewed teachers, teacher leaders and administrators, several words surfaced to describe a teacher who was ready to participate with teacher leaders...growth mindset, reflective, coachable, willing to ask for help, flexible, open to ideas/feedback/change, ability to adapt, willing to take risks, problem-solvers, continuous improvement and grit. These same thoughts were reflected in the responses to open-ended responses on the survey.

What word could capture these ideas related to teaching? ENLIGHTENED! Enlighted means illuminated, well-informed, sophisticated, open-minded, broad-minded (progressive, unbiased), refined, and cultivated (improve, better, elevate). Enlightened teaching reflects the type of teacher that embraces teacher leadership.

For materials related to teaching these skills, please visit the website:

<https://sites.google.com/site/preserviceteacherleadership/home>

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