
1

Understanding Teacher Leadership

Being a teacher leader means sharing and representing relevant and key ideas of our work as teachers in contexts beyond our individual classrooms so as to improve the education of our students and our ability to provide it for them.

Ariel Sacks, Eighth Grade Teacher Leader

Hardworking educators struggle every day within a system that was not designed for the needs of today's students. In spite of the skepticism of the public and the ensuing policy reports that reveal failures within our educational system, most teachers are committed to searching for answers to improve student outcomes, although other demands compete for their attention. The unending need to find social services for students and their families, competitive challenges from advocates of charter schools and school vouchers, and the dwindling numbers of capable individuals who want to become teachers and school administrators create distractions from the challenge committed educators face in improving student learning.

Over the last 25 years, the massive number of reports on how to improve schools influenced policymakers to pass legislation placing

pressure on educators to provide quality education for all students. Few would disagree with this goal. Many would argue, though, that the goal cannot be accomplished by simply raising standards, creating and implementing more outcome measures, and holding students, teachers, and administrators ever more accountable for test scores. Research on the impact of the accountability movement (Darling-Hammond & Prince, 2007; Wechsler et al., 2007) has helped us understand that investing in teachers and their learning, rather than creating more tests, is a better investment for improving student outcomes. Unlike well-intentioned policymakers who persist in their search for “silver bullet” legislation to reform schools, savvy parents already know that the focus of reform efforts should be on the classroom teacher, who can make the most difference in their children’s learning.

After mixed results with accountability measures, externally designed reform programs, and reward/punishment systems meant to exact higher test scores, the focus is turning toward individual classrooms and teacher quality (*Education Week*, 2008). To improve teacher quality, teachers need to learn to teach better. So attention has shifted to professional development, formerly an occasional experience for most teachers that is now a frequent obligation for every teacher regardless of the relevance for the teacher. Vendors, district administrators, school reform leaders, and others provide menus of professional development; some reflect quality, but many violate even the rudimentary standards for effective professional development. Wechsler et al. (2007), in a study of teaching in California, reported that this state does not have a coherent approach to ensuring that teachers have the knowledge and skills to be effective, and this conclusion would most likely also be true in every state.

Perhaps the answers to concerns about education rest in the potential of a leadership structure that taps into everyone’s talents within the school community, especially the teachers. There cannot be significant progress within an educational system in which hierarchical control separates managers (school principals) from workers (teachers). Leadership must be “embedded in the school community as a whole” (Lambert, 1998, p. 5). The notion of the principal as the only leader is evolving into a clearer understanding of the leadership roles that teachers must take if our schools are to be successful.

Within every school there is a *sleeping giant* of teacher leadership that can be a strong catalyst for making changes to improve student learning. By using the energy of teacher leaders as agents of school change, public education will stand a better chance of ensuring that “every child has a high quality teacher” (Wehling, 2007, p. 14). We

can call upon the leadership of teachers—the largest group of school employees and those closest to the students—to ensure a high level of teacher quality by bringing their vast resources to bear on continuously improving the schools. By helping teachers recognize that they are leaders, by offering opportunities to develop their leadership skills, and by creating school cultures that honor their leadership, we can awaken this sleeping giant of teacher leadership.

In order to do this, we begin in this chapter to examine how teacher leadership emerged. Then we share our expanded definition of teacher leadership. To illustrate the definition, we provide three examples of teacher leaders who struggle with universal dilemmas teacher leaders face. We next invite teachers to assess their inclination to be teacher leaders using the Readiness for Teacher Leadership instrument. Finally, we suggest that everyone has a responsibility to support teacher leaders, because teacher leaders cannot do it alone within the existing system.

Teacher Leadership Emerges

When we wrote the first edition of this book in the mid-1990s, the concept of “teacher leadership” was relatively unknown. We discovered the importance of teacher leadership in our work with principals and school improvement. Principals who learned with teachers about school reform were more likely to transfer their learning from professional development workshops to the work in their schools. Unfortunately, though, many of the principals were transferred to other schools, and the initiatives at their previous schools fell to whims of the next principal. The teachers who had been colearners with their former principals were disillusioned and powerless to sustain their work. We wondered how systems could be built to sustain school improvement initiatives over time in spite of who sat in the principal’s office. We dreamed that in every school, there would be a critical mass of positive teacher leaders who had the knowledge, skills, and beliefs to maintain the momentum of school improvement that influenced student learning. The gap between our dream for teacher leadership and the reality of school leadership structures has been an obstacle for over 20 years.

In spite of these obstacles, today, teacher leadership is emerging, and in many schools teacher leaders are finding their voices. Previously, if we asked a principal to identify teacher leaders, most often there were long hesitations and tentative responses; finally principals responded

by identifying the textbook chairperson or the team leader. Yet they did not consider these teachers as “real” leaders, and certainly the teachers in those positions did not see themselves as leaders. Currently, “teacher leadership” is a more familiar term as evidenced by the vast growth of the numbers of instructional leadership positions, the inclusion of teacher leadership in standards for teachers, collaborative work across states on licensure for teacher leaders, and the proliferation of teacher leadership literature.

A primary reason that teacher leader positions are emerging is that school systems recognize that the professional development offered to teachers does not result in changed teacher behavior in the classroom unless follow-up coaching and support are offered. Teacher leaders with titles such as literacy coach, mentor, and lead teacher provide on-site assistance for teachers. As teachers take on leadership roles, they are uniting and reaching out beyond their classrooms to influence educational policy through professional networks, such as the Teacher Leaders Network (www.teacherleaders.org) that spans the United States.

Meanwhile, the number of journals, research reports, and books focused on teacher leadership is growing (Mangin & Stoelinga, 2008). We hear from many doctoral students who are engaged in writing dissertations that study teacher leadership and its impact. Although important first steps are underway, we look forward to the unleashing of leadership talent within every school as the norm.

To tap into the potential of teacher leadership requires moving beyond changing policy, enforcing mandates, and offering professional development. These reform strategies are relatively easy compared to the challenges of guaranteeing teacher quality in every classroom, ensuring effective principal leadership, and engaging teachers in meaningful leadership responsibilities. To reach these goals, we must overcome three obstacles. First, the structure of school and school system leadership must be examined. Next, there must be a shift from the old norms of teaching in isolation and focusing on just “my students.” Finally, many teachers must recognize that a broader role of teacher leadership is open and available to those who wish to assume the responsibilities. Teaching is basically a “flat” profession (Danielson, 2007, p. 14), in which a teacher’s responsibilities can remain the same from the first day of teaching until retirement regardless of the level of expertise gained over the years. Although many teachers engage in collaborative work and practice shared decision making to expand their circle of influence to *all* students and *all* teachers in *their* schools, too many teachers and administrators

work in parallel universes, where formal leadership still rests in the principal's office and teacher leadership is haphazard at best.

While teacher leadership is no longer an unknown idea, it is "sometimes touted, but [it is] rarely fully realized" (Berry, Norton, & Byrd, 2007, p. 48). In our work with teacher leaders, we wondered why teachers are hesitant to be called leaders even when they are active in leadership activities. Regardless of the region of the country, we found three major reasons for their reluctance. First, the quality of teacher leadership depends on the culture of the school. Teachers describe school contexts that do not encourage them to be leaders. Often teachers who are motivated to become leaders will leave these unsupportive school cultures and will seek out schools more conducive to their leadership aspirations. A second concern is that teachers feel they do not have the skills to lead other adults. While principals and other leaders are required to learn leadership skills, teachers rarely are engaged in building these skills. Finally, the egalitarian norms of school cultures suggest that all teachers should be equal. This strong norm discourages teachers from drawing attention to themselves. Fearing the reactions of their colleagues, teachers hesitate to be singled out of the group in an environment that has valued treating all teachers the same (Johnson & Donaldson, 2007). All of these factors impede the progress of teacher leadership. As teacher leadership becomes more widely accepted in some schools, the culture of teaching has more readily embraced leadership from peers (Mackenzie, 2007).

Teacher leadership is essential for the level of complex change schools face. In order to advance these roles for teachers, it is necessary for proponents to be clear about what teacher leadership is.

Definition of Teacher Leadership

There is common agreement that we are a long way from a widespread understanding of teacher leadership. Confusion about definitions and expectations of teacher leaders abound (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Just what does teacher leadership look like? Who are teacher leaders? In the past, when we visited groups that were interested in teacher leadership, there was a request for time to clarify the concept of teacher leadership. Now we face a different predicament. Since teacher leadership is popular in the educator's professional jargon, there is a reluctance to examine the concept, because everyone believes he or she knows what it means. Regardless of the interest or lack of

interest in defining teacher leadership, we believe a dialogue about the definition provides the foundation for a common understanding in order to promote and support teacher leaders.

We arrived at our definition of teacher leadership after a review of the educational literature, careful consideration of our experiences, and much conversation with teacher leaders, principals, and others. This definition continues to evolve as we continue our exploration and learning. Our definition is teachers leaders lead within and beyond the classroom; identify with and contribute to a community of teacher learners and leaders; influence others toward improved educational practice; and accept responsibility for achieving the outcomes of their leadership.

Lead Within and Beyond the Classroom

The professional teacher is first of all competent in the classroom through the facilitation of students' learning. Teacher leadership is allowed by other teachers when the teacher is perceived as a capable teacher of students. Little (1995) cited legitimacy for leadership as a prerequisite for teacher leaders in their influence of peers. This legitimacy can only be given by other teachers and not by a positional title. Teachers we meet clearly accept this part of the leadership role, and some even recognize that they can transfer many classroom skills to their work with peers. Teachers can be leaders of change beyond their classrooms by accepting more responsibility for helping colleagues to achieve success for all of the students and for the total school program.

The level of involvement in teacher leadership beyond the classroom depends on the context of the school and the school system as well as the teacher's willingness. Most important, teachers do not have to divorce themselves from focusing on teaching and learning to be leaders. In the past, a commonly held belief was that if you were a teacher, the only way to become a leader was to leave the classroom and possibly the school (Barth, 1988; Boyer, 1983). Few teachers are attracted to school administration, and if they prepare for this role, it is because administration appears to be their only option for affecting students more broadly. The goal of becoming an administrator as the only way of getting ahead in education is giving way to teachers finding other outlets for their leadership both inside and outside their schools.

There are differences of opinion about teachers becoming leaders by taking responsibilities outside classrooms they consider their own. When we first started working with teacher leadership,

we advocated for teachers to continue to teach while contributing beyond the classroom. We feared that teacher leaders might lose their connection to the classroom. With the emerging formal roles for teacher leaders, such as those of math coach or full time mentor of new teachers, we acknowledge that teacher leaders may leave the classroom and remain quite effective in working with other teachers. Their work is still focused on the improvement of teaching and learning, but within their colleagues' classrooms. Time demands and increased workload make it difficult for some teacher leaders to remain full time in the classroom and also to take on demanding leadership roles. Formal teacher leader roles can enable teachers to be valuable contributors to school improvement as long as the teacher leaders are not pulled into quasi-administrative responsibilities that take them away from the focus on teaching and their authentic relationships with colleague teachers.

Leadership, of course, is not limited to a selected group of lead teachers or master teachers. Teachers who choose not to leave the classroom and instead to assume informal leadership roles within the school are equally valued and powerful. Drawing from their expertise and passion for teaching, these teachers influence other teachers informally through having casual conversations, sharing materials, facilitating professional development, or simply extending an invitation for other teachers to visit their classrooms.

Teacher leadership roles empower teachers to realize their professional worth while still maintaining the centrality of their teaching roles (Stone, Horejs, & Lomas, 1997). Although some teacher leaders may seek administrative roles, most teachers in leadership roles do not view these opportunities as steps up the ladder to the administrative ranks. These teachers want to remain close to students and are willing to assume leadership roles that will affect decisions related to their daily practice with those students.

Contribute to a Community of Learners and Leaders

Leading beyond the classroom provides an opportunity for teachers to interact with other adults in the school. Ackerman and Mackenzie (2007) suggested that teacher leaders "live for the dream of feeling part of a collective, collaborative enterprise" (p. 237). If this dream is realized, teachers learn within the school's professional community. Barth (2001) suggested that there is a "powerful relationship between learning and leading" (p. 445). Although the concept of professional learning communities emerged as a logical way to engage the adults

in the school in their own learning, the realization of this type of school culture is relatively rare. Developing a professional learning community is more difficult than most people realize. Yet when teacher leaders do join a community of learners and leaders, in contrast to an elitist group, it opens up opportunities for every teacher to be a part of the community.

Teacher leaders, though, know the value of working with their peers in “communities of practice” (Lieberman & Miller, 2004, p. 22) or their own professional learning communities. Within these settings, teachers are learning in social context rather than only learning individually (Stein, Smith, & Silver, 1999). Teacher leadership develops naturally among professionals who learn, share, and address problems together.

When teacher leaders and principals expand professional learning communities to include the entire school, then all teachers are included in the professional learning. Hord’s (2003) examination of professional learning communities reveals that teacher leaders are partners with the formal school leaders in their efforts to improve teaching and learning. Five dimensions emerge as attributes of schools that are professional learning communities. The dimensions are

1. Supportive and shared leadership: School administrators participate democratically with teachers—sharing power, authority, and decision making.
2. Shared values and vision: School administrators and teachers share visions for school improvement that have an undeviating focus on student learning and that are consistently referenced for the staff’s work.
3. Collective learning and application of learning: Faculty and staff collective learning and application of the learning (taking action) create high intellectual learning tasks and solutions to address student needs.
4. Supportive conditions: School conditions and human capacities support the staff’s arrangement as a professional learning organization.
5. Shared personal practice: Peers review and give feedback on teacher instructional practice in order to increase individual and organizational capacity. (Hord, 2003, p. 7)

Teacher leaders thrive in professional learning communities that exhibit these attributes. Credible teachers are empowered to assume

leadership roles with the support of their peers. A critical mass of teacher leaders engaged in a professional learning community can often maintain momentum in a school's improvement efforts even during changes in formal, administrative leadership. The lack of continuity of leadership in schools and school districts makes maintaining reforms difficult (Fullan, 2005), but a professional learning community provides the best buffer we have to prevent this level of disturbance to sustainability of improvement efforts.

Teacher leaders also reach outside their schools to a wider professional community. Participation in national educational projects, professional organizations, and other external school reform movements provide teachers with networks of other teacher leaders who reinforce improved teaching practices. Lieberman and Wood (2003) documented the value of teacher involvement in external networks. These communities of learners and leaders can be the impetus for teachers to realize that their leadership skills are valuable and can give them the courage to lead within their own school while developing both professional expertise and leadership skills.

Finally, teacher leaders know how to build alliances and networks in order to accomplish their work (Crowther, 2008). These connections help them to pull together the necessary people, funding, and other resources to support their action plans. They know the social dynamics within the school and how to connect like-minded people as well as work with the skeptics. Depending on the health of the school culture, teacher leaders can build community and collaboratively find ways to make a difference for students.

Influence Others Toward Improved Practice

Teacher leaders influence others toward improved educational practice. A key word in our notion of teacher leadership is *influence*. There is probably not another profession that provides more practice in influencing than teaching, in which students are influenced daily by their teachers. The art of transferring these skills into work with colleagues, although complex, can be learned by teacher leaders.

Leadership is influencing. Teacher leaders are approachable and influence primarily through their relationships, which become the foundation upon which teacher leaders are able to share and learn with others. Silva, Gimbert, and Nolan (2000) found in their study of teacher leaders that building relationships was critical in their work. Also, Mooney (1994) reported descriptions of teacher leaders by other teachers. Teacher leaders were described as hardworking, involved

with innovation, motivating students with a variety of abilities, and available to other teachers.

Formal positions are not necessary to influence others. In fact, teachers collaborating with their colleagues are just as effective in influencing others as are individuals with formal titles who carry the power of a position (Lambert, 2003). Motivating colleagues toward improved practice relies on the personal influence of competent teachers who have positive relationships with other adults in the school. In every school there are teacher leaders who show initiative, willingly experiment with new ideas, and then share their experiences with others.

Colleagues are influenced if leaders exhibit behaviors they advocate. Teacher leaders may engage in “reaching out to others with encouragement, technical knowledge to solve classroom problems, and enthusiasm for learning new things” (Rosenholtz, 1989, p. 208). Successful teacher leaders we know are consummate learners who pay attention to their own development and model continuous learning. Sharing information and visibly improving their own practice gives teacher leaders endorsement in their work with other teachers. Teachers who are credible to their peers, who are continuous learners, and who pass relevant information about best practices to others influence their colleague teachers. While teacher leaders are working in professional communities, they are, in turn, influenced by other teachers.

This attribute of teacher leadership is the most difficult to accomplish within a teacher culture that does not easily acknowledge that a colleague may have knowledge to share. The delicate balance of relationships is a constant challenge for teacher leaders who want to influence others to work together toward the goal of improved practice. Unless this balance is achieved, teachers can remain isolated except to share “war stories” about their daily interactions with students, parents, and even administrators.

Accept Responsibility for Achieving Outcomes

Leadership assumes accountability for results. This is a new component in our definition, and when we have shared it with different groups of leaders, there has been universal agreement that taking responsibility for one’s leadership is crucial for teacher leadership to be taken seriously. One teacher shared, “If we design the leadership role, we are also obligated to accept the accountability that comes with it.” As a result of these kinds of conversations with teacher leaders, the definition is expanded to include this component.

Teachers often enter leadership roles by recognizing an area for improvement and then addressing the issue. This passion for finding solutions can lead to multiple and extensive ideas that require a high level of energy and more time than is available. For these reasons and many others, teachers can become discouraged and desert the plans midstream. In contrast, teacher leaders take responsibility for follow-through on commitments and for achieving outcomes.

An effective teacher leader sets the resolution of a pressing concern as a goal, gathers data to support the need for change, engages like-minded colleagues, and secures resources to make changes. Keeping the vision of a better world for students, teacher leaders persist to find ways to achieve their goals. Tichy warned us that “vision without execution equals hallucination” (Harris, 2003, ¶ 6). So teacher leaders move beyond vision, take action, and are responsible for the outcomes.

Persistence is the key to their success. With limited formal power, even in a formal role, teacher leaders know that they have to rely on their personal power to influence others, and they rarely let go of the desire to achieve desired outcomes. Ferren (2000) suggested that it takes “random acts of responsibility” committed each day to be a leader (¶ 1). Teacher leaders may achieve only partial success, but they recognize that “half a loaf” is an incremental step and may lead to an ultimate solution (Barth, 2007, p. 25).

In a study of effective professional learning communities, teachers reported that one of the most important types of support the principal provided was consistent follow-through on decisions (Moller et al., 2000). If this is true for principals, then it also applies to teacher leadership. Trust is built through experience with how much you can depend on another person. Follow-through on leadership responsibilities is important for ensuring that the principal and other teachers have trust in a teacher leader. As we have discussed teacher leadership with principals, we have found that one of the primary reasons for hesitating to share leadership is that these principals experienced disappointment when teachers became excited about a project, made a commitment to take the lead, and then did not follow through. Not only are teacher leaders accountable, but they also hold the same expectations for their colleagues.

This definition of teacher leadership helps teachers to think differently about leadership and encourages teachers to consider leadership in their schools. In contrast to an authoritarian model of leadership, this definition more closely parallels what many teachers do already. It gives them confidence to acknowledge that they are or can be leaders and still maintain their relationships with their peers.

With this definition in mind, we share descriptions of three potential teacher leaders. Each teacher faces challenges to stepping up to a leadership role.

Three Potential Teacher Leaders

Descriptions of three potential teacher leaders illustrate the promise of rousing the giant of teacher leadership. Most educators will recognize these situations as typical.

Latonya

An elementary teacher for five years, Latonya experienced what she believed to be an excellent preservice preparation program at a nearby university. She entered the profession with knowledge of content, instructional strategies, and communication skills that help her interact effectively with students, parents, and her peers. Latonya works with experienced teachers in a school that is governed by a school leadership team that includes teachers, parents, and administrators as well as several local community members. Latonya plans and teaches with a team of fourth grade teachers whose students meet with success. She mentors preservice teachers from the nearby university on a regular basis. Her principal recognizes her competence and often recommends her to serve on committees in the school district. She has visited other schools to observe innovations. She is encouraged by the feedback she gets from parents on her work with their children. Often she visits families in their homes when parents find it difficult to attend parent-teacher conferences.

Currently, Latonya wrestles with the role she takes in the school's change efforts. She worries about how other teachers perceive her. Do they suspect that she is hoping to move into administration, even though her real motivation is to improve daily life at school for her students and her colleagues? Latonya wonders how other teachers will react if she offers to facilitate a study group so that teachers can share ideas and materials from the professional reading they are doing. Sometimes Latonya thinks she is too assertive in meetings and wonders if she may offend her colleagues by proposing too many changes. Last week she feared she was intimidating other teachers on the school improvement team. How much leadership she should exert is a concern for Latonya.

George

Recognizing the unlimited possibilities of teacher leadership would also be helpful for George, a music teacher who works in an urban high school. Two years ago, George left his vocation of performing with a band to become a teacher. A dedicated and competent professional teacher, George is pleased he made the switch but experiences frustration with the lack of change in the traditional high school where he teaches. George meets obstacles when he tries to persuade others that his music program should be expanded further to meet student needs. When he joined the school advisory committee, he found that little was accomplished. His experience in working outside the school in the community would, he thinks, really help facilitate the work of this committee.

After two years as a classroom teacher, he decided to pursue a master's degree. George would also like to share and to apply knowledge he is gaining in his graduate courses to the problems faced in his high school. Test scores at his school could be improved; student drop-out rates are alarming. There is much improvement needed in his school. He feels that, except within the fine arts department, his colleagues will neither listen to his thinking nor value his expertise. He hesitates to step forward, though he thinks he has something to contribute. George ponders whether his principal and his colleagues will be supportive of his leadership on schoolwide issues.

Miranda

Miranda is a special education teacher in a middle school. Over 20 years ago, she started teaching with most of the same teachers in this school. Two new middle schools opened recently in the district, and attendance boundaries changed. Her school's student population also changed drastically. Rather than the middle-class suburban population that Miranda and her colleagues have worked with for years, they are now teaching students from neighborhoods where poverty, unstable family structures, and substance abuse are prevalent. The students do not respond well to the curriculum and instructional strategies of the past. Miranda knows that the demands of a diverse student population require change in her school. She feels alone in this belief. She wants to help her colleagues cope with the new challenges they face rather than join them in doing things the way they have always done them. She recently was awarded certification from the National Board for

Professional Teaching Standards and has gained confidence in her ability as a teacher leader.

Miranda would like to lead discussions with her colleagues to invite them to solve instructional problems they face. Possibly she will talk to her principal about trying to find time for professional development activities targeted to middle school strategies. She would like to initiate some coteaching inclusion strategies with a regular education colleague. She believes these approaches can help teachers cope with the changes in their student population. She feels ready to step out and exercise her leadership, but she wonders how much impact she will have on reluctant teachers who seem to value maintaining the status quo.

Dilemmas similar to those of Latonya, George, and Miranda are not unusual. These teachers can play an even broader leadership role in the improvement of teaching and learning in their schools. However, administrators, other teachers, and, most important, the structures of schools may not support the contributions such teachers could make. Not seeing teacher leadership as a legitimate activity supported by others may keep teachers like these from contributing in significant ways to change in their schools.

We view the roles available to teachers like Latonya, George, and Miranda broadly. The sheer number of possible roles for teacher leaders in schools and districts lends credence to the idea that there truly is a huge untapped resource in schools. Surprisingly, though, many of these teachers do not see themselves as leaders unless opportunities are provided for them to reflect on their potential to lead.

Readiness for Teacher Leadership

Teachers benefit from conversations designed to raise their awareness about teacher leadership. This discussion is prerequisite to teachers thinking about their development as teacher leaders. In school systems, district staff members often ask us to help principals identify teacher leaders. How do we know who is a teacher leader or has the potential to be a teacher leader? It is easy to identify the formal teacher leaders, because they have titles and assigned responsibilities. The informal leaders are the teachers who practice their craft in subtle ways that may not be obvious to others. We use three adjectives to help teachers and administrators identify potential teacher leaders: *competent*, *credible*, and *approachable*. Teachers usually know which teachers are competent within their classrooms, and this naturally establishes them as credible. Being approachable is a critical characteristic. There are some teachers

who are competent and credible but who choose to work as individuals rather than in collaboration with others. The ability to build positive relationships is critical to becoming a teacher leader.

A valuable conversation can be initiated by raising an individual teacher's awareness about his or her potential for leadership or about recognition of fellow colleagues as potential leaders. Am I a teacher leader? Do I have the potential to be a teacher leader? What characteristics do teachers need to have to become leaders? Which of my fellow teachers might also be identified as leaders? If answering these questions helps teachers more fully understand teacher leadership, then they may be ready to explore their own development as leaders and support the development of their colleagues.

One strategy to begin exploring teacher leadership is to use the instrument in Figure 1.1. This is an instrument to measure readiness for teacher leadership. Once teachers are open to considering that it is their responsibility to be leaders, the checklist is a tool to generate conversation around the concept. We use this instrument as we work with groups of teachers who are relatively unfamiliar with the idea of teacher leadership. It is useful for groups of preservice teachers or experienced teachers.

Who Is Responsible?

The responsibility for the development of teacher leaders is not limited to a single individual or group. Too often, the entire obligation is placed on the shoulders of the school principal. Others share in this responsibility. Teachers, superintendents, and district administrators, as well as leaders in colleges and universities, can be excellent advocates for teacher leadership.

Teachers

Teachers are responsible for the support of teacher leadership. The giant cannot be awakened without teacher leaders inviting others to join together in a community of leaders. By establishing collaborative relationships among faculty members, teachers begin to take the first step toward establishing an environment in which teacher leadership can thrive. The social relationships of teachers within a school are powerful determiners of how teachers assuming leadership roles will be viewed. Members of powerful cliques within a school can encourage or inhibit teachers who are willing to take on leadership roles.

Figure 1.1 Teacher Leadership Readiness Instrument

<i>Assessing Your Readiness for</i>					
Teacher Leadership					
Respond to the following statements in terms of how strongly you agree or disagree	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	No Opinion	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. My work as a teacher is both meaningful and important.					
2. Individual teachers should be able to influence how other teachers think about, plan for, and conduct their work with students.					
3. Teachers should be recognized for trying new teaching strategies whether they succeed or fail.					
4. Teachers should decide on the best methods of meeting educational goals set by policymaking groups (e.g., school boards, state departments of education).					
5. I am willing to observe and provide feedback to fellow teachers.					
6. I would like to spend time discussing my values and beliefs about teaching with my colleagues.					
7. It is important to me to have the respect of the administrators and other teachers at my school.					

Respond to the following statements in terms of how strongly you agree or disagree	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	No Opinion	Agree	Strongly Agree
8. I would be willing to help a colleague who was having difficulty with his or her teaching.					
9. I can see the points of view of my colleagues, parents, and students.					
10. I would give my time to help select new faculty members for my school.					
11. I try to work as a facilitator of the work of students in my classroom and of colleagues in meetings at my school.					
12. Teachers working collaboratively should be able to influence practice in their schools.					
13. I can continue to serve as a classroom teacher and become a leader in my school.					
14. Cooperating with my colleagues is more important than competing with them.					
15. I would give my time to help plan professional development activities at my school.					
16. My work contributes to the overall success of our school program.					

(Continued)

Figure 1.1 (Continued)

Respond to the following statements in terms of how strongly you agree or disagree	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	No Opinion	Agree	Strongly Agree
17. Mentoring new teachers is part of my responsibility as a professional teacher.					
18. School faculty and university faculty can mutually benefit from working together.					
19. I would be willing to give my time to participate in making decisions about such things as instructional materials, allocation of resources, student assignments, and organization of the school day.					
20. I value time spent working with my colleagues on curriculum and instructional matters.					
21. I am very effective in working with almost all of my colleagues.					
22. I have knowledge, information, and skills that can help students be successful.					
23. I recognize and value points of view that are different from mine.					
24. I am very effective in working with almost all of my students.					
25. I want to work in an environment where I am recognized and valued as a professional.					

Assessing Your Readiness for Teacher Leadership**Scoring Protocol**

1. Count the number of times you chose "strongly disagree."
Multiply by minus two (-2), and write the number here: _____
2. Count the number of times you chose "disagree."
Multiply by minus one (-1), and write the number here: _____
3. Ignore the number of times you chose "no opinion."
4. Count the number of times you chose "agree."
Write the number here: _____
5. Count the number of times you chose "strongly agree."
Multiply by two (2), and write the number here: _____
6. **Write the sum of these four numbers here:** _____

If the number on line 6 is between 35 and 50

Virtually all of your attitudes, values, and beliefs parallel those related to teacher leadership.

If the number on line 6 is between 20 and 34

The majority of your attitudes, values, and beliefs parallel those related to teacher leadership.

If the number on line 6 is between -5 and 19

Some of your attitudes, values, and beliefs parallel those related to teacher leadership. Several do not.

If the number on line 6 is -6 or below

Few of your attitudes, values, and beliefs parallel those related to teacher leadership.

School Administrators

Principals or assistant principals can encourage or discourage teacher initiative. These formal school-site leaders are critical to empowering teachers as leaders. They are the primary models for teacher leaders in the school and may effectively model leadership strategies and skills that teacher leaders can use. A principal's willingness to share power and to be a colearner with teacher leaders to improve classroom practice provides support for teacher leadership. Removing barriers, providing resources, and actively listening can be the most important tasks a principal does for teacher leaders.

Superintendents and District Staff

The school rests within a larger organization, the school district. In a two-school district or a district with hundreds of schools, the decision makers at the district level influence the learning of the adults within the entire system. The influence can be tangible, such as resources allocated to professional development, or it can be intangible, such as setting the expectation that employees will learn. Just like in schools, where principals set the tone for change, superintendents and their staffs are responsible for providing the type of support that frees and encourages schools to prepare teachers as leaders. Superintendents and other staff in a school district can legitimize the efforts of developing teacher leadership by establishing appropriate policy and district culture and by being advocates for teacher leadership.

Colleges and Universities

The role of the colleges and universities in preparing teacher leaders is significant in the continuum of teacher development. The expectation that leadership is a teacher's responsibility can be cultivated early in the undergraduate preparation of the individual (Sherrill, 1999). Collaborative arrangements, such as professional development schools or learning consortia, connect teachers with university personnel. Standards and licensure for teacher leaders are being explored in many states, so professors are beginning to examine the content of their courses to assure they are preparing their graduates for leadership roles. Development of knowledge, skills, beliefs, and attitudes about teacher leadership begins with the university or college preparation programs for future teachers. Graduate programs and courses are emerging across the country

specifically designed to prepare practicing teachers for leadership. The leadership skills are as important in these programs as the curriculum and instruction content. After the teacher leaves the university, the goal should be to encourage that teacher to be a leader.

Conclusion

The giant resource of teacher leadership must be unleashed in the support of improved student learning. When teachers recognize that they can be leaders and accept a leading role from among the array of roles available to them, positive results in schools will follow. Teacher acceptance of leadership roles, appropriate professional development, and advocacy from formal leaders in the school system can start building a critical mass of teacher leaders to improve schools. The importance of teachers in complex, ongoing, educational change efforts cannot be overstated.

APPLICATION CHALLENGES

For Teachers

1. Help teacher colleagues to see the value of teacher leadership in improving student outcomes by opening the discussion in your school. Be positive, share your knowledge of the concept, and engage others in discussion. Emphasize the benefits to the improvement of teaching and learning for students, the retention of teachers, and the possibility to sustain change in the school setting. Work together to influence your principal's understanding of teacher leadership and its value.

2. Tap into the many resources available to develop yourself as a teacher leader (see Resource D). Professional reading, networking with other teacher leaders, and online communications can assist you in growing your understanding of teacher leadership and in building your own capacity.

For Principals

1. Build the confidence of teachers to be leaders. Make yourself available for regular interactions with prospective teacher leaders, and authentically listen to their ideas. Support teachers in initiatives

they wish to lead, and remove barriers to their success. Find ways to give incentives (e.g., release time, resources, recognition, and problem solving assistance) to teachers who are willing to take on leadership.

2. Grow professionally yourself in understanding teacher leadership and its possible impact on student outcomes in your building. Assure that you model professional learning and collaboration, and then work toward empowering the teachers rather than controlling them. Share professional readings and resources with teachers. Engage them in meaningful dialogue about teaching and learning.

For Superintendents and District-Level Administrators

1. Recognize that changes in schools are enhanced by a balance of efforts from the top down and the bottom up. Attempt to put policy and practice into place that pave the way for teacher leadership. Reflect on specific ways the school district can support teacher leaders, make resources available, and provide opportunities for networking.

2. Model leadership by working collaboratively with school administrators in ways that you would like to see principals and assistant principals work with teacher leaders. Create an understanding of teacher leadership among your building administrators, and encourage them to empower teachers in the same ways you empower your administrators.

For College and University Professors

1. Introduce the concept of teachers acting as leaders early in the preservice experience. Engage teacher education students in collaborative work, and build their skills to be fully functioning members of school cultures in which professional learning communities thrive. Emphasize the linkages between teacher collaboration and improved student outcomes.

2. Examine your curriculum and preparation programs for opportunities for preservice teachers to gain a broad perspective on formal and informal leadership opportunities for teachers. Assess the extent to which your programs are encouraging leadership rather than followership among your graduates.