

Teacher Leadership: A Literature Review

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Abstract

Various educators and scholars have carried out the studies and research on Teacher Leadership for the last two decades. Findings have significantly shown that the teacher as a leader hold the key in improving the school administration and the students. Teachers are the closest persons, next to the parents, who are the motivator, the advisor, the knowledge giver and caregiver to the students. Teachers are the source in developing and creating the teaching and learning process to be a productive and effective environment. Teachers as leaders encourage their own development and that of their colleagues. They collaborate with other teachers and share their experience to enhance their skills in teaching and in administrative work. This article describes Teacher Leadership as one of the leading factors in increasing the school and students' performance.

Keywords: Teacher leadership; Collaboration; Community; School administration; Students' achievement

1. The Beginning of Teacher Leadership

It is undeniable that teaching today is getting complex and challenging. Teachers have various roles to perform. They are the expertise in the teaching and learning of the students and are the source in making sure their organization runs accordingly. In addition, they collaboratively discuss and create instructional practices that can enhance students' learning and achievement and improve the culture in the school environment. Teachers are leaders and unfortunately most teachers are not keen to be viewed as leaders although they are the primary agent in making changes and stimulate the progress a school need. Leaders, according to Campbell, Corbally & Ramseyer (1966), who affect the behaviour of a group of people, this is true whether they occupy positions of status, belong to the power elite, make outstanding contributions in their field of endeavour, or emerge within their groups as individuals whose insights and judgements command the respect of their peers.

Thus, teacher leaders are those who can perform significantly in their field and contribute to the growth of a school. In addition, they are the people who influence the behaviour of both students and adults in the school environment. Teacher leadership is considered a factor in influencing the change in a school (Brownlee, 1979). However, there are obstacles before the teachers are accepted as teacher leaders. One of the challenges was that the principal did not view that teachers were "real" leaders and this led the teachers not to view themselves as

leaders (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2011). According to Katzenmeyer & Moller (2011), there are three obstacles to overcome in order to develop teacher leadership:

- i. The structure of school and school system leadership must be examined
- ii. The process of teaching and learning in the classroom must be shifted from the old norms of teaching in isolation and just focusing on the students
- iii. Teachers must be aware that the opportunity to recognize the broader sense of teacher leadership is available to them

Teachers should recognize that they need to go out of the classroom in their quest to create the necessary development and changes in a school. Although teacher leadership is not an unfamiliar concept, there are teachers who are uncomfortable to be noted as teacher leaders. Katzenmeyer & Moller (2011) asserted that the reluctances exist because the quality of teacher leadership depends on the culture of the school. The teachers are unable to enhance their leadership and they tend to move to another school that motivates them to implement their leadership skills. In addition, teachers are not confident enough to lead other teachers. They are not given the chance to be a part of a program that develop their leadership skills. The egalitarian practice in the school discourages teachers to project themselves as leaders and they do not want to be above their colleagues (Johnson & Donaldson, 2007). Even though, the challenges and obstacles faced by the teachers seem alarming, the focus on Teacher Leadership continues to progress. According to York-Barr & Duke (2004), teacher leadership impart vital advantages to the improvement of an organization. Teachers are the work force that run the organizational operations. They are the ones who are closest to the students. By involving teachers in decision-making, it can lead to greater ownership and commitment to organizational goals (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Teachers who are involved in decision making regarding the teaching and learning in the classroom feel empowered and important (Barth, 2001).

Teachers are experts in the teaching and learning discipline. Therefore, they are essential in education restructuring as they are the ones who have “the front-line knowledge of classroom issues and culture of schools and they understand the support they need to do their jobs well” (Paulu & Winters, 1998). Their valuable knowledge is shared among their peers and the new teachers. This formed relationship that is built among the teacher leaders and their colleagues, which create an allegiance to establish professional learning community (Hargreaves, 2002). Harris and Lambert (2003) support this and believe that a professional learning community is where a group of teachers contribute their leadership skills in decision-making, fulfilling the same goals, working collaboratively and acknowledge the accountability of their actions. Professional learning communities lead to a strong and measurable improvements in students’ learning. Instead of bringing about ‘quick fixes’ or superficial change, they create and support sustainable improvements that last overtime because they build professional skill and the capacity to keep the school progressing (Hargreaves, 2002).

Recognizing teacher leaders’ contributions to the growth of a school and the development of students’ performance is vital in retaining, recruiting and motivating teachers to continue their accomplishments (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). The discussions and interactions between teacher leaders, the administrators and colleagues lead to the understanding of achieving the same aims and objectives of the organization creatively through their formidable cooperation (Barth, 2001).

Barth (2001) commented that with the significant involvement of teacher leaders in decision making regarding the school and in teaching and learning, the students are the ones who benefitted the most in teacher leadership. Teacher leadership is necessary in establishing the essential changes a school and classrooms need to progress (Muijis & Harris, 2003). The definition of teacher leadership needs to be known clearly in order to motivate teachers to become leaders.

2. The Definition of Teacher Leadership

Over the decades, the definition of what encompasses teacher leadership has been varied and uncertain. York-Barr & Duke (2004) expressed that there is no one definite meaning of what teacher leadership is and they believed that teacher leadership have evolved over time. According to Gambert and Nolan (2000), the evolution of teacher leadership is influenced by three waves. The evolution is described as follow:

The first wave: Teachers carry out their formal duties such as department heads or managers where they are to make sure the flow of the school operations run smoothly. Wasley (1991) defined this stage as an extension of the administration, “designed [not] to change practice but to ensure the efficiency of and effectiveness of the existing system”.

The second wave: Teachers carry out their roles as experts in their field and become curriculum creators, staff developers and mentors for new teachers.

The third wave: Darling-Hammond (1988) and Silva et al. (2000) asserted that in order to promote the development of an organization, it has to support the collaboration and unremitting learning and that concedes that teachers are crucial designers and co-designers of school culture.

We believe that teachers are leaders when they function in professional learning communities to affect student learning; contribute to school improvement; inspire excellence in practice; and empower stakeholders to participate in educational improvement” (Childs-Bowen, Moller and Scrivner’s, 2000). Perhaps Crowther et al. (2002) explained a more comprehensive view on teacher leadership. Action that transforms teaching and learning in a school, that ties school and community together on behalf of learning, and that advances social sustainability and quality of life for a community...Teacher leadership facilitates principled action to achieve whole-school success. It applies the distinctive power of teaching to shape meaning for children, youth and adults. And it contributes to long-term, enhanced quality of community life Crowther et al. (2002).

Barth (2011) believes that a teacher leader:

1. gets to sit at the table with grownups as first-class citizen in the schoolhouse rather than remain the subordinate in a world full of super ordinates;
2. enjoys variety, even relief, from the often relentless tedium of the classroom; and
3. has an opportunity to work with and influence the lives of adults, as well as those of youngsters.

Teacher leaders are experts in teaching and learning to improve the ethos and instruction in schools that lead to students’ proficiency in learning. In addition, they are leaders among their colleagues in developing instructional practices, and working at the organizational level to align personnel, fiscal and material resources to improve teaching and learning (York-Barr

& Duke, 2004). Katzenmeyer & Moller (2011) definition of teacher leadership described that teacher 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.

Liberman (2013) defined teacher leadership as providing the opportunity to recognize the relationship between knowledge and practice, a way of organizing learning, a way of understanding the connections between knowledge and practice, a way of combining the explicit and tacit ways of knowing, a way of learning the skills, abilities and capabilities for developing and nurturing community among peers and finally a way of negotiating the tensions between privacy and a new view of community.

The perceptions on the definition of teacher leadership described above emphasize that the development and achievement of the students and the school culture depends on the expertise of the teachers in their teaching and learning and their valued cooperation with other teachers in designing instructional practice.

3. Teacher Leadership and Its Relationship with Other Leadership

According to York-Barr & Duke (2004), teacher leadership is closely related to four conceptions of leadership that consist of formal and informal leaders. They are participative leadership, leadership as an organizational quality, distributed leadership and parallel leadership. The connections between these four concepts of leadership lead to the emergence of teacher leadership. Leithwood & Duke (1999) recognize that teacher leadership is strongly similar to instructional and distributive leadership. Instructional leadership typically focuses on the behaviours of teachers as they engage in activities directly affecting the growth of the students. Many versions of this form of leadership focus additionally on other organizational variables (such as school culture) that are believed to have important consequences for such teacher behaviour. Participative leadership stresses the decision-making processes of the group. One school of thought within this category of leadership argues for such participation on the grounds that it will enhance organizational effectiveness. A second school rests its case for participation on democratic principles Crowther et al. (2002).

Muijis & Harris (2003) support this notion by stating that distributive leadership theory provides a notable conceptual clarity in understanding the concept of teacher leadership for three main reasons. First, it incorporates the activities of multiple groups of individual in a school who work at guiding and mobilizing staff in the instructional change process. Next, the task is delegate among teacher leaders where the leadership task is achieved through several leaders. Lastly, the leaders depend on each other and share responsibility.

All organizational members can lead and that the responsibility is distributed and shared. Gromn (2000) perceived that leadership as a flow of influence in organizations which disentangles it from any presumed connection with headship. According to York-Barr & Duke (2004), some studies support the idea that leadership leads to the sharing of roles or positions in schools. Hellen & Firestone (1995) carried out a study on the sources of leadership for implementation of a specific plan in four schools. They reported that teachers take part in formal and informal leadership functions, specifically as the source of change and in supporting each other in the process.

In conclusion, teacher leadership stems from various leadership theories. Teacher

leadership incorporates significant relationships, openness and organizing methods in enriching students' proficiency in learning (York-Barr & Duke 2004).

4. Teacher leaders: What do they do? And who are they? What do they do?

Teacher leaders are responsible in carrying out their role as leaders and as classroom teachers while fulfilling their other duties related to individual and collective leadership responsibilities (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Lieberman, Saxi and Miles (1998) through their study found out that teacher leaders' obligation was diverse and that they learn leadership skills while carrying out their responsibility. The skill was as follows:

- Fostering trust and improve rapport
- Establishing organizational conditions
- Dealing with processes
- Supervising the task
- Forming skills and confidence in others

Katzenmeyer & Moller (2011) ascertain that teacher leadership comprise leading within and outside the classroom, contribute to a community of learners and leaders, influence others toward improved practice and accept responsibility for achieving outcomes. Lead within and beyond the classroom refer to the teacher leaders in making changes outside the classroom. Katzenmeyer & Moller (2011) explained that 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. Teachers do not have to pull themselves away from the process of teaching and learning to become teacher leaders. Barth (1988) and Boyer (1983) stated that teachers are reluctant to become leaders, as they have to be away from the classroom and the school to be one.

Katzenmeyer & Moller (2011) believed that teachers who choose not to leave the classroom and instead to assume informal leadership roles within the school are equally valued and powerful. Through their expertise in teaching and learning, teacher leaders are able to influence other teachers informally through their everyday discussion, their daily routines of sharing materials and supporting professional development. Teacher leadership roles empower the teachers to believe that they are important in both leading and teaching in the classroom (Stone, Horejs & Iomas, 1997).

Creating changes outside the classroom provide the opportunity for teacher leaders to interact with other teachers in the school. These leaders and their colleagues are working together to improve the achievement of the students and the school as a whole. As mentioned earlier, the collaboration between the teacher leaders, other teachers and the formal school leaders initiated a group of professional learning communities. According to Hord (2003), there are five dimensions existed due to professional learning communities. They included:

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 vision 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: Faculty and staff collective learning and application of the learning (taking action) create high intellectual learning tasks and solutions to address students' 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.

Besides sharing their expertise within and outside the classroom, teacher leaders collaborate with other professional community. They are able to reinforce and improve their teaching practices through their involvement in national education conferences, professional organizations and teaching and learning training and workshops (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2011). The connection the teacher leaders have with other learning communities provide the chance to significantly accomplish their goals and objectives, that is, to enhance the school and the students' performance in education. Teacher leadership influence other teachers to improve their teaching practice (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2011). Teachers are one of the closest group of people that spend a substantial amount of time with the students. Students do get influenced by their teachers. The sharing of practices among the teachers allow the teachers to learn from the teacher leaders. Teacher leaders are often approachable and easy to work with. Fostering relationship with other teachers can lead to improvement as Silva, Gimbert and Nolan (2000) discovered in their study. Mooney (1994) stated that teacher leaders are diligent, innovative, encouraging students' progress and are accessible.

Katzenmeyer & Moller (2011), conclude teacher leaders influence on other teachers as 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.

Teachers often positioned themselves as teacher leaders when they are aware of what needs to be enriched and how to remedy the problem. A lot of efforts and time are usually put into amending the issues. Sometimes, teachers become discouraged and thus abandoned the task halfway. On the other hand, teacher leaders would follow through their obligation to achieve the intended result (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2011).

The discussion above regarding teacher leaders' responsibility indicates the vital of teacher leadership in developing teaching and learning in a school and consequently the improvement of students' education.

5. Who are these Teacher Leaders?

York-Barr & Duke (2004) stated that teacher leaders are both teachers and leaders. They are regarded highly by their peers because of their substantial teaching experience and are outstanding teachers. They are influential towards their co-workers and open pathways to improvement for the benefit of the students and the school. Snell and Swanson (2000) studied 10 teacher leaders for two years and deduced that the teachers respected and accepted the

subjects as leaders because of their significant expertise in teaching and learning, collaboration and their liberation in achieving their goals.

In her study on teacher leadership and the change it can bring to the school, Brownlee (1979) asserted that teacher leaders display a set of distinguishing characteristics and defined the distinctive characteristics that include:

1. The capacity to bring about moderate change in school;
2. Performance – knowledge of curriculum, instructional skills, classroom management;
3. Positive relationships with students and school-related adults;
4. Age;
5. Teaching experience;
6. Level of formal education;
7. Frequency of communication with other teachers; and
8. Years of assignment to the present school.

Brownlee affirmed that teacher leaders need to be respected in order to influence other teachers. Sharing of leadership by administrators to teacher leaders could form a school that is more efficiently and effectively maintained and improved.

Teacher leaders are individuals who have a solid and compelling experience and expertise in their field. They are recognized and respected as teachers who are successful in improving their students' learning capabilities. They are willing to work beyond the classroom to help other teachers to become experts in what they do best and that is teaching. They are the key factor in bringing change to the school environment and culture. Teacher leaders are willing to take risks and challenges to reach the intended goals for the benefit of the stakeholders.

5. Conclusion

Teacher leadership evidently contributes in the expanding growth of a school which encompasses improving students' learning ability and the school community as a whole. As teachers accept the fact that they are one of the key factors in making positive changes in a school, they need to realize that their hardwork, their eagerness to expand their teaching practices, their collaboration in the teaching community and their openness in sharing their expertise will eventually lead to a successful positive change.

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