

Why Teacher Leadership?

Patterson and Patterson (2004) define a teacher leader as a person “who works with colleagues for the purpose of improving teaching and learning whether in a formal or informal capacity”. In 2007, I proposed the use of a broader definition of a teacher leader as “a person who contributes to reaching the mission of an educational organization within or outside the classroom by sharing expertise, working collaboratively and supporting others” (Wall, 2007).

Experience has shown that teacher leaders contribute to the mission of a school in many ways including serving as members of the Teacher Council, chairing standing committees, serving as a department or program coordinator, organizing athletic, cultural and social events for students and/or staff, facilitating professional learning activities, developing or revising programs, serving on professional committees, sharing expertise with colleagues or mentoring colleagues. Teacher leadership has been an important aspect of educational organizations for many years; however, the importance of effective teacher leadership has increased significantly in recent years (Barth, 2001; Donaldson, 2001; Fullan, 2006; Lambert, 2002).

Changes Forces and Teacher Leadership

Over the past twenty years a number of international change forces have impacted educational organizations including the exponential increase in available knowledge, the widespread use of information technologies, the trend to globalization and the increased practice of comparing the educational performance of students and teachers across countries (Fullan, 2006; Hargreaves, 2009; MacBeath, 2006).

At the community level, some of the major change forces include changes in family structure, increased disparity between social groups, more frequent job changes, and the increased importance of education and lifelong learning. At the school level, we have also seen a movement towards school-based governance, increased use of standardized examinations, greater emphasis on accountability, and the downloading

of increasing administrative responsibilities to the school level. The result of these forces of educational change has been more and faster personal, professional and organizational change, which has resulted in the need for increased teacher involvement and leadership (Fullan, 2001; Hargreaves, 2009; Stoll, Bolam and Collarbone, 2002).

Benefits of Teacher Leadership

At the school level, involving teachers in decision-making, curriculum building, professional learning , and community service has been shown to help build a positive organizational culture. Moreover, formal leaders may benefit significantly from the support that they receive from teacher colleagues in dealing with the increased administrative and professional demands placed on them (Barth, 2006; Donaldson, 2001; Donaldson, 2007; Feiler, Heritage & Gallimore, 2000; Muijs & Harris, 2006; Patterson & Patterson, 2004)

Clearly, a school can benefit from increased teacher leadership but the question must be asked: what are the benefits for the teacher-leader? Recent studies have shown that when teachers are involved in leadership they feel they can shape the shared vision of their school and influence how their organization actually runs. They may also experience greater professional growth and increased recognition from their peers and the community (Barth, 2006; Donaldson, 2007; Muijs & Harris, 2006).

Given the importance and many benefits associated with enhanced teacher leadership, what are the personal and professional qualities of effective teacher-leaders? This important question will be addressed in next week's post.

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