“Teacher Leadership Development at Hebei University in China”
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INTRODUCTION
“Leadership is Influence”...John Maxwell
This definition of leadership is one of the best I have discovered in my years of school leadership. Leadership is one of the most studied, discussed and written on topics today. It is defined in many ways and applied in many styles. Questions focus on whether leaders are born or made. Does one style of leadership work better than others? What are the essential qualities for successful leadership? Maxwell’s definition of leadership hinges on being able to influence people. The key concept is that if “leaders” do not influence the people they need to lead, they are heading in a direction on their own. As a former school administrator, it became clear to me that the more leadership in a system the greater the results. An annual goal was to create an environment that fostered leadership skills in my staff. That was accomplished by building the leadership capacity of the staff through professional development, by placing staff in situations where they could exercise their skills, and by providing the resources needed for success.
In higher education, the question becomes can teacher leadership be presented so that professors can develop their leadership skills and add to the capacity and quality of the university system. This paper is the result of staff development conducted at Hebei University in Baoding China. The focus of the program was to identify the leadership skills level of the staff, create an understanding of effective leadership qualities, and identify areas where the qualities may be applied. The format for the staff development was a series of lectures conducted on site.

Why Teacher Leaders
There are different levels of leadership. The basic level is leadership by position or title. In the university setting those positions could include department head, dean of a school or central administration. A title brings certain rights and responsibility. If a leader remains at that level, their organization will not reach maximum capacity. In order to grow, a leader must build relationships with the member of their staff and thus gain permission from them to lead. Once relationships are established, people look to see if the leader can get results. Once this foundation is set, people will then let the leader develop their leadership skills. This is where the concept of Teacher Leader enters. Whether it is in the public school sector or higher education, effective leaders know that by developing their staff they build influence. A good positional leader knows that the success of their institution depends on the leadership contribution of the members of that institution. Therefore, the challenge is to create an environment that fosters leadership development.

What is the first step?
The foundation of developing leadership is establishing an understanding of effective leadership qualities. The question that begins the process is, “What are the qualities that make an effective leader?” The many times I have done this, the most frequent answers are: integrity and honesty, good decision making skills, demonstration of caring, ability to effect change, and effective communication. When the professors in China were asked these questions, their answers fit into these categories. The cornerstone of every leader’s influence is trust. Trust depends on integrity. The theory is that the only one who can destroy your trust is you. Even in difficult decisions, integrity needs to be the overriding principle. Too often leaders in an effort to please everyone will give the answers people want to hear. Truth is often
not the popular position but needs to be the preferred response if a leader is to have a foundation of trust. Establishing trust is the first step to teacher leadership. Solid trust relationships with students and colleagues will enable the teacher to take both groups to learning and instructional levels that will impact the organization. Leaders are constantly making decisions. A good decision comes when the leader gathers data relevant to the decision, analyzes the data, and makes the decision that is in the best interest of the organization, implements the decision and establishes an evaluation to determine success measures. For the teacher leader, decision making occurs in every instructional episode. A teacher leader makes teaching and learning decisions using the steps outlined above. The decision making process in the classroom translates well to decisions made within the school unit. Will you follow a person that demonstrates a lack of concern for you? You may if you are forced to do so. Having a genuine concern for the people you intend to lead will gain you great influence, an influence that can even overcome deficiencies in other leadership qualities. When people know you care about them, they will often give you the benefit of the doubt in a decision or change event. This leadership quality can only be developed through relationships. A good leader seeks to understand the life circumstances of people and remembers that all of us deal with trials and situations that impact our lives. As teacher leaders builds those relationships with their students through in and out of class interactions. With colleagues, a teacher leader is supportive and understanding. Change is imminent. We live in a world where change is occurring at a rapid rate. Technology is the most vivid example. In teaching, system change comes in the form of curriculum design, teaching pedagogy, school structure, and students learning. A good leader knows that change will happen. The challenge is to make the change effective to achieve the goal. In education it is student learning. A teacher leader has a self learning focus. They are continually seeking effective teaching strategies to improve student learning. In the school unit, the teacher leader makes change happen as opposed to letting it happen to them. That includes visioneering to identify change areas and developing the preferred successful change implementation. (Visioneering is a concept where a vision is set to a specific need as opposed to a broad vision.) All of these qualities depend on the ability to effectively communicate with the various groups. A leader needs to clearly communicate their vision and the steps for implementation. The communication must be undergirded by a foundation of trust, integrity and care. When this is established, influence will be established, and the leader will not be walking alone.

What does the research say?

The Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement created a research brief entitled “What Does the Research Tell Us About Teacher Leadership?” The information summarized came from a study conducted in 2004 titled, “What do we know about teacher leadership? Findings from two decades of scholarship.” One of the goals of the brief was to summarize the findings through a comprehensive review of the teacher leadership literature. The study defined teacher leadership as “Teacher leadership is the process by which teachers, individually or collectively; influence their colleagues, administration, and other members of the school community to improve teaching and learning practices with the aim of increased student learning and achievement.” A good teacher leader is a facilitator who seeks to strengthen the school. They accomplish this by monitoring improvement efforts, selecting and developing curriculum, providing peer coaching, becoming a change catalyst and decision maker, mentoring, and fostering culture development. Influence is developed by
teacher leaders through both formal and informal relationships.
The authors of the study claim that teacher leadership grows when optimal conditions exist in the areas of school culture and context, roles and relationships, and school structures.
School culture and context facilitate leadership growth when the school environment has the following characteristics:
- The school is focused on learning, inquiry, and reflective practice.
- Staff is encouraged to take initiatives.
- An expectation of teamwork and shared responsibility, decision making, and leadership are present.
- Teaching professionals are valued as role models.
- A strong sense of community among teachers that fosters professionalism.

Teacher leadership is nurtured through roles and relationships when:
- Colleagues recognize and respect teacher leaders who have content and instructional expertise.
- High trust and positive working relationships exist among teacher and school leadership.
- Teacher leadership work focuses on the learning process not managerial tasks.
- Teacher leader and school leader domains are clearly defined.
- Interpersonal relationships among staff and school leadership flourish.

Structure impacts teacher leadership when it provides the resources needed for the teacher leader to be successful. That includes materials, time, and space. In addition, the structure fosters growth when the school leadership believes in the importance of staff development.

The research review assisted the authors in presenting a conceptual framework for implementing and expanding teacher leadership in a school. Of the six concepts of the framework, the first three set foundation conditions for teacher leadership. They include:
- Teacher leaders are respected as teachers, want to learn leadership skills, and have the capacity to develop such skills.
- Teacher leader’s work is valued by peers, visible in the school, continually negotiated through feedback and evaluation.
- The culture within the school supports teacher leaders by providing the resources needed to be successful.

Once teacher leaders are establish in a well grounded setting they:
Maintain a focus on teaching and learning and establish trusting and constructive relationships.
Concentrate themselves with the activities that meet the goal of improved student achievement.
Produce outcomes that result in high levels of student learning and achievement.

The reality is that teacher leadership goes against the trend in a school setting that has a hierarchical leadership model. The concept goes against the cultural norms and the tradition of individualism of a school setting. This creates a set of challenges to the concept. To underscore one challenge, research review uses the metaphor of “crabbing” presented by Daniel Duke. The metaphor equates the teaching culture with the concept of crabbing where the crab fishermen do not need to place a lid on the crab bucket. This is the result of the other crabs pulling any crab that tries to escape back into the trap. This is the mentality that many perspective teachers face in their school. The culture of no one standing out and no one being poor is a large barrier to the goal. Other challenges include how the teacher leader approaches the task. They need to work in a collaborative style versus an authoritative. The method of teacher leader selection can create a hurdle. Who and how they are selected can create issues. An effective
teacher leader may not be the most senior staff member or the most popular and if they are selected without staff input they are the leader’s pet.
The bottom line of the study is that we do not have a wealth of research on the topic of teacher leadership. They do conclude that because of the high expectations on schools, fostering teacher leadership seems prudent and that traditional forms of management must be more horizontal and less vertical for teacher leadership to be successful.

**Teacher Leadership Development**

**Phase 1.**
The instruction on teacher leadership was conducted with professors from the university. The format was a series of seven (7) teaching lessons over a period of two years. The objectives for the instruction included creating an understanding of leadership, of the key qualities of an effective leader, and of key skills of a leader. In addition, the instruction included teaching of several teaching strategies. The foundation for the leadership skills was based on a work by John Maxwell entitled, “Developing the Leader Within You.” The content for the teaching strategies came from years of staff development presented over my administrative career.
The initial activities included a brainstorming think-pair-share on the qualities the professors believe were important for successful leadership. A list was generated and the result was a definition that leadership is the ability to influence people. All of the traits identified fit under that definition. The concept of influence and how a teacher can influence people in the system became critical to the remaining lectures.
Once the concept of leadership was established, the participants completed a leadership inventory. This gave the professors insight into the various leadership styles, the characteristics of each style, and an indication of their predominate style of leadership.

The next step in the learning experience was to conduct a series of lessons on key leadership points. For each leadership concept, the focus was how as teacher leaders they can impact their students and their system in a positive manner. The concepts discussed included: Levels of Leadership, Setting Priorities, Integrity and Character, Change, Problem Solving, and Decision Making

**Phase 2:**
The second phase of teacher leadership development focused on Professional Learning Communities. Using online communication a group of 8 professors from Hebei University and California University of PA met to discuss topics related to teaching and learning. The result was a PLC that worked as a team to enhance teaching. This step was a result of Phase 1 of the program that identified the use of online staff development to develop teacher leaders.
The first session of the PLC used an article on teamwork as a basis for discussion. The session stressed the need for teamwork to be an effective learning community. This session was followed by an online discussion regarding the planning of lessons. At this point, a Wiki was introduced into the program. The Wiki enabled us to post sample lesson plans and to make comments. The third session focused on assessment. The discussion dealt with traditional assessments of English as a Second Language learners and how assessments could be varied effectively.

**Research Results**
The participants in the PLC were asked to share their insights into the benefits of the experience. This was accomplished via email with participants sharing their thoughts answering questions about the PLC experience. The questions asked simply were what did you learn from the PLC discussion and what questions do you have. After the first session
on teamwork, participants commented on the need for teamwork and referred to their cooperative learning experiences. Concerns expressed centered on the challenges of time, staff commitment and the resources needed to be successful. The topic for the second session was lesson planning. The team members expressed their desire to implement the techniques of lesson design, backward design and their components. The challenges included implementing some of the suggestions. They felt that a slow implementation was best for their situation. The next session dealt with student assessment. Responses expressed a desire to vary the assessments of students and supported the need to assess students frequently in both the written and oral format. Teachers expressed concern about the time required to assess frequently and a lack of confidence in their ability to implement the suggestions.

Conclusions
The results of the data indicate that a foundation is being set in the area of teacher leadership and that it is impacting the teaching of the participants. With the implementation of PLC, teachers seem to be more confident in their abilities. They are willing to try new techniques because of their commitment to student learning. This desire will translate into improved student achievement. The next step in the process is to increase the roles of teacher leadership and to expand the implementation of PLC in the university. This will be accomplished by a follow up visit by an American professor to observe the implementation of the various techniques and a continuation of the PLC sessions.

The key question is “What should that look like in the Hebei setting?” The objective will be to increase the professors understanding of how teacher leadership and PLC can influence student learning.

Suggested Reading and Web Sites
The Center for Teacher Leadership. www.ctl.vcu.edu
Teacher Leadership Network. www.holmespartnersho.org/teacher.html

References