Chapter 14

Teacher Leadership: Teachers as Literacy Leaders

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ABSTRACT

This chapter focuses on teachers as literacy leaders in P-12 urban and suburban schools. A review of research highlights teacher leadership implementation, organizational approaches, and current leadership models and standards. Chapter components outline the evolution of traditional and nontraditional roles and responsibilities for teacher leaders, teacher leadership qualities, teacher leadership models and theories, and teacher leadership preparation programs. Secondly, teacher leadership workplace resistance and weaknesses in current teacher preparation programs are discussed. Thus, this chapter provides recommendations for teacher leaders and teacher leadership preparation programs facing challenges associated with distributed leadership and transformational change. Finally, this chapter focuses on literacy leadership as a catalyst for improving practices and driving school-wide reform at the P-12 level.

INTRODUCTION

Teacher leadership approaches and theories have been implemented in the field of education for many years. Teachers have been serving as leaders in the classroom, community, and in school-wide improvement practices for a very long time (Cranston & Kusanovich, 2015). However, a paradigm shift in leadership is redefining the value and roles of teacher leadership in schools today. Moreso, teachers are at the forefront, working directly with students in classrooms, driving school improvement initiatives. Therefore, there is a calling for more opportunities to train, prepare, and implement teacher leadership initiatives in school systems at the national, state, and local levels. Teacher leadership initiatives are contributing to the re-imagination of a teaching career that is designed for today’s world (Teach to Lead, 2014).

One of the most significant challenges for teacher leadership today includes concerns regarding teacher preparation programs. Some researchers argue that teacher leadership education should begin at a pre-service level and include curricula that encompasses school culture norms and challenges, school
improvement practices and experiences, and activities that create an awareness for leadership skills, dispositions, and attitudes. (Hsiao, Chang, & Chen, 2013). However, other researchers dispute pre-service leadership preparation and advocate for graduate level leadership preparation programs and professional development training that provides field-based opportunities for practicing teachers (Cranston & Kusanovgich, 2015). Despite this particular argument, it is agreed that course work for the preparation of teacher leaders, at any level, must include discussion and review of potential program implementation barriers and prepare teachers to lead other adults.

Rising demands for teacher leaders in school settings today contribute to new and redefined models and standards for leadership roles. Specifically, the preparation of teachers for leadership roles in literacy can be guided through the Standards for Reading Professionals (2010) provided by the International Literacy Association (formerly Reading Association). These standards “set forth the criteria for developing and evaluating preparation programs for reading professionals” (ILA, 2010). The Standards define literacy leadership role competencies and dispositions including: Foundational Knowledge (Standard 1), Curriculum and Instruction (Standard 2), Assessment and Evaluation (Standard 3), Diversity (Standard 4), Literate Environment (Standard 5), and Professional Learning and Leadership (Standard 6).

This chapter is organized as follows: Teacher Leaders of Today highlights the many roles and opportunities for teachers to become active leaders and contribute to the overall school culture and climate. Conceptual Framework & Leadership Theory will encompass educational and leadership theories of distributed and transformational leadership. Teachers of Yesterday and Today will focus on the evolving role of teachers as leaders over the past decade as well as the qualities teachers will need to possess in order to be effective leaders. Finally, Teacher Preparation Programs will outline how teacher preparation programs are contributing to defining the role of a teacher as a leader.

BACKGROUND

In the United States, education reforms challenge educators’ 21st-century skills by increasing expectations for teaching quality and quantity. Curriculum, practice, certification, and assessments are on the forefront for debate (Rotherham & Willingham, 2009). Educators often highlight the following objectives because they are presumed to yield positive outcomes for students: Common Core and state standards alignment, collaboration, expertise, increase in education and professional development, project-based assessments, and leadership (Rotherham & Willingham, 2009, p. 3). Furthermore, teacher leadership initiatives have emerged and are positively affecting the climate and culture of schools today. Teachers are taking on leadership roles that help to support classroom teachers and school-wide initiatives. Specifically, school-wide literacy initiatives provide an essential blue print for improving student achievement. Initiatives include: creating, implementing, and evaluating a literacy action plan; forming collaborative teams that review literacy needs and expectations in the school and community; outlining school capacity to support literacy development; and reviewing current teaching practices and effectiveness of the school literacy program. Literacy leaders are experts in this area and are prepared to guide action aligned with stakeholders’ needs.