



IS TEACHER LEADERSHIP A FANTASY OR REALITY? A REVIEW

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Abstract

The purpose of current paper is to comment on the concept of teacher leadership in educational context. Teacher leaders' expertise about teaching and learning is needed to lead instructional improvement and increase teacher quality. It was a conceptual review paper. For this purpose the available literature on teacher leadership was reviewed. The related literature reflected that teacher leadership was not a fantasy, rather it was strong reality which, could result in improving the quality of teaching and the whole environment of the school. The development of this concept relies mostly on the shoulders of school heads. How much they recognize the leverage of teacher leadership? The fruit of teacher leadership can be seen in shape of effective students learning outcomes. Researches strongly support the point that teacher leadership effects students' achievement. Through the entire discussion of literature, it revealed that teacher's role as a leader is very important for enhancing students' performance and developing their personality as well as in shaping the direction of school environment.

Key Words: Leadership, teacher leadership, students' performance, school environment, classroom leader.

INTRODUCTION

Leader is the person who led his followers to the achievement of goals of the organization. Leadership is the ability to influence other people's ideas and action. If we take classroom as an organization, then in this organization, it is the teacher who is leading this organization. Teacher is a person who serves the whole nation. He shows them the path of their future, he facilitates them while understanding certain concepts, he observe them while doing activities, he provides such an environment to the students to explore a variety of experiences, he guides them when they face any problem and of course he leads them in every field of life. So role of a teacher as facilitator, observer, guide and leader are very important and teacher plays all these roles directly, indirectly, consciously or unconsciously.

According to Barth (2001) teacher leadership is not about "teacher's power", rather it is about mobilizing the still largely untapped attributes of teachers to strengthen student performance at ground level and working toward a real collaboration.

There are a variety of functions inside the classroom that the teacher performs. He leads by examples and allow others to watch. It can be considered a most clear and straightforward way that a teacher can use to lead



by examples. In different teacher's training programs, trainee teachers present before their colleagues and then they can easily assess their weaknesses as well as strengths.

Childs-Bowen, Moller, and Scrivner, (2000, p. 28) maintain that Teachers are leaders when they function in professional communities to affect student learning; contribute to school improvement; inspire excellence in practice; and empower stakeholders to participate in educational improvement."

Objectives of the Study

This study aims to find out literature on the concept of teacher leadership in order to promote the concept of teacher leadership.

Students are the main concern in any educational organizations and educational organizations are important for whole nation because a teacher transmits intellectual traditions to the coming generation. And main role in guiding these students are their brilliant teachers. So teachers are leaders who lead the whole nation. Teacher's role is important inside and outside the classroom. So it is important to know the role of a teacher as leader for the development of students. This research has implication for providing teachers opportunity to rearrange and assess their current role and position. It has implication for teacher educators to give importance of the needs of a teachers' skill.

Research Question

What is teacher leadership and what is its importance?

Sharma, (2002, p.134) observes that teacher is vital important and acts as a leader in the classroom. A teacher demonstrates expertise in their instruction and shares that knowledge with other professionals. They frequently reflect on their work to stay on the cutting edge of what's best for children. Teacher leaders engage in continuous action research project that examine their effectiveness. Teacher leaders mentor new teachers. They are risk-takers who participate in school decisions.

The role of teacher leader is more informal today. And this experience is gained from classroom experience. One study was conducted by York Barr in 2004 on "What do we know about teacher leadership?" The author of this study suggested a definition while keeping in view several definition of teacher leadership. According to York (pp.287-288) teacher leadership is the process by which teachers, individually or collectively; influence their colleagues, principals, and other members of the school communities to improve teaching and learning practices with the aim of increased student learning and achievement. Such team leadership involves three intentional development foci: individual development, collaboration or team development, and organizational development.

York-Barr, & Duke, (2004) expresses that teacher expertise is at "the foundation for increasing teacher quality and advancements in teaching and learning;" this expertise becomes more widely available "when accomplished teachers model instructional practices, encourage sharing of best practices, mentor new teachers, and collaborate with teaching colleagues". Teacher leaders' expertise about teaching and learning is needed to lead instructional improvement and increase teacher quality.

One way a principal can improve teacher quality is to support staff development needs. Teacher leaders can help principals support professional development by identifying teacher development needs, offering professional learning experience, developing and delivering opportunities, and evaluating the outcomes of staff development. The improvement of student learning requires every leader in the school to focus on that outcome. For example, instructional teacher leadership positions have been created to increase students' academic achievement by first improving teachers' instruction. Further, teachers who model learning for students can help to create a community of learners. Teacher leadership leads to teacher growth and learning, and when teachers learn, their students learn. Effective and efficient collaborative decision-making processes need to be in place to tap and infuse this expertise across the faculty.

The influence of teacher leadership is important to education reform. Teacher leaders can help "guide fellow teachers as well as the school at large toward higher standards of achievement and individual responsibility for



school reform" (Childs-Bowen et al., 2000). With the addition of the No Child Left Behind Act, the emphasis on educational improvement at all grade levels has provided "further incentive for teachers to be involved in teacher leadership" (Birky, Shelton, & Headley, 2006). In order to implement curricular and instructional reforms at the classroom level, a commitment from the teachers who lead at that level is essential. Reform possibilities reside in the hands of teachers; they are on the front lines and know the classroom issues, the culture of the school, and the types of support they need to do their jobs.

Recruit, retain, motivate, and reward accomplished teachers. One major reason for the new interest in teacher leadership is the desire to recruit, retain, motivate, and reward accomplished teachers. That is why according to York-Barr & Duke, (2004) acknowledging teachers' expertise and contributions and providing opportunities for growth and influence can support these objectives. Teachers want to work in schools that are designed for them to be successful and in which they have influence on key decisions that affect instruction and student success. Alabama that "empowerment and leadership opportunities were important factors in whether teachers said they [would] work in certain schools."

In addition, the opportunity to influence teaching and learning for adults and children through greater involvement in school leadership offers appeal to many accomplished teachers. Teachers find opportunities for continuous learning as they expand the ways in which they contribute throughout their careers. "Teachers who lead help to shape their own schools and, thereby, their own destinies as educators" (Barth, 2001).

A clear effect of teacher leadership is the growth and learning for the teachers themselves. This view is expressed by York-Barr & Duke, (2004) that professional growth also occurs as the result of collaboration with peers, assisting other teachers, working with administrators, and being exposed to new ideas. In fact, studies show that leading and learning are interrelated, that "teacher leaders grow in their understandings of instructional, professional, and organizational practice as they lead". Likewise Childs-Bowen, Moller, and Scrivner, (2000, p. 28) maintain that teachers are leaders when they function in professional communities to affect student learning; contribute to school improvement; inspire excellence in practice; and empower stakeholders to participate in educational improvement.

Teacher leadership provides the additional person power needed to run the organizational operations of the school, which are too complex for principals to run alone. Indeed, teacher leaders are a source of reliable, useful, and professional help for the principal. "When teachers lead, principals extend their own capacity" (Barth, 2001).

In addition, instructional teacher leadership can reduce the principal's workload. Teacher leaders are able to assume some of the principal's many responsibilities, including those of instructional leader. When teacher leaders take on important school wide responsibilities and are centrally involved in school decision making, they are able to transform their school into a democracy. Students benefit from observing and experiencing democratic, participatory forms of government. They also benefit from higher teacher morale because their teachers are involved in democratic decision making and school leadership. <http://www2.tqsource.org/strategies/leadership/EnhancingTeacherLeadership.pdf>

According to Arif (2003) in order to create a classroom environment with maximum productive time utilization, the teachers must establish and maintain it through following teaching and managing practices so that instances of student disruptive behavior are reduced. They remain mostly involved in learning oriented actions and activities.

- (i) Keep students motivated by keeping the students motivated in learning, teachers set the stage for creating positive class environment. Motivating students is the first step toward preventing discipline problems in classrooms because a student involved in learning is not usually involved in clash with others at the same time.
- (ii) Meet basic needs. Teachers must try to meet students' basic as well as age related needs. Make students feel physically comfortable, safe, welcome, socially accepted and valued. Otherwise, they more likely to face learning difficulties and disruptively.



(iii) Exercise moderate degree of control. The degree of class control must be moderate. Student learning is great in classroom where teachers exercise neither too much nor too less control. Too much control may be effective on memory tasks but it is harmful for learning involving critical and creative thinking.

(iv) Empower the students make them responsible for their own learning through group and individual learning activities so that they ultimately become independent learners. This is one of the purposes of good classroom management.

(v) Keep instruction at the student level. Keep instruction at the students' development level so that they neither experience discouragement nor boredom. Otherwise, they might behave disruptively.

(vi) Develop healthy and professionally sound relationship with all the students by being friendly with them. Learn their names and some positive information about each to greet them.

(vii) Communicate interest in all the students and show concern for each of them. The interest and concern is communicated through brief eye contact with all and through supporting gestures and facial expressions while teaching.

(viii) While instructing, ensure physical closeness with all the students by roaming around the class.

(ix) Avoid labeling the students with negative adjectives, which are likely to lower their self-esteem. Labeling influences teachers' quality of interaction with the students, which further influences students' expectations and actions negatively.

(x) Describe the behaviour of the misbehaving student, not characterize the student. Instead of saying, "you are rude" say "your comment was rude". By criticizing the personality of the students, he is less likely to change his behaviour.

(xi) Increase the "engaged time" by keeping the students involved in the learning tasks through, wittiness, overlapping, smooth transitions and group focus.

(xii) Teach role and routines to the younger students in academic fashion with a lot of explanation, examples and practices during initial classes.

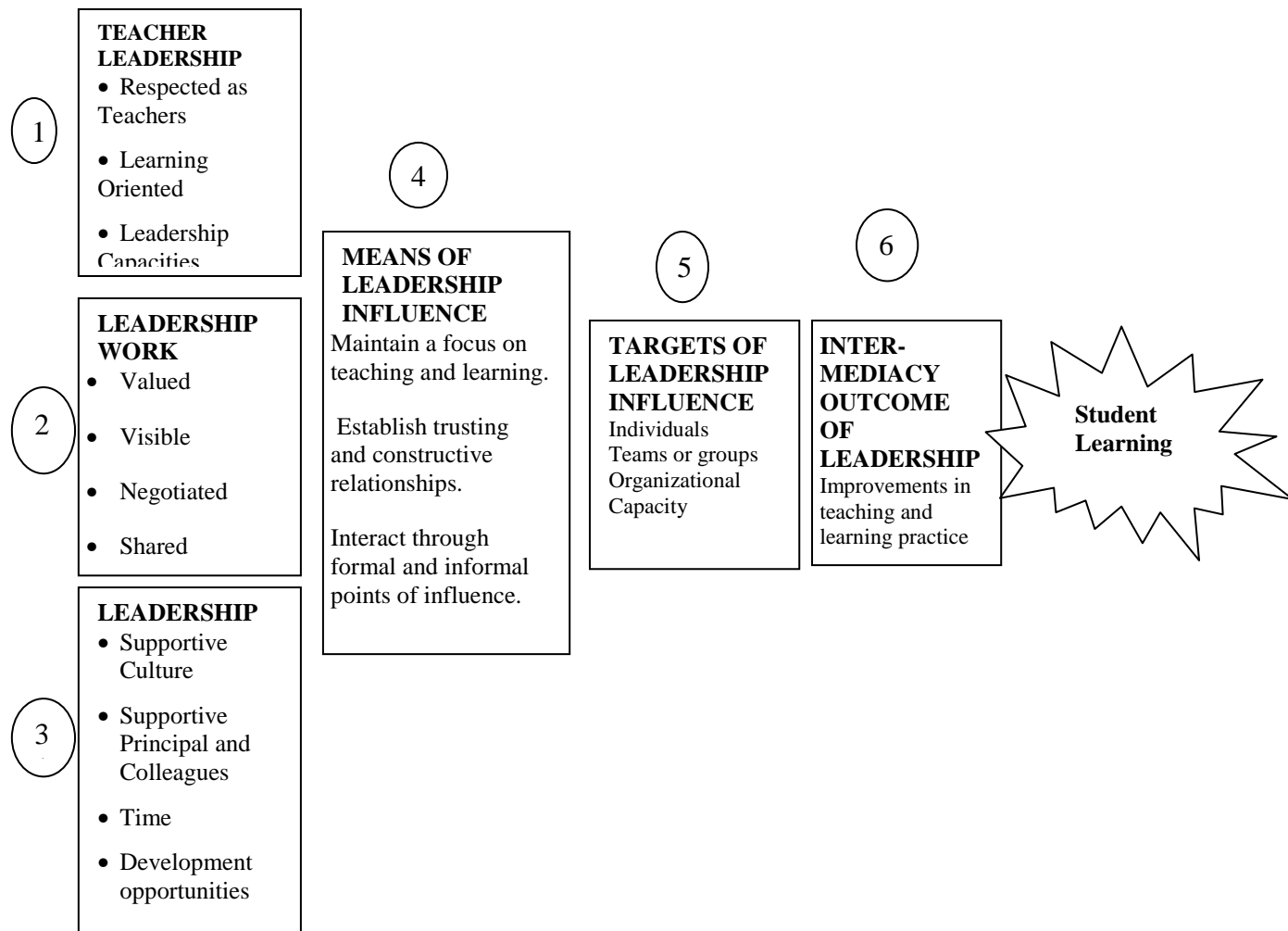
(xiii) Develop a set of few general classroom rules applicable to variety of situations. These rules should be displayed in the class.

(xiv) Be assertive, rather than passive or aggressive, in enforcing discipline. Apply the rule forcefully fairly, consistently and calmly.

(xv) Create business like climate in the classroom. Where students understand that they and the teacher have a commonly shared goal of accomplishing such activities that promote learning.

A Conceptual Framework for Teacher Leadership and its on Students' achievement

York-Barr, j., & Duke, K. (2004) has given a framework about the effect of teacher leadership on students' achievement.



In February 2003 the Centre for Teacher Leadership (CTL) at Virginia Common Wealth University School of Education conducted a survey of recognized teachers to determine their perception of themselves as leaders and their training needs. It was online administered to a purposeful sample of Teachers. Key findings of this survey showed that those teachers that are selected as sample are confident about their role as leaders, there is a gap between the role that is perceived as leader and actual skills needed to be a leader.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Teachers have the pivot role in any society because they trained the whole generation. When a teacher performs many roles like guide, facilitator, observer, counselor then leadership role of a teacher is also of great importance. So if a teacher has leadership qualities than of course student will get positive benefit from students.

Personality of a teacher effects the whole classroom environment. If a teacher is active then he/she can easily handle his/her classroom, can teach actively, and can understand student’s individual differences.



“Teachers are leaders when they function in professional communities to affect student learning; contribute to school improvement; inspire excellence in practice; and empower stakeholders to participate in educational improvement” (Childs-Bowen, Moller, & Scrivner, 2000, p. 28).

It means that teacher role is not limited to classroom, its widen and speeded in the whole school, even outside the school. Teacher who is a leader not only work in class room but he also help other teachers to practice certain new techniques in their classrooms.

Teacher leadership help in improving teaching quality, one of its ways is that if a head support staff development needs, and evaluate teachers/ staff development. Teacher leadership effects students’ learning

Barr and Duke’s (2004) research strongly support the point that teacher leadership effects students achievement. They gave a conceptual framework and these are six major component in that, First three component shows conditions necessary for teacher leader then in forth point they construct a healthy and constructive relationship. Then in fifth component some of the responsibilities necessary for teacher and at the end the final outcome that is students achievement.

In current era, students are considered a central role in any nation. Students don’t know about the direction which is effective for them, they don’t know about their inner abilities to accomplish a task. It is their teachers who acknowledge all this, understand individual differences, solve their problems, help them in coping with learning difficulties and encourage them to move forward. Through this entire discussion, it is concluded that teacher’s role as a leader is very important for enhancing students’ performance. The personality of a teacher affects the whole classroom. Teachers should be encouraged to be leader in the classroom so that they can effectively and efficiently manage the whole classroom and it will result in overall effective students’ performance.

RECOMMENDATION

- More studies should be conducted to examine how far the concept of “teacher leadership” is meaningful, useful and applicable to a wide variety of school.
- Teachers should be promoted on the basis of their performance.
- Several workshops should be arranged to promote teacher confidence to be leaders.
- Shared Decision making should be enhanced for informal interaction between teachers and Principals.
- Teachers’ role and work should be respected.
- Teachers should be encouraged to work in collaboration with other teachers.
- Heads should involve teachers in making decisions.
- Teachers should be empowered in their leadership tasks.

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