Teacher Leaders' Experience in the Shared Leadership Model

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Abstract:- Many school administrators are transitioning to a shared leadership model consisting of teacher leaders and administrators to collaborate and make decisions as a team. This type of model has shown to raise achievement among students creating a conducive environment for learning. In our pilot study, we examined current teacher leaders' experiences in the role as a leader on their campus and found there is very little training for teacher leaders as shown in our study. We also share a few tips for administrators to help nurture and build leadership skills in teacher leaders.

Keywords:- Teacher Leaders; Shared Leadership.

I. INTRODUCTION

Researchers agree that there is a critical need for shared leadership models to be incorporated in today's K-12 school campuses due to the immense pressure put on current administrators including accountability, workload, paperwork and curricular changes (Knapp, 2017; Huntzicker, 2017). . As researchers, we want to help administrators shape and nurture their teachers to be successful in transitioning to effective leaders. Teacher leaders have a variety of leadership experiences that have molded them into the type of leader they are today. In our pursuit to help administrators, it is vital to assess current teacher leaders to better understand how to help them be more effective in leadership roles.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Some researchers suggest that the term "educational leadership" is not well defined (Von Dohlen & Karvonen, 2018). Katzenmeyer & Moller (2009) share that "teacher leaders lead within and beyond the classroom; identify with and contribute to a community of learners and leaders; influence others toward improved educational practice" (p. 6). According to York-Barr & Duke (2004), teacher leadership is a process through which teachers influence their colleagues to improve teaching and student learning. Stein, Macaluso & Stanulis (2016) define teacher leadership as the means in which teachers influence school-wide instruction or policy.

Teacher leadership is varied with formal and informal roles and takes many forms (instructional coaching, department chair) (Stein, et. al, 2016). Many agree that there is not one single definition of a "teacher leader". Katzenmeyer & Moller (2009) share "teacher leaders lead within and beyond the classroom; identify with and contribute to a community of learners and leaders; influence others toward improved educational practice" (p.6).York-Barr and Duke's (2004) definition is "Teacher leadership is the process by which teachers, individually or collectively influence their colleagues, principals, and other members of school communities to improve teaching and learning practices with the aim of increased student learning and achievement" (p. 287-288).

In fact, the term of "teacher leader" is not clearly defined (Abramovich & Miedjensky, 2019; Hunzicker, 2017; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). It all varies from one school campus to another. York-Barr and Duke (2004) share "The hope for teacher leadership is continuous improvement of teaching and learning in our nation's schools, with the result being increased achievement for every student" (p. 255).

Teacher leaderships take on a variety of both formal and informal roles such instructional coaches, curriculum specialists, team leaders, mentoring, leading small group discussions and teaching modeling (Hunzicker, 2017; York-Barr & Duke, 2004).

As mentioned many schools are going toward a shared leadership model in which the principal shares leadership responsibilities among a leadership team. The shared leadership model also helps prepares teacher leaders to move into higher leadership positions.

According to Wilhelm (2013), the principal must become a staff developer including leading their staff in analyzing data, facilitating group discussions, using researched-based methods of instruction among other skills. An advantage of the shared leadership model is that it creates school ownership (Wilhelm, 2013). According to Sussman (2018), principals who practice shared leadership have higher student achievement. Researchers have stressed the importance for teacher leadership to help improve K-12 schools (Von Dohlen & Karvonen, 2018; York-Barr & Duke, 2004).

There is a strong demand for teacher leaders. Long gone are the days that principals act as silos. With the stress of accountability and high-stakes testing, the demand on principals is tremendous. Many schools have embraced shared leadership styles in which leadership is viewed as a collective activity among stake holders (Weiner, 2016). Teacher leaders also are provided hands-on leadership experience when principals adopt this type of leadership.

According to Knapp (2017), teacher leaders job-embedded experience is key to obtaining leadership skills. More and more school districts are tapping into the shared leadership model providing academies and workshops specific for developing leadership skills. In this model, administrators share in the decision-making, curriculum, and policies. Many principals have established a leadership team consisting of team leaders, instructional coaches and other administrators who meet on a regular basis.

In our pilot study, we examined teacher leaders in their leadership opportunities, mentorship/resources and influence of peers on their role as a leader.

III. RESEARCH METHODS

Participants are current graduate classes in our M.Ed. program. There were 25 participants. This is a pilot study that will be expanded. The survey was created by the first author was given using a Likert Scale with follow-up questions as well as open-ended questions. Forty percent of the participants had 0-5 years of teaching experience as shown in Table 1. Sixty-four percent had 0-5 years of teacher leader experience as shown in Table 2. There was a variety of teacher leader roles with 32% being a team leader, 28% being a chair, 24% as an instructional coach and 16% as a classroom teacher.

Years of Teaching Experience	
0-5 Years	10
6-10 Years	7
11-15 Years	5
16-20 Years	3
20 Years or More	0
Years of Teacher Leader Experience	
0-5 Years	16
6-10 Years	5
11-15 Years	4
16-20 Years	0
20 Years or More	0
Years of Teacher Leader Experience	
0-5 Years	16
6-10 Years	5
11-15 Years	4
16-20 Years	0
20 Years or More	0
Current Teacher Leader Role	
Team Leader	32%
Department Chair	28%
Instructional Coach	24%
Classroom Teacher	16%

Table 1:- Participants' Experience

IV. RESEARCH RESULTS

➢ *Frequency of Leadership Opportunities*
The frequency of leadership experiences can impact teacher leaders in regards to the skills and knowledge to make them more effective leaders which is why we felt it was vital to ask participants the frequency of their own leadership opportunities. As shown in Table 2, seventy-two percent of the participants indicated their leadership opportunities were ongoing and continuous.

➢ *Feedback by Supervisors*
Researchers have stressed the importance of feedback in order for learners to grow (Reid, 2019). Feedback is imperative for teacher leaders to grow and become more effective. Unfortunately, 52% indicated that he/she did not receive adequate feedback from their supervisor.

➢ *Mentorship*
Mentorship is key to learning any new roles especially one as a leader. Sadly 68% indicated not being provided a mentor for being in their teacher leader role. One shared "There was not adequate training on being a teacher leader or instructional coach. Luckily, I had colleagues that were instructional coaches at other campuses who helped me especially in the beginning".

➢ *Mentor Communication/Mentorship*
Of those that indicated that they were assigned a mentor for their leadership role, 85% indicated regular communication from their mentor. One participant shared "I was truly fortunate to have regular meetings with my mentor. She helped guided me into my role and provided feedback for improvement".

We also asked how did their mentor model leadership. One shared "Our old dean of instruction held weekly meetings with department chairs where she would model what needed to be accomplished. I would observe how she facilitated the meetings and ensured our voices were heard". One also shared "I felt like I had several mentors that had different roles (instructional coach, assistant principal and principal) who had a variety of instructional leadership styles which provided me a great perspective as a current/future leader".

➢ *Necessary Knowledge and Skills Required*
We wanted to know if they felt they had the necessary knowledge and skills required to effectively do their leadership role. Every participant indicated that they had the necessary skills and knowledge to do their role effectively.

➢ *District Resources and Training*
It is import for districts to invest in their own employees. As mentioned, many school districts have established leadership academies and workshops to help teacher leaders in gaining knowledge and skills in their leadership roles. Unfortunately, 84% of the participants felt their district provided adequate training and resources for their teacher leader role.

In a follow-up opened ended question, participants had the opportunity to expand on their answer. One shared "I think it would be beneficial to provide teachers who are team leaders professional development in leadership. At the beginning of each new school year at the team leader meeting, we discuss 10-15 minutes what it means to be a strong leader, but that is the extent of our training on leadership skills".

According to Knapp (2017), teacher leaders must be considered capable to lead others in order to build networks buy-in and legitimacy. Seventy-two percent felt that there was an effect of peer influence on their role as a teacher leader. Many stressed that they felt pressure because they felt they were at many times just a messenger. One shared "It can be a difficult role to be the "messenger" when discussing new district initiatives. Another shared, "I constantly had to navigate between instructional coach and colleague". Some felt that they were not taken seriously. For example, one participant shared "I felt my opinion was not valued because I may have had fewer years of experience then some of the teachers".

➢ *Barriers*

We also asked them an open-ended question in regards to barriers they faced as a teacher leader. One shared "I had to understand that not everyone will always agree. Compromises had to be made." Another shared, "I felt at times, my opinion or input was not as valued as others in the same position because I did not have as many years of experience as others in the same position."

Frequency of Leadership Opportunities	
3-5 times a semester	8%
5-10 times a semester	12%
More than 10 times but not continuous	8%
Ongoing	72%
Feedback by Supervisors	
Disagree	24%
Somewhat Disagree	28%
Somewhat Agree	40%
Agree	8%
Provided a Mentor	
Disagree	48%
Somewhat Disagree	20%
Somewhat Agree	24%
Agree	8%
Mentor Communication	
Disagree	0%
Somewhat Disagree	12%
Somewhat Agree	63%
Agree	25%
Necessary Knowledge, Skills Required	
Skills Required	
Disagree	0%
Somewhat Disagree	0%
Somewhat Agree	56%
Agree	44%
District Provides Adequate Training	
Disagree	52%
Somewhat Disagree	32%
Somewhat Agree	12%
Agree	4%
Effect of Peer Influence	
Disagree	8%
Somewhat Disagree	20%
Somewhat Agree	40%
Agree	32%

Table 2:- Research Results

V. DISCUSSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

The data was received provided us with valuable information that can help us improve how we prepare teacher leaders. Researchers have agreed that support from school administrators play a significant role in the development of teacher leaders (Semaloglu & Savas, 2018; Reid, 2019). As an educational community, we need to encourage schools to nurture teacher leaders to make schools better for students.

In regards to our pilot study, we found that there is a deficiency in how we prepare teacher leaders. We recommend that administrators and districts incorporate professional development, mentors and professional learning communities.

➢ *Professional Development*

We recommend that school districts incorporate professional development opportunities that provide on-the-job training that is continuous and specific. Also, we encourage school districts to establish leadership academies that help teacher leaders gain expertise in leadership and skills in their role as a teacher leader. Many teacher leaders take graduate classes on administrator or instructional leadership but the training is abstract and can be broad in nature.

➢ *Mentorship*

With novice teacher leaders, it is imperative that they are provided mentors that can help guide them and provide support. Mentors that are successful are those that understand how to guide them into effective leaders (Sun, 2018). A mentor must also be committed to their mentee's success and career development (Sun, 2018). Mentors must also communicate on a regular basis. Schechter (2014) in his study involving a principal preparation program with prospective principals and current principals serving as mentors, that 70% of the mentors and 80% of the mentees pointed out respect, admiration, openness, honesty, trust, and sincerity as the necessary parts needed to ensure a mentoring program is successful.

➢ *Professional Learning Communities*

Professional learning communities (PLCs) can be an effective avenue to promote teacher leadership as they collaborate with colleagues and establish trusting relationships (Von Dohlen & Karvonen, 2018). In addition, teacher leaders can have an opportunity to use their leadership skills in sharing their content and pedagogy knowledge with their peers.

As shared many administrators and districts are moving towards shared leadership models. We hope this article sheds light on the importance of preparing teacher leaders in order for them to be successful.

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