

The Influence of Teacher Leaders in Education Policy Development

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Abstract

This paper offers a discussion and rich information on teacher leader's role in creating policy. Teacher leadership describes various phenomena in the arena of education. Informal and formal leadership roles, improvement processes, personal characteristics, professional development and other activities are linked to teacher leadership. There is a need to justify the roles of teacher leaders in the policy making processes in schools as a legitimate tool for enhancing school and teaching performance. Therefore, using various scholars' viewpoints, this paper will define various roles that teacher leaders play in the development of policy in school programs. The paper will first define teacher leaders and determine the importance of teacher leaders in policy making. Based on the findings teacher leaders play a vital role in policy making in schools due to their traits and roles that influence the school improvement programs.

1.0. Introduction

In every school, there are teachers with a vision that extend their classrooms role even beyond their departments and teams. Such teachers recognize learners' school experience depends on interaction with every teacher and the complex systems that are throughout the school and the district. This awareness prompts teachers of this nature to actively take part in influencing changes and creations of educational policies (Bryk & Gomez, 2010). They tend to experience professional restlessness, that is, they have the desire to give more to their school apart from just teaching and their normal responsibilities as teachers. Sometimes this desire is from their initiatives or within a formal structure; these teachers often find innovative ways to exercise their leadership skills.

Teachers are often recognized as leaders by their skills as effective instructors within their classrooms as well as their formal leadership roles within their schools. These teachers who are identified as leaders are individuals who know their subject matter, curriculum, and classroom management. In addition, these individuals act as role models for their peers by modeling professional qualities and behaviors. These teacher leaders also have various characteristics like demonstrating great instructional skills, having a clearly defined education philosophy and have a clear belief system in what it takes to be an effective teacher. Teachers who are on their way in becoming teacher leaders often start with their personal assessments and their beliefs in who to influence the educational field.

Traditionally, teacher leaders are experienced teachers with good teaching skills. According to their colleagues, the leaders of elementary school are professionals who accept work and responsibility and also support other teachers (Bryk & Gomez, 2010). Additionally, traditionally, teacher leaders are experienced teachers with good teaching skills. According to their colleagues, the leaders of elementary school are professionals who accept work and responsibility and also support other teachers (Bryk & Gomez, 2010). Additionally, they also take part in mentoring, collaborating and decision making with others to create policies and improve the school productivity.

2.0. Why teacher leadership in policy making

Currently more than ever, many interconnected factors tend to argue that there is a need to involve teacher leaders in school in the creation of policies. According to Bryk and Gomez (2010), teaching is a profession that seems flat. In various professions when the practitioner gains experience, they have the chance to exercise greater responsibility along with assuming essential challenges. In many settings, teachers extend their influence only by becoming an administrator. Most of them end up thinking that it is not the appropriate avenue for them.

The administrator job refers to work that may not interest them though they still have the urge in exercising wider impact in the profession and the school (Newmann & Bruce, 2007). The desire for greater responsibility then remains unfulfilled resulting to cynicism and frustration. As a result, it is important to comprise teacher leaders in policy making to exercise their greater responsibility.

The tenure of the teacher in schools is also longer compared to the administrators. In most cases, the administrators remain in positions for four to five years, and teachers stay for longer period. Teachers often manage the institutional memory as they are the school culture custodians. Hence, including teachers in policymaking is appropriate as they understand the school culture, and they can stay for a longer period to ensure that the policy gets implemented as planned. School districts that need to enhance their performance tend to make wise investment by cultivating and encouraging teacher leaders as they are in a position in carrying out long-range projects and taking a longer view.

The modern principal position demands are also practically impossible to reach. Current principals are expected to be competent and visionary managers and also instructional leaders (Bryk, Sebring, Allensworth, Luppescu & John, 2010). Therefore, it is essential to instill a sense purpose to the staff and maintain the physical plant along with submitting budgets on time (Resnick, 2010). Additionally, the principal is now the accountable person required imposing by the federal and states government, and they should respond to the various stakeholders; staff members, parents, the larger community and the district office. Therefore, due to this range from various ranges of sources, it is difficult for various administrators to devote them enough energy and time for school improvement including creating policies. As a result of effective school programs, the teacher leaders need to get involved in policy making as administrators cannot fully take part in the school improvement programs.

Lastly, the principals tend to have limited expertise. Similar to every educator, most principals also have their specific instructional expertise areas. An administrator who was a science teacher may know a lot about a science research-based instructional practice though he may not know much about instructions in mathematics world. Therefore, the school administrators may do not have expertise in every aspect of the school. Individual teachers also have their specific knowledge areas. However, a teacher leaders group can be able to supply various professional knowledge required in school improve policies.

Therefore, following these factors, it is clear that the school improvement cannot depend on the administrators only in improving its school through creating policies (Farris-Berg & Edward, 2012). However, involving the teacher leaders in school improvement programs is seen as appropriate as it offers more knowledge and expertise.

3.0. Skills and qualities offered by teacher leaders in offer in policy making

There are two fundamentals roles types for teacher leaders that include informal and formal. The formal teacher leaders fill the roles like an instructional coach, department chair or master teacher. These people typically apply for the positions and get selected through a process of selection. Ideally, they also get train for the new responsibilities. These leaders play an important role in various schools. In most cases, these teacher leaders order materials, manage the policy making a project and facilitate the teacher study groups. They can also evaluate other teachers, their colleagues; they get regarded as the pseudo administrators (Kolderie, 2014). On the contrary, the informal teacher leaders emerge organically and spontaneously from the ranks of teachers. These leaders take the initiative of taking part in the policy making program instead of being selected. They have no author in a certain position, and their influence originates from the respect they get from commanding their colleagues through practice and expertise (Bryk & Gomez, 2010).

Whether spontaneously assume the leadership or selected for the role, effective teacher leaders show significant skills, dispositions, and values. Teacher leaders call other colleagues to action along with energizing them aiming a successful implementation of the policy in learning and teaching. Scholars argue that all leadership should involve mobilizing people commitment in placing their energy to actions and enhance things. A successful policy involves individual commitment and a collective mobilization. Therefore, a leadership hallmark refers to the ability of leaders to collaborate with their colleagues and others as Halverson (2010) suggests. Teachers should enlist colleagues who will support their policy vision, create consensus amongst the diverse educators group and convince other people of their proposal and feasibility plan for the policy. They should gain respect for their instructional skills. The leaders are also supposed to understand the information and evidence along with recognizing the need for focusing on the policy aspects that will result to significant gains to the students.

Some dispositions and values make some individuals ideally appropriate for teacher leadership. For instance, effective teacher leaders are respectful and open-minded towards other people views towards the issue at hand. They show enthusiasm and optimism, decisiveness and confidence. They persevere without letting setbacks derail a significant program they are following (Danielson, 2006). On the contrary, they are willing and flexible to consider a diverse approach if the first effort does not succeed.

Many good teacher leaders' characters are significantly similar as the good teacher's characters: expertise, flexibility, persuasiveness, confidence and open-mindedness in their fields. Despite the similarities, the working colleagues are significantly different from teachers' skills in learning their preparation programs and working with students. To assume the leadership role in creating policy need expertise in assessment design, curriculum planning, and data analysis. It also needs developing abilities in listening actively, facilitating meetings, keeping group discussion, deciding on action course and monitoring progress.

4.0. *What do Teachers Leaders Do in policy making?*

There are three key areas that policy is making program in school benefit from the teachers leaders involvement. These teacher leaders' involvements take place across the school, within their teacher leader's team and department or beyond the school (Muijs & Harris, 2006). All these setting require equal involvement though with its own requirements and need particular inclinations and skills. The three settings are all important in policy making and help to create an effective policy.

4.1. *Within the Team or Department*

Leading change within the leader's team or department as it may need considerable interpersonal act or skill. Such effort success also depends on the established credit by the teacher leaders along with trust with his policy program colleagues (City, Richard, Fiarman & Teitel, 2009).

At this level leadership can take various forms with the aim of creating an effective policy. For instance, the teacher leaders may coordinate the policy program by inviting other colleagues in examining the reasons for the need to have the new policy for improving student's performance. In various different ways, the teachers' leaders need to mobilize the closest colleagues' efforts with the aim of enhancing the school's policy program to benefit the students.

4.2. *Across the School*

Some of the great opportunities for the teacher leadership relates to the areas that have great impact on the daily student lives across the school like master schedule, student programs or grading policies. For instance, many learners experience the most memorable school careers activities through taking part in school play, taking advanced class or being on the school debate team. The activities help students to engage deeply on the academic contents. To ensure learners have full access to such opportunities comprise a collective effort, alternatives consideration and discussion by the teacher leaders. Even though administrators have a vital facilitative role in this case, teacher leaders are closer to the action. Additionally, grading policies have a significant effect on the learners' experience in their learning activities. The teachers can take part in exploring the alternate grading approaches by studying the students' reaction towards the assignments they give them in class. These teacher leaders can form systematic discussions with the students and make recommendations to rest of the faculty towards a different grading system that can include student self-assessment and formative assessment.

4.3. *Beyond the School*

Policy involves understanding the community beyond the school (Halverson & Kelley, 2013). Therefore, in this case, the teacher leaders contribute beyond the school as they need to evaluate the committee and how they can affect the policy being created for the curriculum. These teachers make presentations at a national or state conference, speak at school board meetings or serve on state standards board as the teachers voice in the community to communicate the planned policy. As a result, they do more than teaching and influence a larger education environment based on the school policies in their community and also the state.

5.0. *Conditions that promote Teacher Leadership*

Teacher leadership in policy making is not hospitable in every school especially for the informal teacher leaders. Therefore, the school has an essential role in fostering the conditions that can facilitate the teacher leaders. Firstly, there should be a safe environment to take risks. Teachers should have confidence with the administrators and other colleagues that they will not criticize them as they express their ideas during the policy making process.

Some of the relevant approaches to solve these issues in school may be obvious and need the educators to think creatively that only happens in a safe environment. Hence, the school administrators need to make it clear that the teacher leaders are safe take risks and express their thoughts or ideas.

Secondly, there should be administrators who will motivate teacher leaders in their roles in policy making in school for school improvement. They should be proactively help teachers in acquiring skills that they require in taking advantage of chances for leadership. Thirdly, sometimes the administrators act as the blocks to the teacher's leaders or the teachers tend not to accept themselves as the chosen leaders. Therefore, school administrators needs creating a culture that will honor teachers that can take leadership roles and step outside the traditional roles (City, Richard, Fiarman & Teitel, 2009).

Lastly, there should opportunities to learn leadership skills. As it is noted, teacher leadership requires skills that mostly are not part of the teacher's preparation program. The teacher leaders should emerge and contribute fully; thus they require chances to learn the significant curriculum planning, assessment design and instructional improvement skills. Teachers can master these through the school-level professional development and seminars.

6.0. Conclusion

According to the discussion, teacher leaders have a vital role in policy making programs in schools. The school administrators tend to have a lot of responsibilities thus they may not fully place their attention and energy toward the policy making programs. Teacher leaders are the only ones that may help to create effective policies that will improve school performances. Teacher leader's roles range from managing curriculum policy projects, facilitating study groups, providing workshops and ordering materials. Moreover, their skills and attributes also give good contributions towards policy making process. The teacher leaders roles consists coordinating individuals from three settings, within the team or department, around the school and beyond the school.

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