

# Capacity-Building With Teacher Leadership

Charlotte Danielson

[charlotte\\_danielson@hotmail.com](mailto:charlotte_danielson@hotmail.com)

[www.danielsongroup.org](http://www.danielsongroup.org)

# Why Teacher Leadership?

---

- School improvement demands capacity-building in every school, in the enhancement of skills of those who work with students.
- Many principals don't have the skills, the expertise, or the time, to exercise their responsibilities of instructional leadership. (They understand this to be essential, but they can't do it.)
- Those in the best position to build capacity are teachers and teacher leaders.

# Capacity and Capacity-Building

---

- Capacity: “the facility or power to produce, perform, or deploy.” (Webster’s Dictionary)
- Capacity Building: “planned development of (or increase in) knowledge, output rate, management, skills, and other capabilities of an organization through acquisition, incentives, technology, and/or training.”
- Capacity-building entails professional learning.

# The Nature of Professional Learning

---

- Trust
- Self-assessment and self-directed inquiry
- Reflection on practice
- Collaboration and conversation
- A community of learners

# Opportunities for Professional Inquiry

---

- Joint curriculum or unit planning
- Lesson study
- Action research; either collective or individual and sharing the results with colleagues
- Analyzing student work
- Observing in one another's classrooms
- Sharing findings from action research

# Why Is Teacher Leadership Important?

---

- Traditional teaching is a “flat” profession.
- Teacher tenure in schools is longer than that of administrators; they hold the institutional memory.
- “Heroic” views of leadership are inadequate.
- Teachers have the needed expertise.
- The principal role is impossible.

# The “Impossible” Principals

---

- The principal is the “point person” for accountability.
- Range of conceptualizations of the principals indicates its complexity:  
technical, managerial, transformational, personal, professional
- There are enormous bureaucratic and administrative requirements.
- There are multiple stakeholders.
- Principals cannot be expert in everything.

# Two Types of Teacher Leadership

---

- Formal roles
- Informal leadership

# Formal Teacher Leadership Roles

---

- Team leader
- Department chair
- Content specialist
- Helping teacher
- Curriculum coordinator

For these roles, teachers are appointed, and they may have to leave their classrooms.

A critical question to be answered: “Do teacher leaders exercise supervisory responsibilities?”

# What Is Leadership?

---

“The litmus test of all leadership is whether it mobilises people’s commitment to putting their energy into actions designed to improve things. It is individual commitment, but above all it is collective mobilisation.”

Michael Fullan

*Leading in a Culture of Change*, p. 9

# Challenges of Formal Teacher Leadership

---

- Credibility with teacher colleagues
- Delineation of responsibilities between teachers and administrators

# Informal Teacher Leadership: What It Is

---

Informal initiative in matters of purpose and practice. Leadership may be exercised in promoting change or simply in improving teaching and learning.

# Informal Teacher Leadership: What It Is Not

---

- Management of large-scale change
- Administrative or managerial leadership
- Shared decision-making
- Distributed leadership
- Career ladder

# School Structures to Promote Professional Learning

---

- Decision-making system focused on instructional needs
- Instructional teams to improve practice
- Dedicated roles for teacher leaders to coordinate and coach
- Training for teacher leaders in curriculum, assessment, analysis of student work, facilitation skills, etc.

# Responsibilities of Administrators to Capacity-Building

---

- Creating and maintaining a culture of professional inquiry
- Identifying/encouraging teachers for new roles
- Adjusting school schedules to permit collaboration
- Providing/arranging training for teacher leaders

# Essential Knowledge of Teacher Leaders

---

- Focus on results: formal, informal
- Curriculum planning
  - balance of outcomes: knowledge, reasoning
  - coordination
  - integration
- Assessment
  - formative
  - summative
- Instruction
  - teaching for engagement
  - specific strategies (e.g., questioning skills)

# Skills of Teacher Leadership

---

- Collaboration skills
- Facilitation skills
  - presenting a new idea
  - leading a discussion
  - keeping a group on track
  - clarifying, mediating, summarizing
- Planning skills
  - problem posing or problem finding
  - collecting evidence
  - planning an approach; share tasks
  - taking action, monitoring progress

# Values and Dispositions Displayed by Teacher Leaders

---

- Deep commitment to student learning
- Courage and risk-taking
- Open-mindedness
- Optimism and enthusiasm
- Confidence and decisiveness
- Curiosity and critical reflection
- Creativity and flexibility
- Perseverance
- Tolerance for ambiguity

# Issues in Teacher Leadership

---

- “Contested ground”
- Negotiated agreements
- The relationship with requirements for license renewal
- The “slide” between informal teacher leadership and formal roles
- The relationship with National Board Certification

# Summary of Teacher Leadership

---

- Teacher leaders play an important role in school improvement.
- Formal teacher leaders are appointed; informal teacher leaders emerge spontaneously.
- The conditions and culture must support teacher leadership.
- Leadership requires knowledge and skill, which must be developed.