

Teacher Leadership Development in Initial Teacher Education

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Presentation aims

- The integrated practicum program
- Literature overview
- Key research questions
- Methodology
- Findings
- Links to current theoretical perspectives
- Implications for the development of practicum curriculum, including teacher leadership

The study

- Qualitative longitudinal case study focused on the development of teacher leadership within an integrated practicum program

Background

University –school partnership development

- Phase 1: (2006-7) ‘Traditional’ practicum
- Phase 2: (2008-9) Teacher inquiry
- Phase 3 (2010-11) Co-construction of new practicum program
- Phase 4 (2012-13) A ‘total immersion’ transformational model of practicum with a significant focus on teacher leadership development is implemented in a private international school.

School context

Teacher Candidates (TCs) and faculty supervisors worked together in the school for 10 weeks

University coursework and leadership development were integrated into the TCs practicum program.

Philosophy of teacher leadership and education

Initial teacher education involves integration of theory and lived experience where teachers learn by reflection in-action and on-action

Teacher education provides a parallel opportunity for leadership to surface within an integrated program that fosters individual and collective learning grounded in values of principled and ethical teacher leadership.

(see Harold, Stephenson and Gifford, 2010)

Our core beliefs about teacher leadership development

1. Leadership competencies can be learned and developed
2. Leadership is contextual and is influenced by culture
3. Leadership development is a lifelong process
4. Leadership is learned best through leadership in action and through reflection on that practice
5. Leadership is based on a foundation of ethics and manifests itself in service to others.

Formalization of the teacher leadership curriculum

A culture of distributed leadership included purposefully created opportunities for TCs to demonstrate leadership in their ongoing practice.

Formal mandated activities included:

- A twice-weekly professional meeting led by the TCs themselves
- TC led workshops for mentor teachers
- Specific leadership roles (e.g. collation of information for the group, liaising with teachers)
- Mentoring the next cohort of TCs into the program
- Providing specific feedback to faculty about the program

Literature overview

Attention has shifted from an emphasis on the role of the principal as a key element in educational reform to a renewed focus on the role of the teachers as leaders and their contribution to curriculum and school renewal.

Teacher leadership is about action that enhances teaching and learning in a school, that ties school and community together and advances quality of life for a community (Crowther, et al. 2009).

Teacher leadership should be developed both within the school context and permeate initial teacher education programs (Barth, 2001; Leeper, et al. 2010).

Literature overview

A 'leadership frame of reference' was introduced in order for our TCs to develop their own philosophy of leadership and to experience leadership practice in a supported environment (Bond, 2011).

Key research questions

The focus was on the development of teacher leadership within an integrated practicum program:

1. How was teacher leadership conceptualized and co-constructed over time?
2. How was teacher leadership formalized in the integrated curriculum?
3. What successes and challenges arose for teacher leadership within the program?
4. How did it impact the teacher candidate and university faculty learning?



Methodology

Qualitative longitudinal case study

Participants in the study were 17 national female TCs engaged in their final practicum experience.

Data collection

- Videotapes
- Ongoing TC written reflections
- Focus group discussions with TCs and mentors
- Observations
- Faculty journals
- Email and Blackboard communications.

Data analysis

Analysis drew on several theoretical frameworks including:

- 'activist teacher professionalism' (Sachs, 2003)
- communities of practice (Wenger et al., 2002)
- teacher leadership (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001).

Findings

Development of a supportive professional learning community (PLC) among the faculty, TCs and mentor teachers was an important element of the practicum and allowed for

- Both planned and unplanned leadership opportunities to emerge
- Teacher leadership characteristics to develop such as greater confidence, flexibility, and resilience, and practices such as risk-taking, collaboration, collegiality, communication, planning, organizing, time management and negotiation.

Teacher leadership conceptualised and co-constructed

We planned and created a culture and work processes in the practicum that encouraged leadership development. This included:

- shared decision making,
- lateral and bottom-up communication,
- team work and collective learning,
- norms of professional conduct

Formalization of teacher leadership in the curriculum

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Formalization of the leadership curriculum

‘Serendipitous’ activities:

Throughout the practicum both faculty and TCs were constantly looking for opportunities that allowed TCs to engage in all aspects of school life and to take control of organizing and managing aspects of their practicum program including:

- Shared planning of curriculum tasks
- Managing technology projects
- Liaising with different mentor teachers to expand classroom teaching opportunities
- Organizing special events (e.g. National Day, Mentor teacher lunch)
- School ‘walk-throughs’
- Peer observations and feedback across multiple subjects and grades
- Attending meetings with parents and teachers

Successes

TCs did engage in leadership practices such as:

- Risk-taking
- Collaboration
- Collegiality
- Communication
- Planning
- Organizing
- Time management
- Negotiation.

Successes

As a result they exhibited emerging teacher leadership characteristics such as:

- greater confidence
- flexibility
- resilience

Levels of faculty support changed during the practicum allowing TCs to develop independence and interdependence. Careful scaffolding of leadership experience at the beginning allowed them to gain confidence in decision making and by the end of the program they were making a lot more independent decisions.

Challenges

- TCs were positioned as ‘junior colleagues’, addressed as colleagues, seen as capable of making (appropriate) professional decisions and taking the initiative
- TCs were at different levels of leadership ‘readiness’. The faculty set high standards and some TCs found it difficult to meet these at times
- As a result ethical issues arose related to attendance, professional honesty and integrity (e.g. NCATE team issue, ‘make-up’ days)

Challenges

- The power of the collective – for good and bad
- Giving TCs freedom and responsibility and some TCs misusing it
- TC unwillingness to embrace the responsibilities of principled leadership to the fullest extent
- Lack of transparency (sharing issues with others rather than communicating with faculty team) – ethical issues that lie with faculty leadership – TCs had a voice but faculty?

Challenges

- Raising awareness of the importance of teacher leadership development at the College and University leadership levels
- Issues around lack of shared understanding at the wider levels resulted in varied interest in and support for the program.

Impact on professional learning

Teacher candidates

- Developed emergent leadership characteristics, knowledge and skills
- Better understanding of the complexity of leadership practice and what it entails
- Both positive and negative use of influence and power of the collective voice

University faculty

- Affirmation of our leadership philosophy
- Curriculum renewal in the program
- Opportunity to observe and assess teacher leadership practices in classrooms and the wider school community
- Better understanding of teacher candidate leadership development

Links to current theoretical perspectives

Leadership needs to become an integral component of all initial teacher education programmes ...the demands placed on teachers today require leadership skills and qualities to be present. Our graduates need to recognize themselves as leaders within our communities who can make a real difference to the lives of future generations. And the best place to start is at the beginning of a teacher's career from the moment they begin their initial teacher education (Harris and Walker, 2013, p.2)

Links to current theoretical perspectives

Bond (2011) suggests that teacher educators need to provide a 'framework' for beginning teachers to think of themselves as teacher leaders. There is a simultaneous pedagogical framework (introducing theoretical and practical content) and mental framework that allows novice teachers to approach tasks with a leadership disposition and perspective.

Leeper, Tonneson and Williams (2010) found a discrepancy in the way faculty and student teachers defined teacher leadership and that the latter need opportunities to practice and implement it in the school context. They note that it is important to connect the learning and experiences of pre-service teachers to the work that teacher leaders actually do.

What next?

- Continue to focus on integration of leadership curriculum and practicum experiences
- Further opportunities to consolidate teacher leadership development in the internship
- Continue to surface individual mental models (Senge, 1990) related to philosophies of teacher education that include teacher leadership development.

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