

Behaviors of Teacher Leaders in the Classroom

Louis L. Warren

Department of Elementary and Middle Grades Education, East Carolina University, Greenville, USA

Email address:

warrenlo@ecu.edu

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Abstract: Behaviors of teachers within the classroom should exhibit leadership skills along with effective teaching skills. These two skills sets should occur simultaneously in the behavior of teachers when they are teaching their students within the classroom. Research shows that effective teachers behavior is the most important factor contributing to students' academic growth within the classrooms of schools serving the K-12 student populations. During the past two decades, there has been a significant increase in the scholarly research conducted on teacher leadership and it, potentially, affects the increase in student academic growth. However, most of this research on teacher leadership have focused on the role of teacher leadership outside the classroom. Currently, there are limited investigations that focuses on the effects on students' academic growth when teachers' leaders lead from within their classrooms. This study investigates the impact teacher leadership have on students' academic growth as well on the teaching profession in general when teacher leaders lead from their classrooms. This study also investigates the importance of school administrators promoting and supporting teachers who lead from within their classroom.

Keywords: Leader, Teacher Behavior, Teacher Leadership, Students Achievement, Student Growth

1. Introduction

The issue of teachers leading from the classroom has been prevalent in the past few years, and it attracts the attention of many school administrators as they seek to strengthen their systems. The need to enhance the teaching staff and the professional learning in schools, therefore, cannot be overemphasized. Years back, teachers had autonomy over their classrooms, and they were responsible for much of the decisions made about the learning process including the methods used and the curriculum to be followed [1]. However, the teacher's autonomy was only present because most schools were just a one-room schoolhouse. However, there has been more expansion and development with globalization; inviting the aspects of collegiality and collaboration into the teaching profession. The study will provide an analysis of teachers leading from the classrooms.

Teachers play a significant role in the students' academic lives. They help in the passing of essential knowledge that facilitates the academic growth of the students. It is important to know that when the students join a specific class, they are all at different levels of academic preparedness. It is the teacher leader's role to be able to prepare every student for

success regardless of his or her preparation levels. For this reason, teacher leadership is becoming a crucial characteristic that is required for both the student and the teacher growth. However, the new aspect of teacher leaders in classrooms has started to break the barriers that hinder the academic success of the students and the overall teaching professionalism. Research on effectiveness of teaching has reported a relationship exist between its teacher leadership and student learning [2].

Different academic researchers agree to the fact that leadership in teachers is a way of thinking and being, a stance rather than a specific set of behaviors. For this reason, it can be challenging to get a clear insight into how the teachers transform from being ordinary teachers to teacher leaders. However, there are certain ways that the school administrators and the school community at large can be able to promote a successful teacher leadership in the classroom [3].

2. Teacher Leaders in the Classroom

2.1. Teacher Leadership

The traditional role of the teachers entailed remaining in

the classroom and performing their normal roles of teaching until retirement or progress into the administration role where they leave their teaching role behind. In most cases, however, this trend has been very unsatisfactory to the teachers. A survey carried out by MetLife showed that 84 percent of the teachers admitted that they were hardly interested in becoming a principal. However, almost 25 percent of the teachers who took part in the survey had a great interest in a hybrid role, which entailed the combination of teaching as a profession and some leadership position.

Principles in schools always move teachers who produce great students' results in leadership roles including the administrative roles with hopes that they can be able to guide their fellow workmates to produce similar outcomes. However, the skills that make a teacher a good leader in the classroom do not mean that they can easily help the other teachers to improve [4]. Furthermore, taking a teacher's role in the classroom as a leader and moving them into an administrative position could affect the performance of the students.

A teacher who is a leader creates a good rapport with the students, and it can take a while before a new teacher acquires the necessary interpersonal, and communication skills or the knowledge that will influence the academic progress of the students. For this reason, it is crucial to support the changes needed for colleagues to be able to portray leadership qualities in the classroom. Supporting this change requires both content knowledge and the skills that can both support and motivate adult learning.

Teacher leaders can be defined as role models who have enough experience and are well respected by the people surrounding them including their colleagues and the students. Teacher leaders are organized, trustworthy, innovative, and confident individuals who facilitate the learning process [5]. The teacher leaders in the classroom model integrity; they possess strong communication and interpersonal skills, portray high professionalism levels, have the required expertise, and show an intense passion for student learning. In addition, they demonstrate an exceptional commitment to their students and take the initiative to be influential change agents in the school environment.

Teacher leaders in the classroom utilize data and other relevant evidence in the decision-making process. They also use significant research to identify new opportunities and be able to take the initiative to mobilize their students around a common purpose. They recognize the right resources that will be able to facilitate the academic progress of their students and also monitor and evaluate this progress. Most teachers in the classrooms today should be able to assume the leadership roles so that they could uplift both the performance of every student and the overall performance of the entire school.

2.2. Teacher Leaders Perspectives

The primary difference that exists between a regular teacher and a teacher leading from the classroom is how they perceive their classroom and the school in general. A regular

teacher always has the mentality that they are only responsible for the students in their class. The mindset only allows them to focus on the students in their class because those are the only students that are entrusted to them. In such a case, they have a sense of ownership to the success that emanates from their classroom.

On the contrary, a teacher leader puts the best interest of all the students in the school at heart rather than that of their classroom only. Instead of focusing on their classrooms strictly, they focus on the entire school system that supports their teaching. Regardless of being a teacher leader in the classroom, they still feel like they have a sense of responsibility and ownership for the entire school. They believe that success starts from the classroom and do not compete to be the best in an institution but instead focus on attaining the overall institutional goal, which in most cases is for the entire school to prosper.

The mentality that the teacher leader in the classroom has inspires them to perform several acts that the regular teacher may be unable to do. For instance, the mindset enables the teacher leaders in the classroom to be able to share. When they perform a given activity in their classroom that works perfectly well and influences success, they will be willing to help their colleagues to replicate the success [6]. The teacher leader in a classroom envisions in a better manner compared to when they are not leaders. They look at the problems that exist in that classroom, try to research, and find ways that might solve this problem and makes things around their classroom to work better. Envisioning better allows the teachers to avoid complaining because all they want is a total improvement in their classroom. They analyze how the improvements in the weak areas can be made and take proper action.

The teacher leading from the classroom takes on more responsibilities that are beyond their contractual duties. They like to participate in good causes in their school without any expectation of extra pay [7]. They also collaborate with the other teachers in the school with an open mind because they understand the fact that a team is more successful in influencing the student success compared to an individual. There is no limit on how teachers in the classroom can become leaders in both their classroom and in the entire school. Teacher leaders strive for better performance of the school and a better tomorrow for all the stakeholders in the school. For this reason, they create a clear vision and a strategic action plan that assists in uniting others into one team. In other words, the teacher leaders, listen more, collaborate, discuss important classroom factors, mediate, convince, and provide the needed support for success (Pounder, 2016).

The characteristics of effective leadership cited earlier supports the notion that teacher leadership begins in the classroom. Teacher leadership is a concept whose time has come, and it begins with how teachers interact with their students in the class. Most people might think that the school administrators make the most important decisions, but research has provided reliable data that administrators should

make important decisions jointly with their teacher leaders. Teacher leaders who have remained in the classrooms should determine and classify the academic level of their students. Teachers remaining in the classroom should be provided with as much support as possible in assisting them develop their leadership skills [6].

2.3. Teacher Leaders Impact on Students Success

Academic research indicates that effective teachers are the essential variables in the success of the students. However, other factors could enhance the success of the students including the size of the class, district funding, community involvement, and family. Despite the existence of all these factors, the teachers are the most influential factors in the success of the students. Therefore, it is essential for all the schools to be able to choose effective leaders so that they can be able to enhance their performance.

Research conducted in Tennessee found that students who were in a classroom taught by an effective teacher leader for three years consecutively outperformed students from a different classroom with a non-leader teacher in a mathematics assessment. The former had a 96th percentile rating as compared to the latter, which had a 44th percentile. The findings showed that the quality of the teacher had a lasting impact on the learning of the student. Data obtained from research carried out in Dallas showed that a student who is in a classroom taught by an outstanding teacher for approximately a year would continue leading in class and continue having great achievement gains over their peers for the next few years [7].

Unfortunately, if a student is not in a class with an outstanding or an effective teacher, then the likelihood of failure is high, and the adverse impact created in their academic achievement may not be fully corrected for approximately three years. A study that was conducted in urban Virginia school district for the third-grade teachers found that students who belonged in the classrooms taught by teachers in the top quartile of effectiveness had 30-40 scores higher than the expected scores outlined in the Virginia Standards of Learning Assessments in English and Mathematics [8]. On the contrary, the students who were taught by teachers in the bottom quartile scored approximately 24 to 32 points lower than the standards expected on the tests. Based on the research carried out, it is evident that the main factor that facilitates the success of the students is the teacher. It is therefore very crucial for schools to be able to support the transformation of schoolteachers into leaders.

Teacher leaders possess the most intimate insight of the content that they should be able to present and teach their students. They also know the context that they should be able to offer to the community that they serve. Providing teachers with the opportunity to serve as leaders in classrooms allows them to apply their unique knowledge to meet the needs of the students. Such an act can be beneficial in enabling the teachers to tailor and streamline their teaching services to the students and come up with classroom policies that can be

able to sustain the academic needs of the students in the years to come. Transformational schools that foster leadership of the teachers in their classrooms lay the groundwork for the overall success of the entire school.

A new study carried out on teacher leadership shows that teachers who work together over a specified period provide the highest success in the students' academics. Students who have classroom teachers who had less experience but had access to the experienced colleagues of their teacher made the highest achievement gains academically [9]. The aspect shows that it is crucial for teachers to spread their expertise to their colleagues through proper leadership. Learning how to satisfy the needs of the students in the classrooms is very vital.

The less-experienced teachers in the schools will always have the most significant margin that accommodates improvement. Teacher leadership is the only aspect that can facilitate these improvements. In the end, the studies have found that the students have more magnificent performances in schools that consist of the highest levels of teacher leadership. Students can learn more when their teachers are involved in the decision-making process and when there is a school improvement plan [10]. However, their potential is significantly limited when there are very few opportunities for teacher leadership.

3. Success of Teacher Leaders

3.1. Teacher Leaders Measurement of Success

Teachers measure their success through their performance rather than their background experience. Successful teachers cannot be identified based on where they schooled, their license or the number of years that they have taught. One of the best ways to assess the success of teachers as leaders is to observe their teaching performances within their classrooms along with reviewing their students' academic growth as measured by standardized testing. This is a good example of why it's important for educational institutions to be able to evaluate and assess their teachers' performance in the classroom with valid and reliable instruments.

Several academic educators have shown ways in which the teacher candidates can be evaluated to identify their effectiveness in providing quality education to the students. Effective teachers portray specific skills and qualifications that entail verbal ability, knowledge of the unique needs of the students, content knowledge of the diverse subjects that they are required to teach the students and the overall coursework pedagogy [11]. They should also consist of positive personality traits like fairness, enthusiasm, a caring attitude, reflective teaching, and dedication in their job. All these factors enhance the effectiveness of the teachers in their classroom. Classroom organization and management skills are, therefore, very crucial and it is only a teacher leader that can be able to carry out these acts effectively. An effective teacher leader consists of characteristics like keeping their students engaged in the content they share, using proper

instructional strategies, monitoring, and evaluating the active learning of the students.

Non-leader teachers transform into leaders gradually. The transformation is a recursive procedure that takes place in a given period; it could be months or years. The progression into teacher leaders might not be steady or linear because most teachers believe that leadership is not the path that they desire to take. For this reason, the process can be gradual as the teachers attempt to fulfill their responsibilities as teachers. The promotion of teacher leadership, therefore, is a continuous learning process that entails evolving and the refining of standards. The process, therefore, can start with allowing the teachers to develop an in-depth knowledge of pedagogy and content. In other words, before the teachers intend to progress over time and become effective leaders, then they should first enhance their teaching practice. In most cases, the transformation of the teacher to the teacher leaders takes place implicitly as a part of their continuing teaching process that is integrated into their daily schedule.

Social and cultural capital has a significant impact on the progress that the teachers make towards leadership. In other words, for a teacher to be able to become a successful leader, then they need to receive both endorsement and support from the colleagues. For instance, teachers who cannot be able to show that they have the required cultural and social capital that will enable their colleagues to identify them as approachable, competent and credible workmates, have a high chance of failure in their transition to teacher leader. Teachers transitioning into leadership roles successfully within their classrooms will often be the teachers recruited by administrators to provide teacher leadership outside the classroom.

3.2. Promote Teacher Leaders in the Classroom

Motivation is the primary aspect needed to promote teacher leadership in the classroom. Motivation in teaching is the central disposition that specifically distinguishes the teacher leaders from those that are not leaders. A study conducted on six teachers who have won several awards in Taiwan showed that teacher leaders have a strong desire to facilitate both the learning and the welfare of their students, which consequently gives them the motivation to take significant action on behalf of the students. Other teachers highly depend on the vision and encouragement that is set forth by the teacher leaders.

Several other studies have shown the fact that the teacher leaders have a high motivation to enhance the achievement of the students. For instance, a study found that teachers who had acquired enough motivation to enroll in the National Board Certification, which is a credential that is highly associated with teacher leadership, mostly received external validation for their teaching practice and self-validated their practice [12]. Teacher leaders also have a high motivation to take part in collaborative acts in the schools and offer all the support that is needed to solve the issues regarding both teaching and learning.

Researchers have also found several distinct ways that can

help promote teacher leaders and enhance their impact on the students' academic lives. The methods include taking part in professional development, sharing ideas, supporting the colleagues, collaboration, with the parents, the colleagues, and the entire community. In addition, they can take part in re-culturing the school, creating an organizational community and taking part in the overall school improvement [13]. The motivation in teacher leaders to support the welfare of both the students and their colleagues reiterates to the belief that teacher leadership is a stance rather than a set of behaviors.

4. Conclusions

In summary, the study stipulates that the transformation of teachers to teacher leader is gradual and is a recursive procedure whereby the teachers can expand their influence as time elapses. However, external factors like the school culture and the colleagues can promote the teachers progress into a teacher leader through motivation. However, the decision on whether the teacher wants to lead or not is upon them. The study shows that leadership starts in the classroom. A teacher leader has to know how to organize and manage their classroom first before they proceed to leading the entire school. Teachers have to operate with the "our students, our school" mentality rather than "my students, my classroom mentality" even if they are leading from the classroom. Such a mentality will allow the entire school to attain overall success for all the students.

It is essential to understand that sharing and working as a team is very crucial in the teacher leadership. The need for teachers to work as a team to recognize the weaknesses in the students and provide solutions to them is crucial. They should also work together to strengthen the strong academic areas of the students and help the teachers to grow in areas that they may not have sufficient expertise. The study portrays the importance of teachers in the academic progress of the students. Students who are taught by outstanding teachers in their classroom often have higher achievement gains compared to these students who are taught by the teachers who are less effective. It is crucial to understand that the teachers have to satisfy all the needs of the students. The study, therefore, shows that teacher leadership is very vital in classrooms. Teacher leadership in classrooms will facilitate the entire success of the school.

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