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AUTHOR Gullatt, David E.
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ABSTRACT

This study identified teacher leadership traits and investigated why those leadership traits are important for educators and students at the middle school level. Characteristics of the middle school and the middle school student were explored as well as opportunities for development and enhancement of teacher leadership skills by middle school teachers and administrators. The study found that many opportunities exist for middle school teachers and students to accept leadership roles. Due to changing patterns of development exhibited by the middle school student, teachers may exercise leadership in curriculum patterns to accommodate the adolescent's learning patterns. Areas of leadership could include the budget, interdisciplinary themes, class schedules, field experiences, and service or extra-curricular opportunities. To exercise effective leadership skills a middle school teacher should: work effectively as a member of an instructional team; design and implement interdisciplinary programs of study; understand and utilize sound principles of guidance; use a variety of teaching styles and instructional techniques; and foster leadership potentiality of adolescents. In return, adolescents exhibiting gained leadership skills will be better socially equipped to make intelligent decisions about themselves and function better in groups. They will also be able to exhibit a vision for themselves that will enhance their success. Contains 26 references. (TJQ)

EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP IN THE MIDDLE SCHOOL CLASSROOM

A paper presented by

David E. Gullatt, Ph.D.
Northwestern State University of Louisiana

at the

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ABSTRACT:
EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP IN THE MIDDLE SCHOOL CLASSROOM

With the structure and organization of modern American society growing more flexible, more complex, more urban, and more pluralistic, the stress on all levels of education has increased. As a result of conflict between the ideal and the real in the American junior high school, educational planners have searched for adaptations of the junior high concept of organization with a new emphasis on exploration for age-appropriate clientele. By the late 1980's many educators' experiences with the middle school concept had become increasingly positive. In addition, recent research indicates that grade span and trends in middle grades practices are definitely linked. The results concluded that practices long deemed to be important by middle school educators (advisory programs, interdisciplinary team organization, and school transition programs) are supported by "good evidence that strong implementation yields benefits that are educationally significant."

Due to changing patterns of development exhibited by the middle school student, middle school teachers may exercise professional leadership in curriculum patterns to accommodate the adolescent's learning patterns. Instructional teams can exercise creative control over how curricular goals are to be reached. Such areas of leadership may include budgets, interdisciplinary themes, class schedules, field experiences, and service\extra-curricular opportunities. As a result of more flexibility within the modern middle school curriculum, teachers are in a position to exert professional leadership in a variety of ways to effect change.

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Effective Leadership in the Middle School Classroom

The focus of this paper centers around identifying teacher leadership traits and investigating why these leadership traits are important for educators and students at the middle school level. In addition, characteristics of the middle school and middle school student will also be explored. Opportunities for development and enhancement of teacher leadership skills by middle school teachers and administrators will be examined. For purposes of this study, middle schools shall include grades five though nine, although it is acknowledged there are many organizational arrangements identified as "middle school."

Questions researched in this investigation are: (a) What does the organizational concept known as "middle school" suggest? (b) What is teacher leadership? (c) What does the notion of leadership and its associated traits have to do with middle school organization? and (d) Why is teacher leadership important within the middle school?

The Concept of Middle School

National Statistics

The National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES, 1995) noted that for the 1993-1994 school year there were 83,621 United States public schools serving a total of 43,476,268 regular education, special education and vocational education students. Of that number 16.9 percent of the public schools (14,132) and 19.5 percent of the public school students (8,477,872) were enrolled in upper elementary/middle school grades (5-9). NCES further provides that the definition of a public middle school is a school that provides educational services to students within the above range of grades, has an assigned administrator, receives public funds as its primary support, and is operated by an educational agency.

Origin and Description of the "Junior High School"

Around the turn or the century, educational organizers influenced by Harvard University President, Dr. Charles W. Eliot, envisioned plans for the first American junior high schools which contained components that would be very familiar to today's middle school educator. These schools were to be based on the characteristics of young adolescents below high school standing and concerned with all aspects of growth and development. The junior high school concept would foresee a school designed to provide continued work in learning skills while bringing more depth to the curriculum than had been the case in the elementary school. Guidance, exploration, independence, and responsibility would be major emphasis areas (Tye, 1985).

Some years later, the original idea of the junior high school was negatively influenced with the "preparation for preparation" syndrome. The energy exerted by high schools to prepare students for college/university study began to move downward in grade to the new junior high school level. With larger junior high school enrollments after World War II, the program of studies offered in most American junior high schools became little more than what was already found in the high schools. Teachers were organized in academic departments rather than the interdisciplinary core curriculum groups that the literature of the junior high school recommended at the turn of the century. Students were promoted or retained on a subject-by-subject basis. Elective programs focused on specialization that would lead to quasi-majors at the high school rather than the exploration envisioned by other early junior high school educators. Rigid grouping patterns based on perceived ability (measured by I.Q.) or prior achievement became characteristic of the junior high school in many districts. Teachers who had prepared for high school teaching often ended up by default in the junior high school. Many administrators felt tenure at the junior high (the way station in life) was only momentary since they had strong aspirations for other jobs such as high school principal or central office supervisor/administrator.

The Reformation of the Junior High School to the Middle School

As the structure of modern American society grew more flexible, more complex, more urban, and more pluralistic, the stress on all levels of education increased (George, 1992). The conflict between the ideal and the real in the American junior high school stood out most glaringly. As a result, planners began to search for adaptations of the junior high concept of organization with a new emphasis on exploration for age-appropriate clientele. However, before the reader can relax with the new concept of middle school successfully marching its way to the 1990's, more delays in pedagogical methodology will occur.

During the 1970's attention to the organizational patterns of the middle school were sometimes driven by integration agendas, overcrowded elementary school conditions, and high school closures brought on by underpopulated campuses. Population age patterns in America had shifted school-age clientele from pre-World War II times. The middle school was truly a transition school to house, for instance, the sixth grade, thereby easing pressure on the overcrowded elementary schools, after moving the ninth grade to the high school to avoid a secondary school closure. Many educational planners felt that sensible integration could be accomplished more efficiently if the public realized that "all" students within an appropriate grade span were required to attend a newly fashioned "middle school." Also, following curriculum outcries that America's schools were turning out inferior products, ninth graders were moved to many high schools and stricter standards were instituted. Thus, the middle school with its "cure all" vestiges and trappings began its existence with quite a colorful, historic, and sometimes un-pedagogical start.

However, to some surprise, by the late 1980's many educators' experiences with the middle school concept had become increasingly positive. School district staff members, teachers, and patrons were discovering that, properly organized and operated, middle schools often delivered substantial

improvements for the district. These positive experiences have, in turn, led school district leaders to explore the middle school concept for its benefits, apart from any other exigencies.

The American Middle School

Truly, the middle school is an educational response to the needs and characteristics of young adolescents during turbulent years and, as such, deals with their full range of intellectual and affective developmental needs. The middle school is unique. It differs from both the elementary and secondary school and attempts to provide a secure bridge between these two phases of schooling.

The following are central elements which fully functioning middle schools must have in common:

1. Educators knowledgeable about and committed to young adolescents.
2. A balanced academic curriculum with a wide range of exploratory activities focusing on three goals: (a) personal development, (b) basic skills, and (c) an introduction to the content of organized knowledge.
3. Interdisciplinary team teaching within which a wide range of organizational arrangements are possible, based on the needs of students.
4. Personalized instruction using a variety of instructional strategies based on the varied skill development of each individual student.
5. An advisor/advisee program that provides comprehensive advising and counseling referral service to each student.
6. Cooperative planning at all levels which results in a safe, responsive, caring school climate. (LA Dept. of Education, 1989, p. v)

Effective middle level education will endure and grow if certain goals are established and adhered to. These goals address the relationship of students to teachers and the programs offered. Research has shown that every student in every middle school must:

1. Succeed every day at something in school either in academics, physical education, arts or exploratory areas.
2. Have access to a qualified adults within the school who will make a special effort to promote student success and will assist individuals in solving problems and adjusting to the world.
3. Experience a carefully planned program of academic fundamentals.
4. Experience a carefully planned program of exploratory offerings.
5. Experience the joy of selecting and exploring a broad variety of activities without the fear of failure. (LA Department of Education, 1989, p. 2)

General Leadership Traits

Few issues have a more controversial history than leadership traits and characteristics. From the "Great Man" theories of the nineteenth century to the "trait" theories of the twentieth century, definition and description has been sought to identify leaders in every professional field. Recent research, using a variety of methods, has made it clear that successful leaders are not like other people. The evidence indicates that there are certain core traits which significantly contribute to a leader's success. Six traits on which these persons differ from non-leaders are: (a) drive, (b) the desire to lead, (c) honesty/integrity, (d) self-confidence, (e) cognitive ability, and (f) knowledge about the business (education in this sense). Eggen (1992) reports that a teacher is simultaneously (a) a manager, (b) a motivator, (c) an instructor, and (d) an evaluation expert needing sophisticated

knowledge, skill, and judgment. The challenge is to continuously and effectively function in these roles and to help all students learn to their maximum capability.

The Application of Leadership to Education

Leadership and management are terms now used in education circles that were borrowed from the business sector over the past twenty-five years. Much research has been conducted in the business/marketing/banking area of management and leadership over the last two decades (Whetten, 1995). As reported by many researchers, there is no secret regarding how to manage and lead an effective business firm or reverse ineffective performance. Two studies will be noted that give a perspective toward the importance of leadership as tools for success. Educational organizers are now beginning to adapt success scenarios from private sector business and finance experiences for application in their settings.

Hanson (1986), investigated the factors that best accounted for financial success over a five-year span in forty major manufacturing firms. The investigator identified five predictors: (a) marketshare, (b) firm capital intensity, (c) size of the firm, (d) industry average return on sales, and (e) emphasis on management/leadership of human resources. His statistical analysis revealed that the last predictor, emphasis on leadership of human resources was three times as powerful a predictor of success as the other four.

The second study examined the reasons for the decline of the U.S. economy in the 1980's. Investigation in this research focused on many banks and savings and loan collapses during the period. The spotlight of inquiry on efficient management and visionary leadership was a focal portion of the investigation. This study revealed that of the 162 national banks failing between 1979 and 1987, two major factors were causes: (a) distressed economic conditions and (b) poor management/leadership. Further investigation reveals that 89 percent of the failed institutions had poor management/leadership. Only 35 percent of the institutions that failed had distressed economic conditions in their regions, and

in only 7 percent of the cases was a distressed economic condition the sole cause of bank failure (Controller, 1987). Findings of the research indicate that poor leadership was the major fault causing the difficulty while lack of vision was the second fault.

Much research has been done in the last ten years to apply leadership qualities from the private sector to the school superintendent and school principal. Effective schools research has stressed the necessity of leadership and managerial qualities for efficient and productive school administrators. Our libraries are becoming full with publications addressing administrative leadership and its importance to educational planning and accountability. The whole notion of teacher leadership, however, is problematic. Most teachers have never defined teacher leadership, nor have they had a conversation about it in their professional lives. Further and more specific research on this topic is absolutely necessary since its application for professional development and utilization in curriculum and general school planning is paramount at the middle school level.

Teacher Leadership

In a review of the literature, Bass (1990) offered 12 perspectives on leadership. Leadership may be viewed as (a) the focus of group processes, (b) personality and its effect on others, (c) the art of inducing compliance, (d) the exercise of influence, (e) an act or behavior, (f) a form of persuasion, (g) a power relation, (h) an instrument of goal achievement, (i) an emerging effect of interaction, (j) a differentiated role, (k) the initiation of structure or (l) a combination of these elements. Leadership is a complex concept with a multitude of meanings and purposes. The same is true of teaching. Neither leadership nor teaching lends itself to simple analysis. Combining the concepts into teacher leadership further increases the complexity. Educational, instructional, organizational, supervisory, administrative, community, and political leadership are all parts of the larger concept called teacher leadership.

Attributes

According to Vail and Redick (1993), teacher leadership differs from leadership exercised by other individuals in the school system. Lieberman, Saxl, and Miles (1988) consciously used the term teacher leaders to suggest that "there is not only a set of leadership skills that are teacher-like, but a way of thinking and acting that is sensitive to teachers, to teaching and to the school culture" (p. 148). Although many acknowledge its unique features, few agree as to what ought to be the focus of teacher leadership. Little (1988) stated that the target of teacher leadership ought to be teachers' choices about (a) curriculum, (b) instruction, (c) how students are helped to learn, and (d) how progress is judged and rewarded.

Predictors of Teacher Leadership

Many teachers harbor extraordinary leadership capabilities. If the conditions which enable teachers to lead can be identified, many impediments facing teachers trying to lead can be overcome. Identifying predictors of performance of teacher leadership behaviors is an important part of creating the conditions necessary for teacher leadership to emerge. In an extensive investigation of teacher leadership, Hatfield (1986) found that the majority of teacher leaders (a) had achieved 10-18 years of professional experience, (b) possessed a master's degree, and (c) filled more than one role in their schools, including roles such as department head, coach, class sponsor, club advisor, and curriculum or staff consultant.

Development

There seems to be an assumption in many schools that teacher leadership cannot be exercised until someone has been a teacher for a long time. When less-experienced teachers attempt to exert leadership, the reaction is often less than overwhelmingly positive. This norm tends to discourage teachers early in their careers from developing their leadership abilities, or at least it dissuades them from viewing leadership as something integral to the role of teacher.

An alternative is to develop a teacher's leadership style systematically throughout one's career. Teachers can experience different types of leadership at different points of their profession. Conley (1993) suggests the following examples to illustrate the types of roles in which teachers might be involved in leadership activitie over time: (a) club sponsorship/coach/student leadership advisor, (b) mentor, (c) peer observer/coach, (d) chair or member of committee or site council, (e) department or chair coordinator, (f) lead teacher, (g) association researcher, (h) teacher researcher, (i) curriculum developer, (j) educational entrepreneur, (k) reflective practitioner, (l) administrative intern, and (m) mentor. Each activity has a direct correlation to improvement of instruction within the classroom since each activity broadens the experiences of the teacher and incorporates a democratic/social/organizational facet to the experiences of the educator.

Restructuring: Creation of Leadership

Associated with the above procedures is the concept of restructuring which also facilitates teacher leadership. When restructuring is attempted with some success, there is a strong likelihood that the role of the teacher also undergoes redefinition. Schools that define themselves as being involved in restructuring generally operate in ways that tend to "professionalize" the role of teacher (Lieberman and Miller, 1990). Teachers are often charged with making many more decisions and are given the wherewithal to implement programs based on these decisions. They spend more time discussing the goals, purposes, and methods of education as colleagues, and they interact around issues of instruction to a greater degree.

Rosenholtz's (1989) study of teachers' workplace concluded that a number of factors were associated with schools where teachers were: (a) more effective, (b) more satisfied, and (c) more amenable to change and improvement. These factors included: (a) high consensus on shared goals, (b) significant teacher collaboration, (c) ample opportunity for teacher growth and learning, (d) an abundant spirit of continuous improvement, (e) some certainty or agreement about what constitutes

effective practice, and (f) a strong sense of the possible along with a commitment to make things happen and to solve problems. When teachers have an organizational environment with these characteristics, changes in the way they approach teaching are much more possible and likely.

Rosenholtz makes clear that in schools that are meeting the needs of a wide range of youngsters, teachers cannot do "whatever" they define personally as effective teaching and operate in isolation from their peers. Opening up the classroom and the instructional process may not be easy for some teachers. If teachers are to have greater decision-making authority, they will need to utilize use human relations skills such as: (a) communication, (b) negotiation, (c) consensus, (d) goal-setting, and (e) conflict resolution to a greater degree. The old teaching behavior norm of isolation, which allows a teacher to reject new ideas and decisions, is challenged by such newer behaviors prescriptions.

In regard to personal and professional characteristics, Liberman et al (1988) reported these characteristics of teacher leaders: (a) possession of a broad range of skills, abilities, and experiences; (b) involvement in curriculum development; (c) involvement in teaching new curriculum to others; (d) interests in an array of academic pursuits and accrual of an array of accomplishment; (e) possession of positions in which they had gained experience in administrative and organizational skills; (f) possession of knowledge of community concerns and schools; (g) possession of a risk-taking temperament; and (h) possession of interpersonal skills which helped them legitimize their positions in their schools amid often hostile and resistant staffs.

Teacher Leadership and Middle School Teaching

With the above information as background, what is the application of research on leadership to the middle school teacher? What does leadership have to do with teaching? Some teachers see a connection between teaching and leading, and some scholars agree with them (Bolman and Deal, 1994).

We usually think of teacher leadership as a formal process (Devanchey, 1987). Teachers have formal authority roles such as department chair, union leadership, member of advisory committees, etc. The formal influential practices in schools have long been acknowledged (Cuban, 1983). The key role that teacher leadership plays; however, is in developing: (a) programs, (b) climate, (c) and curriculum within a school. This typically occurs in an informal and unstructured manner (Whitaker, 1995).

Leadership opportunities arise daily and often in the classroom. Teaching and leadership are both about infusing life and work with passion, meaning, and purpose. John Gardner (1989) stated, "Leaders teach. Lincoln, in his second inaugural address, provided an extraordinary example of the leader as teacher. Teaching and leading are distinguishable occupations, but every great leader is clearly teaching --and every great teacher is leading" (p. 18).

Leadership, like teaching, is essentially a relationship and a process of mutual influence between leaders and those they hope to lead. Good leaders, like good teachers, are as good at listening and sensing as they are at persuading and teaching . What distinguishes leadership from other kinds of relationships is that when it works well, it enables people to collaborate in the service of shared visions, values and missions. At their best, teachers, like other leaders, shape relationships that make a measurable difference in other's lives although those differences may be hard to reach and may not come to fruition for years after the fact (Bolman and Deal, 1994).

Teachers usually have no way of knowing they have made a difference in a child's life, even when they have made a dramatic one. But for children who usually think of themselves as slow, stupid, or not worth talking to, a good teacher leader can provide an astonishing revelation. A teacher leader can give a child at least a chance to feel, "She/he thinks I'm worth something. Maybe I am!" (Kidder, 1989, p. 513). Inservice and preservice training for teachers provides many ideas and concepts to help understand (a) individual students, (b) teaching methods, and (c) curriculum.

Applications to the Classroom Setting

Teachers continually face the challenge of deciding what is happening in the (a) classroom, (b) the school, and (c) in the community, in general. The everyday world of the classroom presents a complex series of (a) challenges, (b) puzzles, (c) interruptions, and (d) assorted frustrations. Sometimes these events are punctuated equally by moments of joy, laughter, energy, and exhilaration. The dynamics inside the classroom are challenge enough. What makes it even harder are all the problems and pressures that originate outside its walls--directives from the principal, complaints from parents, district policies, state regulations, and the breakdown of families and communities. To make some sense of all the variables affecting the daily lesson plan, teachers will organize vague, confusing, messy symptoms of life in schools into meaningful patterns. Experiences drawn from a lifetime of practice and training have provided a many experiences (or some practitioners and researchers use the term "lenses") that teacher leaders use to define and frame reality inside and outside the classroom.

Alexander and McEwin (1989), in a major national survey, found that important changes in middle school organization and curriculum have accompanied the dramatic increase in numbers. For example, interdisciplinary team organization has increased tremendously in the last twenty years. Whereas in 1968 fewer than 10 percent of the schools reported interdisciplinary team organization, in 1988 approximately one-third did so. Also, in 1988, nearly 400 schools reported having advisor-advisee programs, while the likelihood of these program being in place in 1968 was so slight the question was not asked.

In addition, many school leaders now report a rationale for middle school implementation responding to the characteristics and needs of early adolescence, rather than reflecting administrative expediency. They also report an earlier and broader range of interest-exploratory courses and activities. The Carnegie Report, Turning Points, recommends young adolescents be educated in schools featuring the middle school concept to contain:

1. Small communities for learning within the larger school buildings.
2. Core academic programs for all learners.
3. Success experiences for all students.
4. Empowerment for teacher to make decisions about the experiences of middle grades students.
5. Teachers trained to teach young adolescents.
6. Health and fitness education.
7. Families reengaged in the education of middle school students.
8. Schools that are reconnected with their communities. (George, 1992, p.12)

Lastly, recent research (Epstein, 1990) indicates in a Johns Hopkins study that grade span and trends in middle grades practices are definitely linked. The results concluded that practices long deemed to be important by middle school educators (advisory programs, interdisciplinary team organization, and school transition programs) are supported by "good evidence that strong implementation yields benefits that are educationally significant.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Many opportunities abound for both middle school teachers and middle school students to accept leadership roles. Due to the changing patterns of development exhibited by the middle school student, teachers may exercise leadership in curriculum patterns to accommodate the adolescent's learning patterns. Instructional teams can exercise creative control over how curricular goals are to be reached. Such areas of leadership may include budget, interdisciplinary themes, class schedules, field experiences, and service/extra-curricular opportunities.

Teacher leadership may result in breaking down large schools into smaller "houses," or "sub-schools," or teams within the same building. The smaller educational environments are more

conducive to meeting the developmental needs of young adolescents and ensure that students will feel more a part of a "family" of caring and supportive individuals. Successful teaching has been defined as a blend of the efforts of the teacher leader augmented by (a) an effective guidance program, (b) the use of specialized methodology, and (c) a modern curriculum.

To exercise effective leadership skills a middle school teacher should (a) work effectively as a member of an instructional team, (b) design and implement interdisciplinary programs of study, (c) understand and utilize sound principles of guidance, (d) use a variety of teaching styles and instructional techniques, and (e) foster leadership potentiality of adolescents. In return, adolescents exhibiting gained leadership skills will be better socially equipped to make intelligent decisions about themselves. They will function better within groups and be able to exhibit a vision for themselves that will enhance their success.

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