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AUTHOR	Lashway, Larry
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ABSTRACT

Ways in which teachers and principals respond to changing leadership roles and some practical steps that principals can take to support leadership are discussed in this article review. It focuses on five papers that explore educators' roles, offering advice on how to respond to changing expectations. "When is New: A Plan of Action" (A. W. Hart) examines ways that teacher leadership changes the principal's traditional duties. "Awakening the Sleeping Giant: Leadership Development for Teachers" (M. Katzenmeyer and G. Moller) suggests that teacher leadership can play a significant transformative part in K-12 schools, and that such teacher leaders are classroom-centered leaders who concentrate on teaching and learning rather than on organizational "nuts and bolts." "Effects of Teacher Leadership on Their Teaching Practice" (M. N. Ovando) surveyed 25 teachers who revealed that leadership roles demanded time that used to be devoted to planning periods and other free moments. "Supports and Barriers to Teacher Leadership: Reports of Teacher Leaders" (L. F. Zinn) presents research showing that the new leadership role can be difficult for teachers to master and that support is crucial to the process, such as a strong network of colleagues and administrator support. "Teacher Leaders and Their Principals: Exploring the Development of New Working Relationships" (M. A. Smylie and J. Conyers) states that once teachers assume a leadership role, they must redefine their relationship with the principal in order to reduce any role ambiguity. (RJM)

Research roundup

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Teacher Leadership

Larry Lashway

In the 1980s, when educational reformers turned their spotlight from the legislature to the classroom, they envisioned teacher leadership as a key to reform. One high-level national commission went so far as to advocate schools run by committees of teachers, without an administrator in sight.

There is little evidence that anyone—least of all teachers—took this particular proposal very seriously, but teacher leadership has emerged as a prominent theme in the educational restructuring literature. Some of the interest comes from schools using site-based management, where teacher leadership is defined as participation in collective decision making. Other researchers have begun to explore bolder visions, seeing teachers as assertive leaders in their own right.

In both cases, principals face an intriguing but troublesome puzzle.

Larry Lashway is a research analyst and writer for the ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management at the University of Oregon.

On the one hand, schools are designed as top-down bureaucratic institutions with teachers at the bottom of the policy-making chain. Notwithstanding the rhetoric of teacher leadership, the system still puts accountability squarely on the shoulders of administrators. On the other hand, early reform efforts have shown that significant change does not occur without the full involvement of teachers; mandates from the top do not automatically lead to effective reform when they trickle down to the classroom.

Reconciling these contradictions is not easy. Principals must first sort through the ambiguities of the new roles. If teachers are leaders, what is the role of the principal? What decisions can be made by teachers? What decisions should be shared?

In addition, teacher leadership raises a host of practical questions. How can principals encourage and help prepare teachers for these new roles? What kind of governance structures works best? Where will the time come from?

The works described here explore these questions from a number of perspectives, showing how teachers and principals respond to new roles and suggesting practical steps that principals can take to support teacher leadership.

Ann Weaver Hart examines the ways that teacher leadership changes the principal's role.

Marilyn Katzenmeyer and Gayle Moller tell how principals can help develop classroom-based teacher leadership.

Martha N. Ovando explores the ways that new leadership roles affect teachers' performance of their traditional roles.

Lynn F. Zinn discusses the factors that support or hinder the practice of teacher leadership.

Mark A. Smylie and Jean Brownlee-Conyers examine the working relationships that develop between teacher leaders and their principals.

Hart, Ann Weaver. **"When Is Now: A Plan of Action."** In *When Teachers Lead*, edited by Terry A. Astuto. University Park, Pa.: University Council for Educational Administration, 1993. 83 pages. ED 366 082. *Available from:* ERIC Document Reproduction Service, 7420 Fullerton Rd., Suite 110, Springfield, VA 22153-2852. 800-443-3742. $16.32.

This paper, part of an edited volume exploring many dimensions of teacher leadership, argues that increased teacher leadership will require a major rethinking of the administrator's role. When teachers lead, they gain power and influence, threatening traditional lines of control; their professional lives change as they collaborate and differentiate their roles; and the school's micropolitical arena changes in unpredictable ways.

As teachers move from isolation to participation, they become part of the power structure, working alongside administrators rather than under them. Principals must now function as one among equals, and the skills of team building, group process, and collaboration become more important than control and coordination. In addition, teachers increasingly expect administrative rules to have a clear link to classroom productivity.

Because leadership takes many forms, teacher roles become more differentiated, and not all teachers are concerned with all issues. Thus, principals can never be sure which issues will catalyze teachers and which will be regarded with indifference; effective strategies will depend on careful listening rather than viewing teachers as interchangeable units.

As the work lives of teachers change, principals will need to develop their own repertoire of knowledge and skills. Teacher leadership thrives on professional consensus rather than hierarchy, and principals who fail to keep pace with teachers' expanding professional capacity will find their own influence waning.

Hart points out that the school's micropolitical arena will become harder to manage as leadership roles bring teachers into conflict with each other. The old ritualized conflict between unions and school management channeled disagreements into predictable paths, but with teacher leadership, controversy springs up in unexpected areas. Principals must develop highly refined conflict management skills to keep the school functioning smoothly. They must also be able to help teachers rethink traditional definitions of collegiality, equality, and privacy.

As teacher leadership challenges the traditional power structure, principals will be called on to exercise transitional and transformational leadership rather than maintenance skills. Hart observes that many administrators have not been trained in these skills, and that administrator training programs must change to reflect the new realities.

Katzenmeyer, Marilyn; and Moller, Gayle. **Awakening the Sleeping Giant: Leadership Development for Teachers.** Thousand Oaks, Cal.: Corwin, 1996. *Available from:* Corwin Press, 2455 Teller Rd., Thousand Oaks, CA 91320-2218. 805-499-0721. $19.95 paper, $45.95 cloth, plus $3.50 shipping and handling.

As the title suggests, the authors believe that teacher leadership, properly nurtured, can play a powerful transformative role in K-12 schools. They see teacher leaders as classroom-centered, focused on teaching and learning rather than organizational nuts and bolts, and relying on influence rather than power. The authors focus on four key elements in achieving this kind of leadership: personal assessment, a supportive school environment, diverse strategies for influencing others, and planning for action.

Personal assessment is important because each teacher brings a unique combination of experiences, skills, and values to the leadership role. The type of leadership a teacher exercises will depend on his or her teaching skills, philosophy, career stage, and personal life. Teachers who consciously reflect on their unique pattern of talents will not only know themselves better, but will better recognize and accept uniqueness in others.

A supportive school environment plays a crucial role in teacher leadership, which develops when schools place a high focus on professional development, collegiality, teacher autonomy, and open communication. In addition, principals must lead the way in amending organizational structures to support teacher leadership, especially in carving out more time for teachers to work through the challenges of their new roles.

Because teacher leaders seldom have much position power, they must operate through influence rather than formal authority. Staff development can help teachers identify and develop the *diverse strategies* that will work best for them. In particular, teachers need skills in working collaboratively with diverse colleagues. With these preconditions in place, teachers will be prepared to focus on a workable *plan of action.*

Throughout this process, the principal's role is critical. Principals serve as primary role models, teaching leadership through actions as well as words. They support the committed, encourage the reluctant, and pave the way by finding resources and removing barriers.

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ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management, 5207 University of Oregon, Eugene, Oregon 97403-5207. Phone 800-438-8841.

According to the authors, these efforts will be repaid by greater teacher effectiveness, reduced resistance to change, and a more professional climate.

Principals will like the book's highly practical content, which includes several self- assessment surveys, as well as end-of-chapter suggestions for teachers, principals, central office administrators, and university faculty.

Ovando, Martha N. **Effects of Teacher Leadership on Their Teaching Practices.** Paper presented at the annual conference of the University Council for Educational Administration, Philadelphia, October, 1994. 23 pages. ED 380 446. *Available from:* ERIC Document Reproduction Service, 7420 Fullerton Rd., Suite 110, Springfield, VA 22153-2852. 800-443-3742. $4.08.

We know that teacher leaders take on new roles in their schools, but what happens to their old roles? In this paper, Martha Ovando explores how teacher leadership affects teaching practices. She surveyed 25 teachers in the same district: all had leadership responsibilities such as department chairperson, academic team leader, or lead teacher.

Respondents indicated that their leadership roles demanded extra time, which tended to be taken from planning periods, conference times, professional days, and before and after school. Teachers indicated that their priority was protecting student contact time. Some teachers indicated that the added time commitment of dual roles created stress. Several also noted that the two roles took different frames of mind and that it was difficult to switch quickly from one frame to another. Despite the frustrations, many of the teachers said the new roles were satisfying and helped them grow professionally.

While Ovando did not attempt to directly measure teaching practices, she concludes that teacher leadership might adversely affect some teaching practices, especially planning and preparation. In addition, teacher focus may suffer because of the need to deal simultaneously with two roles. Ovando recommends that teacher leaders receive continuing support (not just at the beginning of their leadership roles) to help them address these concerns.

Zinn, Lynn F. **Supports and Barriers to Teacher Leadership: Reports of Teacher Leaders.** Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Chicago, March 1997. 43 pages. ED 408 259. *Available from:* ERIC Document Reproduction Service, 7420 Fullerton Rd., Suite 110, Springfield, VA 22153-2852. 800-443-3742. $8.16.

A decade of experimentation with teacher leadership has made it clear that new roles can be difficult to master. What barriers stand in the way? What actions can facilitate teacher leadership? This case study of nine elementary teacher leaders provides some answers.

Zinn considers sources of support and barriers in three categories: in the school setting, outside the school setting, and within the individual. Within the school setting, the strongest sources of support are a strong network of colleagues and administrator support. Principals lend this support by providing verbal encouragement, locating resources, supplying information, and coaching new leadership skills. Training opportunities also play a role, but do not by themselves seem to create leaders.

Time is the greatest barrier within schools. Not only is there too little of it, but classroom responsibilities prevent teacher leaders from using available time flexibly. Sometimes they face resentment or jealousy from other teachers or hostility from administrators. In addition, the new roles are sometimes ill-defined and ambiguous.

Outside the school setting, teacher leaders benefit most from support of family and friends, though several mentioned media recognition and support from parents of students. Lack of support from these groups is a significant barrier, and the need to balance work and family is a continual concern. In some cases, the cultural or family backgrounds of teachers did not encourage leadership roles.

As individuals, these teacher leaders showed a strong sense of motivation, confidence, and commitment. They also enjoyed the challenges and changes offered by leadership roles. At the same time, all experienced personal barriers to leadership: reluctance to be assertive, discouragement, and stress.

Zinn concludes that the balance between support and barriers is often fragile, and sometimes dependent on factors beyond the principal's control. Simply offering verbal support will seldom be sufficient to overcome the many barriers, and principals must take concrete actions. Because not all teachers respond in the same way, individual concerns must be carefully attended to, and teachers must be offered diverse options in undertaking leadership roles. Despite the difficulties, the author sees teacher leadership as an exciting and powerful development that will amply repay the effort required to nurture it.

Smylie, Mark A.; and Brownlee-Conyers, Jean. **Teacher Leaders and Their Principals: Exploring the Development of New Working Relationships.** Educational *Administration Quarterly* 28:2 (May 1992): 150-184. *Available from:* Sage Publications, Inc., 2455 Teller Rd. Thousand Oaks, CA 91320. 805-499-0721. $15.00.

When a school designates certain teachers as leaders, it immediately thrusts them into a new and uncharted relationship with the school's traditional leader, the principal. How do principals and teachers work out their new relationship?

Smylie and Brownlee-Conyers studied a suburban district where teacher leaders were expected to play a major role in fostering collegiality, professional development, and school improvement, but had few specified duties. These teachers remained in their classrooms on a reduced schedule.

Because of the open-ended nature of the leadership roles, both teachers and principals gave immediate priority to reducing the ambiguity. Accordingly, their earliest concerns were interpersonal, as they groped for a mutually satisfactory working relationship, trying to develop the trust, support, and loyalty that both parties expected.

The authors found that teachers and principals entered the relationship with individual agendas that they did not immediately put aside. Principals were concerned with protecting certain prerogatives, such as exercising the ability to make key decisions, representing the school to the community, and knowing what activities were going on in the school. For their part, teachers were concerned with maintaining relationships with peers, protecting their responsibility for working with students, and avoiding conflict with the principal. (As one teacher put it, "When it's all said and done, he's still my boss.")

In pursuing their individual agendas, both teachers and principals consciously used strategies to shape the relationship. For example, principals often complimented teachers, solicited their advice, and suggested tasks. Teachers looked for ways to assert their ideas without creating conflict; some spoke of planting seeds or acting as though a teacher's idea had come from the principal.

Over time, however, the relationships evolved from an emphasis on self-interest and interpersonal communication to symbiosis and a focus on the tasks to be accomplished. The authors conclude that resolving tensions and developing trust are essential first steps in developing productive partnerships. Schools should help both parties cultivate the skills needed for this task.

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