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AUTHOR Whitsett, Glee; Riley, Jack

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ABSTRACT

This study examined shifts in perceptions of the meaning of leadership and necessary leadership skills held by 18 teachers in a graduate program on teacher leadership. Participants were queried twice regarding their definitions of leadership; once at the outset of their degree program and again 1 year later. In between, they took classes in leadership and mentor training, professional standards, school climate, legal and fiscal management, public relations and community resources, and parent and family involvement. Two Likert-scale surveys examined their perceptions of the importance of 11 leadership skills and of the extent to which they attained growth in each skills. Results found little variation in the relative importance participants assigned to the skills. Confidence emerged as the most important skill, followed by two skills that involved the participation of others in tasks undertaken by the teacher leader. Participants varied more widely in their assessment of personal growth in leadership skills. They perceived the greatest growth in knowledge of educational issues and understanding leadership styles. Initially, most participants defined leadership under the figurehead category. Midway through the program, half of them changed to define leadership in terms of the cheerleader/team player category. (Contains 15 references.) (SM)

Running Head: DEFINING AND APPLYING LEADERSHIP

Defining and applying leadership: Perceptions of teacher leader candidates

Glee Whitsett

Jack Riley

The University of Montevallo

Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Mid-South

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Abstract

This study examines shifts in the perceptions of the meaning of leadership and necessary leadership skills held by teachers enrolled in a graduate program in teacher leadership. The purpose of the study was to determine the extent to which developing teacher leaders change in the way they define and apply leadership as a result of formal training.

Although teacher as leader appears to be a new focus for education, teachers have served in leadership roles since the days of the one-room schoolhouse. Silva, Gimbert, and Nolan (2000) identify three waves of teacher leadership, progressing from those who hold positions of leadership such as department chair or grade level captain to those who participate in mentoring and curriculum development, and finally to teacher leaders involved in the reculturing of schools. Urbanski and Nickolaou (1997) advance the view that administrative leadership is primarily managerial, while teacher leadership is more collegial.

Limited research on the effects of formal training in teacher leadership led to this study. Subjects were 18 graduate students enrolled in a graduate program in teacher leadership. Instrumentation was a Likert-scale survey indicating perceptions of the importance of leadership skills identified in the literature on teacher leadership, and the extent to which they had attained growth in each of those skills. In addition, subjects wrote two definitions of leadership, one at the onset of their program, and one after a year of study.

Issues addressed in this paper include shifts in leadership definition and the relative importance assigned to leadership skills. The implications for training of not only teacher leaders but also school administrators who deal with teacher leaders are also discussed.

Defining and applying leadership: Perceptions of teacher leader candidates

Purpose of the Study

Educational leadership is increasingly the focal point of emerging trends in school reform and accountability. One trend involves classroom teachers at all levels assuming greater roles of responsibility and leadership. Teacher leadership has emerged as a major emphasis of attempts to improve student learning. In *The Nature of Leadership*, John Gardner (2000) provides a straightforward definition of leadership: the process by which an individual induces a group to pursue the objectives of the individual. This definition is echoed throughout the literature. The purpose of this study is to examine the perspectives of teachers preparing to be teacher leaders – their beliefs about teacher leadership and its requisite skills, and their perceptions of personal growth in those skills.

Research Questions

Three research questions guided this study:

1. How do teacher leader candidates define leadership at various points in a teacher leader degree program?
2. What is the degree of importance that teacher leader candidates attach to selected teacher leadership skills?
3. How do teacher leader candidates identify their level of growth in selected teacher leadership skills during a teacher leader degree program?

Related Research

Although much has been written on the subject of leadership in terms of business management, very little research has been done on leadership in academics. Comparatively less

research has been done on leadership within the academic department and grade levels in terms of teachers. Teacher leaders may have the authority to make most departmental and grade level decisions, but rarely does formal training or instruction for this position exist. This can put the teacher leader in charge of a unit without really knowing how to manage people or how to accomplish group goals. They are left, so to speak, without an instruction manual, and some people may flounder in this situation. As Redwood, Goldwasser, and Street (1999) put it, "Some leaders are born, but most need help" (p. 64).

Fairly new to the English language, the word *leadership* has only been in use for about two hundred years (Yukl, 1989), although "the term leader, from which it was derived, appeared as early as A.D. 1300" (Yukl, 1989, p. 3). Yukl classifies leadership approaches into four classifications: power-influence, behavior, trait, and situational.

Leadership, as defined by Hersey and Blanchard (1982), is the "process of influencing the activities of an individual or a group in efforts toward goal achievement in a given situation" (p. 83). They also believed that leadership involved the components of leader, follower, and situational variables (Hersey & Blanchard, 1988). While Hodgkinson (1991) proposes, "leadership is a mere incantation for the bewitchment of the led" (p. 53), he goes on to state that leadership and administration are interchangeable. Pearman (1998) states that "Leadership is in flux today, and the old paradigms for managing effectively are no longer enough. The key to success for the new millennium leader is the ability to communicate meaningful information and build relationships among organizational members" (p. 21).

Leadership can also vary by culture. Redwood, Goldwasser, and Street (1999) conducted a worldwide survey on leadership and found that Western leaders and workers are often afraid of

change. Eastern respondents, on the other hand, "...rated both the perceived importance of action leadership and their leaders' skills higher than did respondents in any other region" (p. 83).

"A leader," according to Guthrie and Reed (1991), "is an individual who accepts the authoritative expectations of others to responsibly guide the activities and enhance the performance of an organization" (p. 10). Guthrie and Reed further state that a leader in education also recognizes the influence of internal and external change on a campus, and adjusts accordingly. They believe that power in leadership depends on the situation, and that one can only lead in a situation based on one's personal talents and abilities. They do think, however, that leadership can be learned, nurtured, and acquired.

Women and Leadership

Teacher leadership programs tend to consist primarily of women, while men lean toward more traditional administrative programs. As the workplace changes, women will continue to increase in power and position. Morrison (1992) states that by the year 2000, "15 percent [of personnel in the workplace] will be native white men, while the rest will be native white women (42 percent), native nonwhite women (13 percent) and men (7 percent), and immigrant men (13 percent) and women (9 percent)" (p. 14). These statistics show the large numbers of women that will be entering the workforce and becoming potential leaders.

Glaser and Smalley (1995) examined the changing criteria for modern leaders. They found that women are now uniquely equipped to contribute to the new work climate because of their natural leadership tendencies. These characteristics include: having a positive attitude, solid job knowledge, a personal touch, generosity, a sense of direction, consistency, flexibility/adaptability, open-mindedness, trustworthiness/reliability, firmness/decisiveness, a

sense of humor, strength/confidence, visibility/accessibility, and ability to motivate.

Communication seems to be the main component in many of these characteristics. Glaser and Smalley (1995) cited a 1992 survey by *Industry Week* that reported "less than half (46 percent) of the respondents said their bosses were good listeners. And 55 percent complained that their supervisors were 'poor' or 'average' in providing direction, in their knowledge of subordinates' jobs, and at communicating goals" (1995, p.32). Similarly, the authors cited Jerry R. Junkins from *21st Century Leadership: Dialogues with 100 Top Leaders* "It's important to realize right now that only 15 percent of the incoming work force in the year 2000 will be white males; the balance will be females and minorities" (p. 34). Glaser and Smalley maintain that the managerial style of women, or "dolphin" approach, works because "they are able to maintain control, yet still empower and inspire their employees" (p. 35).

For new leaders, Glaser and Smalley (1995, p.43) advise against ten mistakes that would be hard for a female manager [teacher leader] to overcome. These are:

1. Misunderstanding-or underestimating-the psychology of change.
2. Expecting too much too soon.
3. Taking charge too quickly.
4. Not taking time to get to know the people you'll be working with.
5. Failure to set-and share-your goals and priorities.
6. Being a "pushover" or a "pushy broad."
7. Inaccessibility to subordinates.
8. Pretending to know it all.
9. Placing your own career aspirations ahead of your organization's needs.

10. Not taking time to explore your corporate culture.

Many of these actions can trigger employee apprehension. Glaser and Smalley (1995) state that fear and lack of involvement in the decision making process are the main reasons workers resist the change that comes with new leadership. Correspondingly, fear plays into a reluctance by women to delegate tasks. The authors believe strong leaders get to know their staff and play to their strengths. They recommend leaders ignore the impulse to not divvy up the workload, whether this stems from guilt of imposition, rationalization, martyrdom, low self-esteem, or a need for perfectionism. According to Glaser and Smalley, dividing the work helps the company and your status as a leader in the long run.

Although Glaser and Smalley state that the natural need for communication is a source of strength for female leaders, they also acknowledge problems that may occur in speech patterns and mannerisms of women. These areas are: excessive apologies, smiling too much at inappropriate times, hedging or using qualifiers, excessive chitchat, empty adjectives/adverbs, tilting or nodding the head, submissive body posture, tag questions, disclaimers, lengthy requests, super polite speech, distracting hand gestures, self-effacing remarks, fillers, asking too many questions, avoiding eye contact, allowing the invasion of personal space, and having a powerless voice. Glaser and Smalley state that any of these can damage one's credibility as a proficient leader, thus hindering the ability to win the esteem of the group.

Similarly, women face internal problems as well as external ones. The problems that confront women who desire to lead include managing problems at work and in their personal lives:

> Women who work full time spend another twenty-five hours a week doing housework, while men spend only thirteen hours. When young children are involved, mothers spend

> seventeen hours a week on childcare, while fathers spend only five hours. Often, women also carry out many of the social obligations involved in a relationship. Societal norms may be more to blame than rigid personnel practices in organizations, but the squeeze being put on many talented women continues to drive some away and to limit the contributions of many who stay. (Glaser & Smalley, 1995, p.52)

If women do accept leadership roles in spite of these obstacles, they must be aware of other societal issues, such as legality. Miles (1997) listed several legal issues that teacher leaders should also be aware of as academic department leaders. These issues included due process, valid contracts, torts, and harassment. In terms of due process, Miles stated that teacher leaders should be aware of 42 U.S.C., Sec. 1983 because it is used to sue for violation of civil rights. Miles stated:

> A defense by a college administrator to a charge of violating a person's constitutional rights, brought under 42 U.S.C., Sec. 1983, is qualified immunity. The defense of qualified-or good faith-immunity for college officials performing discretionary functions is based on the principle that insubstantial claims should not be granted a trial. (p. 18)

Miles (1997) also states that teacher leaders should be responsible for knowledge of different types of torts. These relate to the emotional, mental, or physical injuries of an individual. Guidelines include: attend meetings regularly, read and understand all financial reports, and have a working knowledge of school policies.

As a general guideline against liability, Miles (1997) offers six checkpoints:

1. Know the state laws governing liability.
2. Determine the [school]'s policies and practices regarding indemnification and governmental immunity.
3. Learn potential liability risks.
4. Guard against risks on the job.
5. Determine the insurance coverage your [school] provides.

6. Investigate the possibility of obtaining supplemental individual coverage. (p. 122)

Teacher Leadership

Although teacher as leader appears to be a new focus for education, teachers have served in leadership roles since the days of the one-room schoolhouse. Bolman and Deal (1994) point out "good leaders, like good teachers, are as good at listening and sensing as they are at persuading and teaching...they, like other leaders, shape relationships that make a measurable difference in others' lives" (p. 3). Thus while many teachers do not take on traditional administrative assignments, they nevertheless participate in many leadership functions within the school. Bolman and Deal (1994) further assert that "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" (p. 3) -- the shared vision, of course, being better schools.

Silva, Gimbert, and Nolan (2000) identify three waves of teacher leadership, progressing from those who hold positions of leadership such as department chair or grade level captain to those who participate in mentoring and curriculum development, and finally to teacher leaders involved in the reculturing of schools. Urbanski and Nickolaou (1997) advance the view that administrative leadership is primarily managerial, while teacher leadership is more collegial.

This emphasis on the collaborative aspects of teacher leadership is both a benefit and a challenge. Coyle (1997) asserts that teacher collaboration is a first step in teacher leadership. Wasley (1991) views teacher leaders as having "the ability to encourage colleagues to change, to do things they wouldn't ordinarily do without the influence of the leader." (p. 170). "Teacher leaders have abandoned their privateness. They engage in collaboration and collegial

interactions with their peers." (Lemlech & Hertzog, 1998, p. 1).

Rush (2003) identified teacher leadership skills from an examination of teacher leader degree programs, and concluded that participants in such programs perceived that they acquired greater command over these skills through formal teacher leadership training. Rush advocated "more emphasis on developing leadership skills that necessitate collegiality and collaboration," [increased efforts] "to solicit, cultivate, and provide leader-prone teachers with formal teacher leadership training" and "programs to acquaint building-level and district-wide leaders with the value and utilization of teacher leadership" (pp. 86-87).

Methodology

Subjects

Subjects were 18 graduate students enrolled in an Ed.S. program in teacher leadership at a small public liberal arts college in the southeast. Of these, eight were elementary classroom teachers, three were elementary reading specialists, two were high school English teachers, two were special education teachers, one was a media specialist, one was a counselor, and one was a physical education teacher. All were females, and three were African-American. All worked in city and county public school systems.

Data Collection

The teacher leader candidates were queried twice regarding their definitions of leadership, once at the outset of their degree program, and again one year later, immediately before the beginning of the capstone experience of the program, a yearlong action research project. In between, candidates took classes in leadership and mentor training, professional standards, school climate, legal and fiscal management, public relations and community

resources, and parent and family involvement. They wrote their definitions of leadership in response to a direct written question. No upper or lower limit was placed on the length of these definitions.

Survey instrumentation consisted of two Likert-scale questionnaires. In one (Appendix A), subjects indicated their perceptions of the relative importance of eleven teacher leadership skills identified by Rush (2003). In the second questionnaire (Appendix B), subjects indicated their perceptions of the extent to which they had attained growth in each of those skills.

Data Analysis

Leadership definitions were analyzed for common themes, patterns, and changes in definition in the intervening year. The Likert-scale surveys were scored using a five-point scale, and means were computed for each survey item.

Findings

Importance of Teacher Leadership Skills

Results from the first survey indicated a strong level of agreement on eleven teacher leadership skills identified by Rush (2003). Those data are presented in Table 1. Means ranged from a high of 4.94 for "Demonstrating Confidence in Leadership Roles" to a low of 4.39 for "Delegating Responsibility." The grand mean for all items was 4.70.

Growth in Teacher Leadership Skills

Results from the second survey showed a wider variation of perceptions regarding subjects' growth in the eleven teacher leadership skills. Those data are presented in Table 2. Means ranged from a high of 4.47 for "Understanding Educational Issues" to a low of 3.47 for "Delegating Responsibility." The grand mean for all items in this survey was 4.05.

Table 1

Importance of Teacher Leadership Skills

	Mean
Understanding educational issues	4.83
Getting others involved in projects	4.83
Understanding of leadership style	4.78
Getting involved in school decision-making	4.78
Demonstrating confidence in leadership roles	4.94
Analyzing data and information	4.56
Helping others grow professionally	4.61
Getting input from others	4.83
Exerting influence in informal settings	4.56
Delegating responsibility	4.39
Making data-driven decisions	4.56

Table 2

Growth in Teacher Leadership Skills

	Mean
Understanding educational issues	4.47
Getting others involved in projects	3.76
Understanding of leadership style	4.29
Getting involved in school decision-making	4.12
Demonstrating confidence in leadership roles	4.24
Analyzing data and information	3.94
Helping others grow professionally	4.00
Getting input from others	4.06
Exerting influence in informal settings	4.29
Delegating responsibility	3.47
Making data-driven decisions	3.88

Definitions of Leadership

Initially, all subjects defined leadership in terms of a strong manager who got others to follow. After one year of coursework, half of those surveyed adopted a more collaborative view of leadership, seeing it as a team process. The subjects who adopted a more collaborative view of leadership always mentioned working with others in their definition of leadership.

Discussion

Importance of Teacher Leadership Skills

Although there was little variation in the relative importance teacher leader candidates assigned to skills identified in the survey, confidence emerged as the most important of these skills. This is not surprising, given the fact that these teachers did not fulfill any traditional leadership roles. Confidence in one's ability to perform in a new capacity is a common need. This finding also conforms to Glaser and Smalley's (1995) leadership criteria, specifically those characteristics possessed by women.

Other skills that were assigned high importance included two skills that involved the participation of others in the tasks undertaken by the teacher leader. This is somewhat contradictory to the skill identified as least important for a teacher leader; that of delegating responsibility, but it again is consistent with Glaser and Smalley's (1995) "dolphin" approach favored by many women leaders, and with Rush's (2003) call for more preparation in collaborative leadership. It may also reflect a conception of teacher leadership as one in which there is little responsibility to delegate, in contrast to traditional school leaders, who can and do delegate. This finding points to a need for more understanding of potential teacher leadership roles, especially by building administrators.

Two other relatively low-rated skills involve the development and use of data for decision-making. It is possible that teachers frequently see decisions being made for reasons other than those driven by data. It may also be that these types of decisions may be made on the basis of data, but at a level of decision-making far removed from the classroom; i.e., the central office or state department of education. Subjects in this study had, as a part of the degree program, examined data as a source for decision-making, but had yet to generate and use data themselves.

In general, the relatively high rating given the importance of these skills by teacher leader candidates validates their use as a measuring stick for teacher leaders. No skill received a rating of less than 4.00, and only one was rated below 4.50.

Growth in Teacher Leadership Skills

Teacher leader candidates in this study varied more widely in their assessment of their personal growth in teacher leadership skills. Knowledge of educational issues and understanding of leadership styles emerged as the areas in which the greatest growth was perceived. This is an expected finding after the completion of 18 hours of advanced graduate study in which educational issues were examined from the leadership perspective.

Delegating responsibility, the lowest-rated skill in terms of importance, was also seen as the one in which the least growth has taken place. As stated previously, Glaser and Smalley (1995) state that fear and lack of involvement in the decision making process are the main reasons workers resist the change that comes with new leadership. Correspondingly, fear plays into a reluctance by women to delegate tasks. This finding may also confirm the view of the school as a place where teachers do not carry the kinds of responsibilities that can be delegated.

It again points to the need to prepare those who take on traditional school leadership position to deal with and take advantage of the skills of teacher leaders. Other skills where teacher leader candidates saw themselves as achieving lesser growth – getting others involved in projects, analyzing data and information, and making data-driven decisions – are the types of skills that may be developed to a greater extent in an action research project, the capstone experience of this program.

Definitions of Leadership

After one year of study, teacher leader candidates fell into one of two categories in terms of definitions of leadership. These categories are the figurehead, who gets others to follow, and the cheerleader, who wants to make decisions as a team member. At the beginning of the teacher leader program, most students defined leadership under the figurehead category. Midway through the program, half of these students changed their viewpoint and defined leadership in terms of the cheerleader/team player category

For example, teacher leader candidates who described the figurehead style of leadership often used the term "influence others" and then qualified this with a behavioral analysis. One said, "A true leader is one who has the ability to exert influence in a confident, but not pushy manner" while another defined leadership as "the ability to which others are affected to follow another's vision." This continued idea of motivating others through influence was defined by other subjects. One stated, "In guiding, the leader must be aware of which style should be used in each individual situation" while another student said, "It is taking the initiative to go forward and pursue other avenues that will enhance teaching."

While many defined leadership from a figurehead perspective, an equal amount saw leadership as a collaborative process, or the cheerleader approach. One student viewed leadership as "making others feel confidence and being a self-esteem builder for them and always lending a helpful hand." Another teacher leader candidate stated, "Leadership provides support and encouragement for the development and implementation of new and improved instructional strategies" while another student said it was "the ability to engage others in collaborative work that will result in improvement, problem solving, or shared decision making with the organization."

Implications

These findings point to both the challenges and opportunities found in the preparation of teacher leaders within the current context of school reform. The emerging literature on teacher leadership provides guidelines for developing the skills necessary to change the school culture, to provide for greater collaboration between and among teachers, and to make data-driven decisions to improve student learning. Women in these roles are particularly well equipped for collaborative leadership. At the same time, building administrators must learn how to take advantage of this new resource, and to adopt the view of leadership reflected in one teacher leader candidate's definition:

> Leadership takes into account the environment in which people work, the attitudes of those working there, and how all stakeholders will be affected by decisions. A good leader helps others come up with their own solutions rather than providing a pat answer. A good leader stays abreast of current issues in their field so they can offer sound advice to those seeking their guidance. A good leader blends into the background and empowers those who work with him.

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Appendix A

Importance of Teacher Leadership Skills

Circle the number that indicates the degree of importance of each item in becoming a teacher leader:

5 Essential	4 Very Important	3 Important	2 Somewhat Important	1 Not Important

Understanding educational issues	5	4	3	2	1
Getting others involved in projects	5	4	3	2	1
Understanding of leadership style	5	4	3	2	1
Getting involved in school decision-making	5	4	3	2	1
Demonstrating confidence in leadership roles	5	4	3	2	1
Analyzing data and information	5	4	3	2	1
Helping others grow professionally	5	4	3	2	1
Getting input from others	5	4	3	2	1
Exerting influence in informal settings	5	4	3	2	1
Delegating responsibility	5	4	3	2	1
Making data-driven decisions	5	4	3	2	1

Appendix B

Growth in Teacher Leadership Skills

Circle the number that indicates your growth in each area at this point in your teacher leader program.

5 Fundamental Growth	4 Significant Growth	3 Moderate Growth	2 Little Growth	1 No Growth

Understanding educational issues	5	4	3	2	1
Getting others involved in projects	5	4	3	2	1
Understanding of leadership style	5	4	3	2	1
Getting involved in school decision-making	5	4	3	2	1
Demonstrating confidence in leadership roles	5	4	3	2	1
Analyzing data and information	5	4	3	2	1
Helping others grow professionally	5	4	3	2	1
Getting input from others	5	4	3	2	1
Exerting influence in informal settings	5	4	3	2	1
Delegating responsibility	5	4	3	2	1
Making data-driven decisions	5	4	3	2	1

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