

# The Principal's Relationship with Teacher and Development Literacy of Elementary School Students

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## Abstract

Throughout this study a number of factors regarding the experience of principals and their strategies and processes from the perspective of helping teachers adopt more effective teaching practices, will be examined. The result should be a fresh and more complete picture of the principals' processes and helping teachers adopt more effective teaching practices will be examined. Finally, it is anticipated that based on the findings, those principals will have an interest in meeting the needs of the teacher leaders who have to get training and support to develop as an effective coach. Also, this study is utilized the qualitative method.

**Keywords:** Principal, teachers, literacy, development, and elementary school students.

## 1. Introduction

### Overview of the Study Topic

The following is a proposal for a qualitative study that will investigate the strategies and processes that five principals use to develop literacy coaches in elementary schools. The schools to be examined are known to have historically low literacy achievement levels that have thus adopted new and rigorous literacy programs program. The literature indicates that a policy of distributed leadership between principals and people known as teacher-leaders has a highly positive effect on student achievement. What requires further investigation are the strategies and procedures that principals use to cultivate effective teacher-leaders. The processes and strategies that principals use to develop the leadership and coaching skills of teacher leaders will be examined through a case study approach, and will gather data from both observation and interview.

### Background and Key Research Findings

Teachers play a clear role in student achievement through following their principals' directions to have the same goal which is increasing the achievement of students. Also, the teacher can positively influence achievement of students if she/ he has a proven level of commitment to students' success, relevant experience to a multitude of classroom scenarios, and a dependable personality that lends itself well to a leadership position (Ross & Gray, 2006).

There are effects of leadership on student achievement mediated by teacher efficacy and teacher commitment. Therefore, teacher beliefs about their capacity and their professional commitment are related with the impact of principals' leadership on student achievement and instruction of teachers (Ross & Gray, 2006).

Henning's (2006) study reported that there was an educational program named the Teacher Leader program that was important and helpful because it aimed to increase student achievement through school improvement and teacher development. This had a positive effect on schools which believe this program enhances a new type of leadership.

The implementation of a strategy seeing teacher-leaders taking a more prominent role in the educational environment is supported by many in the educational leadership community. Many have voiced opinions regarding a distribution of leadership rather than a top-down approach to leadership in schools. This dispersal of authority among the principal and his teacher-leaders makes intervention for student problems far easier since response times are faster and more students can be attended to due to the fact that more authority figures are available to assist teachers with classroom dilemmas. The dispersal of authority also means that consensus can be formed at a very local level within the school, as teacher-leaders get direct input from teachers about problems rather than a state or national bureaucracy which assumes all schools are essentially the same (Leithwood & Mascall, 2008).

Such problems regarding a "one-size-fits-all" approach are also argued against by Wixson and Yochum (2004), where they stated that procedures and studies of policies are held at a macro level when the focus must be narrowed down to the micro level. In other words, researchers who are studying educational practices are attempting to do so without actually even examining classroom procedures themselves, instead boiling success

and failure down to a set of inputs and outputs, such as number of class hours spent on a particular subject and standardized test scores. Rather, what Wixson and Yochum argued is that the quality of classroom instruction needs to be taken into account in order for improvement to occur. This macro-level examination of education has led to and perpetuated what they consider negative influences of high-stakes testing that stifle American education and the progress of students into adult life.

Focusing on literacy coaching, Lynch and Ferguson (2010) validate Wixson and Yochum's claim that the focus on school improvement is zoomed out too far. In the Ontario school district they studied, Lynch and Ferguson found that there existed no scientific framework from which principals and teacher-leaders were engaging in literacy coaching. Rather, they were tinkering and seeing what worked best on what was essentially a casual basis, and this fact made it hard to figure out what was going right and what was going wrong. Moreover, it made it more difficult to extrapolate the successes onto other school districts because methods without scientifically-tested bases were unlikely to get government funding.

Mangin's (2007) study found that principals with positive leadership qualities such as commitment to success and objective reasoning abilities will end up producing teacher-leaders which parallel their own abilities. Essentially, Mangin argued that the teacher-leaders are a reflection of the principal in many ways, and these teacher-leaders will in turn be the ones who will be either leaving a positive or negative impact upon the progress of literacy coaches.

Because the improvement is thought to come from the principal, some school districts have decided to focus the bulk of education in educational leadership on school principals, with the hopes that they will cultivate effective teacher leaders. However, it is probably more helpful to teach both principals and teachers to work with one another to create a cadre of teacher-leaders who assist the principal in things such as literacy coaching for other teachers which is one of the more difficult things to achieve (Mangin, 2007).

Literacy coaching is a challenging process for a variety of reasons. There is a famous quotation from Michel Foucault in the literature where he states that "where there is power, there is resistance." This quotation is invoked to inform the readers that people in general do not like to be dictated to and that there is a big problem in education with top-down management because of this. While teachers may go through the motions of literacy coaching and instruction, they will still retain their biases and old way of doing things, likely reverting back to the old style of teaching upon encountering resistance from students, themselves, or colleagues (Wixson & Yochum, 2004). This ties in with the observation that schools are beginning to move away from top-down, hierarchical, macro-level suggestions for improvement and choosing a more nimble, lightweight, and local option (Leithwood & Mascall, 2008).

Quatroche and Wepner's (2008) study found that literacy teachers should have courses in leadership besides reading specialties to complete because teacher-leaders need to be versatile to handle a variety of subjects. Essentially, the rigor used to provide teacher-leaders with enough competence to handle the considerable task of establishing literacy in low-achieving youth needs to be extrapolated to other subjects in order to allow schools to flourish.

## **2. Focus of the Study**

### **Practical Problem**

Lynch and Ferguson's (2010) study provided us with the role of literacy coaches. There are several important aspects of literacy, especially associated with a literacy coach, such as the observation of teaching tactics, strategies, and idiosyncratic behavior. In addition, there are some challenges that face the literacy coaches, such as dealing with limited resource materials and the amount of time available to work with teachers if they are not familiar with the literacy role. As a result, this research observed literacy coaches in order to determine what made them successful, and recommends that other districts do the same in order to build upon the science of literacy coaching. The practical problem in this case is that a larger sample size is needed to draw conclusions about literacy coaching.

Another problem is getting a good return on investment for literacy coaching. As stated before, there is a dearth of literature reporting back from classroom observations on what exactly makes literacy coaching work, and strategies which try to take a top-down approach where people intellectualize from posts in state and national bureaucracies and far away from classrooms has led to unhelpful policies or a lack of commitment from teachers. This research aims to determine what makes literacy coaching work at a basic level in order to be able to generalize about this topic independent of assumptions by bureaucrats in education administrations (Leithwood & Mascall, 2008).

### **Researchable Problem**

Studies show that teacher-leaders are more effective in helping teachers adopt more effective teaching practices when the principal makes sure the teacher-leader has training and support to develop an effective coach. What needs further study is the process principals use to develop the leadership and coaching skills of teacher-leaders in the realm of literacy coaching which translates to student improvement in schools. This problem will be examined by researching the cases that have worked and finding commonalities between the cases in order to generalize about this topic.

### **The Purpose**

The purpose of this study is to provide scientific conclusions regarding how principals successfully cultivate literacy coaches who provide positive results on their schools.

### **Research Questions**

The overarching research question that will guide this study is: What strategies and processes have five principals used to develop literacy coaches in elementary schools with historically low literacy achievement levels? The sub questions from the overarching question include:

1. What training and support do principals provide the literacy coaches?
2. What has been the impact of being teacher-leaders in helping teachers adopt more effective teaching practices?
3. How has their relationships with principals and teachers affected their decision to be teacher leaders and literacy coaches?
4. How does the principal guide and support development of leadership, coaching, and monitoring skills with the literacy coaches?

These are the central questions of the study. I will add more questions as the research proceeds and I obtain more clarity on the content of this study. It is anticipated that certain aspects of both research and practice in elementary education will be challenged. This study should examine and describe a number of strategies and processes that principals used and are using to develop literacy coaches in elementary schools in which is more effective in teaching practices. Also, it is important to examine some more basic issues, such as literacy in different aspects, such as policy, literacy instruction, and the relationship between literacy coaching and student reading achievement.

### **Significance of the Study**

This study will produce better understanding and description of the strategies and processes that principals use to develop literacy coaches in elementary schools with historically low literacy achievements levels. The analysis produced by this study will help the principals to develop the leadership and coaching skills of teacher-leaders and improve performance in their schools.

Therefore, throughout this study a number of factors regarding the experience of principals and their strategies and processes from the perspective of helping teachers adopt more effective teaching practices, will be examined. The result should be a fresh and more complete picture of the principals' processes and how helping teachers adopt more effective teaching practices will be examined. Finally, it is anticipated that based on the findings, those principals will have an interest in meeting the needs of the teacher leaders who have to get training and support to develop into being an effective coach.

### **3. Methodology**

#### **Research Design**

This study will utilize a multiple case study design. Case studies are "an exploration of a 'bounded system' of a case or multiple cases over time through detail, in depth data collection involving multiple sources of information rich in context" (Creswell, 2007, p. 61). The multiple case study design or collective case study investigates several cases to gain insight into a central phenomenon. Thus, the reason of choosing this method is that case studies allow the researcher to become familiar with the data in its natural setting and fully appreciate the context (Creswell, 2007).

#### **The Setting**

This research will be conducted in five public elementary schools in Kalamazoo, Michigan after getting permission from the schools administration. The researcher will go to five schools to meet the principals because he/she wants to get written permission to do his/her research in these schools that they lead. Also, the researcher will explain to them why he/she has chosen these schools particularly, i.e. the researcher will work with the

principals to have interviews and observation of the processes and strategies that they used to develop literacy coaches. Moreover, the researcher will work with principals to choose the potential teachers that he/she will interview and observe the leadership and coaching skills they use in their classrooms.

#### **Case Selection**

Each case is about the perspectives of teachers and administrators within that particular school. All phenomena that either influence or reflect these perspectives will be examined, such as each elementary school's principals management policy, classroom management policies of teachers, and achievement of students in literacy.

In order to gain multiple perspectives in the area of the strategies and processes that principals use to develop literacy coaches in elementary schools, this study will use the maximum variation sampling strategy (Creswell, 2007). To achieve this, five elementary schools will be recruited to participate. The schools will include five principals, and teachers and classrooms that will be identified by the principals.

In order to preserve the unity of the case, data from each school will be analyzed with the unique context of the school in mind, including location, socio-economic factors, and rates of leadership and coaching programs. Cross-case analysis will formally occur only after the individual site analyses are complete.

In addition, multiple sources of data will be accessed, not the least of which will involve interviewing principals, from classroom teachers' literacy to students. So, this study used the direct approach where the researcher asked participants to reflect on, and talk about, their subjective experiences of phenomenon in interviews. Also, each school site will be approached as a separate case study with the following characteristics (Creswell, 2007).

### **4. Research Design and Procedures**

#### **Data Collection**

The principals will be identified with the assistance of a researcher. In qualitative research, gatekeepers are used to assist the researcher in gaining access and developing trust with the community of study (Hatch, 2002). The gatekeeper and researcher have several conversations about the principals' strategies and process necessary for this study. The gatekeeper will get in contact with the principals that met the criteria, and ask them if they would be interested in participating in the study. If the principals agrees, the gatekeeper will schedule a visit with the principals where I will explain to them the purpose of the study and what participating in this study entails. The gatekeeper will also be present during this meeting.

The researcher will be conducting a qualitative study of this study that will focus on the strategies and processes that five principals used to develop literacy coaches in elementary schools. The schools will consist mainly of students with historically low literacy achievement levels that have adopted a proposed new rigorous literacy program, where the researcher will be using interviews as the primary research approach. So, in this proposed study, the primary source of data collection will be through the use of semi-structured in-depth interviews.

The data collected in this study will include more than words; but will also include observation of attitudes, feelings, vocal and facial expressions, and other behaviors that are also involved in this data collection. Hence, for this study, data will be collected in the forms of semi-structured interviews, a non-participant observation, collection of documents, and a reflective journal (Creswell, 2007; Marshall & Rossman, 2006).

*Interviews.* Interviews allows me as the researcher access through words to observes an individual's constructed reality and interpretation of his or her own experience (Creswell, 2007). The principals and teachers will be interviewed separately. It is proposed that the interviewing process will begin in the fall of 2015.

Often, with only an occasional question from me for clarification, it is anticipated that the principals, teachers, and students will talk about a wide variety of topics throughout an extended interview. It is anticipated that there will be up to 20-30 interviews and any necessary follow-up interviews will be conducted. So, the researcher has to complete the data analysis and obtain a beginning understanding of the findings.

In-depth interviews enable me as the researcher to seek an understanding of participants' perspectives of their experiences or situations through repeated face-to-face encounters. So, all interviews will be tape-recorded and, based on four pilot interviews already conducted, are expected to vary in length from 45 minutes to one hour and 45 minutes. The interviews will be informal and open-ended, and be carried out in a conversational style. All interviews will be audio-recorded. Also, during the interview, the researcher will take notes. Participants will be reminded that breaks are allowed if they feel the need to do so. They will also be informed that to protect their identity, they need to provide a pseudonym. Each participant will be provided with consent and told that they might withdraw from the study at any point (Creswell, 2007).

The researcher will write field notes in conjunction with the interviews, follow-up interviews, observations, and casual encounters with subjects. Notes and journals also will be written while listening to taped interviews, typing transcripts, and reflecting upon a particular interview. Then the researcher will write memos of these transcript of interviews. In addition to the interviews and follow-up interviews, the researcher expect to obtain other data throughout the study, such as comments from administrative and teaching colleagues, papers or other materials subjects care to give to me, and ongoing literature review (Marshall & Rossman, 2006).

Two interview protocols were developed for this study. The first is the principals version and the second is the teachers version. The principals' interview protocol version asks principals about their experience having the processes and strategies that use to develop the leadership and coaching skills of teacher leaders. The protocol consists of seven questions as example (Creswell, 2007). These seven questions are divided into 6 sections. The sections include questions about the leadership experience, questions about strategies and processes of literacy coaches' development, questions about literacy program, questions about literacy achievement levels, questions about literacy instructions to students, and questions about effective training for leaders as coaches.

The teachers' protocol version consists of six questions as example. This interview protocol asks about the their instructions of literacy, questions about literacy coaches experience, questions about teacher leader skills, questions about relationship between the training and development of coaching skills, questions about the impact of principals' leadership on students achievement and instruction of teacher, and questions about students achievement in literacy.

*Non-Participant Observation.* The purpose of this observation is to gain additional information about the processes and strategies that principals' use to develop the leadership and coaching skills of teacher leaders and the literacy instructions of teachers as coaches in their classroom. The observation will be conducted by a non-participant observer (i.e., researcher) and take place two days after the interviews. It will be carried out in at least twenty to twenty-five minutes. Principals will be asked to provide a document that their processes and strategies of training to develop teachers as literacy coaches usually offer for them. The observation may be audio-recorded and the researcher will take notes during and after the observation (Marshall & Rossman, 2006).

*Documents.* The documents gathered for this study will include any type of papers that literacy programs that teachers took. Principals will be asked to provide a document that their teachers have literacy programs to help them to be leader coaches. For the purpose of data analysis, the document will be copy and any identifiable information will be erased (Creswell, 2007).

*Reflective Journal.* The last form of data will consist of me keeping a reflective journal and field notes. The journal allows the researcher to describe his feelings about conducting research in this area of study. According to Marshall & Rossman (2006), the use of a reflective journal adds rigor to qualitative inquiry as the investigator is able to record his/her reactions, assumptions, expectations, and biases about the research process. The field notes will provide additional data for the analysis.

## **Data Analysis**

Before the data is analyzed, the researcher will transcribe all interviews, observations, documents, journal entries and field notes. The process of transcribing allows the researcher to become acquainted with the data (Creswell, 2007; Marshall & Rossman, 2006).

The researcher will create Microsoft Word files for the interviews, observations, documents, and journal entries. All files will be protected by setting a password. All files will be saved in the researcher's portable computer for which the researcher only has access to. The researcher will use the meaning of analysis context as the unit of analysis for coding and also looked at for description. This means that the data is not coded sentence by sentence or paragraph by paragraph, but coded for meaning (Creswell, 2007; Marshall & Rossman, 2006).

Additionally, the researcher will anticipate that ongoing data analysis will take place throughout the study. All of the taped interviews, journals, and field notes will be entered into computer files. Also, the researcher will try to use a specific program of a software program that uses a coding system organized around different topics and themes found in these files (Creswell, 2007; Marshall & Rossman, 2006).

The researcher will make note of the importance that transcripts are used as they play an important role in the data analysis step because it will allow him/her to write a full description of the phenomena, analyze the themes, and express the feelings of these experiences to others. Thus, during the initial first-level coding phase of data reduction, descriptive codes and labels will be assigned to phrases and segments of text of recorded observations. During second-level coding, clusters of similarly coded units will be considered to be categories and assigned a more conceptual label. The researcher will aim to undertake a third level of coding of categories

if appropriate. Together with coded and categorized tasks, the phase of data reduction will also include the quantification of time spent on various tasks. This information can then be compared with participants' perspectives of issues discussed in interviews (Creswell, 2007)

The phase of data display from observation will involve the mapping of categories, together with time spent on each, on a chart into a simplified, compact form. The chart will provide a visual representation of how categories relate to each other and will help to identify the key aspects of each participant's work at the time of observation by the researcher.

This study will follow the multiple case study design where the data is analyzed case by case through thematic analysis and later by cross-case analysis. Therefore, interviews, observations, documents, and field notes will be analyzed for each case. Moreover, for the thematic analysis, the researcher will follow the researcher step-by-step guidelines to have the thematic analysis for case study. The researcher will use the word guidelines to highlight the flexibility of this qualitative analytic method. These guidelines are (1) familiarizing the researcher self with his/her data, (2) generating initial codes, (3) Read throughout each transcript to memo the data, (4) reviewing themes, (5) defining and naming themes, and (6) producing the report. As a result, for this type of qualitative study, the researcher will follow merging findings procedure. The researcher whose priority is to merge the findings across cases should use this particular method. This method also allows the researcher to make generalizations about the cases (Creswell, 2007). Finally, each principal and teacher can review the data analysis, so there will be an increasing rigor of the findings.

## **5.Trustworthiness**

### ***Credibility***

As the area of qualitative research increases, social and behavioral scientists critique on the validity of studies that use such methodology. Qualitative researchers utilize various validation strategies to make their studies credible and rigorous. So, Credibility for this study was achieved using the validation strategies of triangulation, researcher reflexivity, thick rich description, and peer debriefing (Marshall & Rossman, 2006).

### ***Transferability***

Thick rich description will be achieved by presenting the participants' voices under each theme and by providing detailed description of each of the cases (Marshall & Rossman, 2006).

### ***Conformability***

The data will be triangulated with the various forms of data that were collected in this study (interviews, observations, documents, reflective journal, and field notes). The researcher provides a section at the end of this chapter where he/she describes his/her story as a researcher and his/her stand on the issue as well as potential bias. Thus, triangulation will be sought through the use of multiple sources of data collection. Thus the researcher can interpret the data through logical way (Marshall & Rossman, 2006).

### ***Authenticity***

The researcher will inquire the assistance of two peer debriefs. Both of these individuals are familiar with qualitative data analysis. The two individuals have agreed to serve this role for the time this study took place. So, long-term involvement and multiple contacts with participants during a single year will enable perspectives to be revisited (Marshall & Rossman, 2006).

Finally, this proposed study seeks to enhance its trustworthiness through those number of mechanisms.

## **6.Limitations/Difficulties**

Although there are no identifiable risks for participating in this study, a one of considerations will be kept in mind when dealing with principals, teachers, or students. A limitation of this study could be that some principals or teachers may not feel comfortable sharing their experiences, perspectives, and perceptions about official information about their jobs or strategies of their jobs, so this may negatively impact the findings and results. On the other hand, Given that five schools will be considered. It will be relatively difficult for the researcher to quantify findings into percentages making it relatively difficult to generalize findings (Creswell, 2014). Therefore, the difficulty in the generalizability of the assumptions arising from the findings may be unique to the few individuals included in the study.

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