Novice Teacher Leadership: Determining the Impact of a Leadership Licensure Requirement After One Year of Teaching

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Abstract

This study of teacher leadership in first-year teachers included the following data sources: survey, follow-up telephone interviews, and teacher leader essays. Fifteen novice teachers responded to the survey, while three participated in follow-up interviews. Results suggest ideas of teacher leadership change from pre-service years to the end of the first year of teaching. Themes are shared from survey and interview findings. Follow-up interviews provide deeper understanding of those changing ideas of teacher leadership. Findings present how teacher leadership is connected to existing teacher development literature. Implications are made for teacher educators in states requiring teacher leadership for licensure.

Teacher educators face increasing mandates for licensure and pressures to demonstrate program outcomes. Among teacher educators, there are increasing concerns that these mandates lead mostly to negotiating a task for compliance than to an understanding or internalization of the concept. While some assessment measures claim to be educative (Lit & Lotan, 2013; Whittaker & Nelson, 2013), tensions around the construction and assessment of these mandates persist. Teacher leadership, often linked to school reform and improvement, has become an expectation of teacher preparation. While teacher leadership is a diffuse and complex concept, it is still one that is evaluated at the pre-service and in-service teaching levels in the state of North Carolina (State Board of Education, 2008, para.1; State Board of Education policy ID Number: TCP-C-006).

A recent study reviewed 124 examples of leadership activities that pre-service teachers developed and engaged in during their student teaching semester required for licensure (Rogers & Scales, 2013). Findings indicated that among teacher candidates when completing requirements, there was a negotiation between compliance and internalization of the ideas presented by the task. Since low-ambiguity or low-risk tasks (Doyle, 1983) are often preferable to more conceptually challenging experiences, we questioned the long-term value of the leadership task (Rogers & Scales, 2013). This questioning brings to light Cochran-Smith's (2001) claim that the "to what end?" question is just as important as the "what" and "how" of these outcomes-based, mandated performance assessments. We found that context, compliance, and the pre-service teachers' own development potentially prevented an authentic experience of teacher leadership (Rogers & Scales, 2013). This paper presents a follow-up research study of novice teachers who completed a teacher leadership licensure requirement. Specifically, how did that licensure requirement inspire beginning teachers to be teacher leaders in their first years of teaching?

Supporting Literature

Teacher Leadership

In 2004, York-Barr and Duke reviewed two decades of research on teacher leadership and found three "waves" of thinking about teacher leadership: formal roles, instructional leadership, and school reform. This last wave, which still has currency today, includes professional learning communities and the aligning teachers' professional goals and actions with school improvement plans.

Because teachers are now seen as key to school improvement and performance, the preparation of pre-service classroom teachers for leadership roles is an emerging field of research. Many articles on pre-service teacher leadership are conceptual (Bond, 2011; Quinn, Haggard, & Ford, 2006; Turnbull, 2005), where the educational theorists note the importance of exploring the concept of leadership throughout the undergraduate experience. The themes that cut across this research is that leadership preparation can occur through service learning, being active in university-sponsored student organizations (Bond, 2011), and being paired with cooperating teachers who are teacher leaders (Sherrill, 2011).

Recently, a special issue of *The New Educator* was devoted to teacher leadership. Within the document, a recurring theme was the tension between the bureaucratic nature of schools and the often ill-defined role of teacher leaders. Carver and Meier (2013) found in their study that while conceptually their graduate students saw a broad range of possible roles for teacher leadership, they were inhibited by their confidence in their ability to be seen as a leader. Research by Margolis and Doring (2013) supports the idea that the perception of other teachers is key to how well teacher leaders are received and recommend that teacher leader roles are carefully and clearly defined in relation to "…the improvement of teaching and learning in ways teachers find valuable" (p. 207).

Developmental Theories

Ignoring existing literature on teacher development and the potential influence it has on the leadership capacity of pre-service teachers would be a mistake. Self-centered concerns often dominate novice and pre-service teachers' thoughts (Fuller, 1969; Fuller & Brown, 1975; Ryan, 1986). For instance, Veenman (1984) found that pre-service and novice teachers are more concerned about how they are perceived as competent teachers in control of their classrooms than their students' academic achievement. As teacher educators, we believe that the same can be said for teacher leadership development today.

Beginning teachers often teach the way that they were taught and fail to make connections to what they learned in their university experiences (Darling-Hammond, 1999), perpetuating the apprenticeship of observation (Lortie, 1975). Researchers have found that is takes more than just a few years to observe learned pedagogical concepts to appear in teachers' classroom practice (Grossman, Valencia, Evans, Thompson, Martin, & Place, 2000; Levin, 2003).

High Stakes Assessments in Teacher Education

In a recent article, Cochran-Smith and her colleagues reviewed high stakes assessments policy in teacher education reform (Cochran-Smith, Piazza, & Power, 2013). Some of these assessments came from the desire to professionalize teaching, such as the Teacher Performance Assessment (Darling-Hammond, 2010). Others, such as the *Our Future, Our Teachers* (U.S. Department of Education, 2011), are plans from the federal government to improve teacher quality. Regardless of the origin of the

assessment, Cochran-Smith et al. (2013) find that these assessments are fundamentally political and controversial. While some teacher education programs have found that these assessments, often tied to licensure, can be educative in the implementation and completion (Peck, Galucci, & Stone, 2010), they were not without tension and dilemmas (Whittaker & Nelson, 2013). Balancing faculty resistance to implementation of mandated assessments and maintaining accreditation (Peck et al., 2010) and the challenge of the "summative imperatives" of a high-stakes (Lit & Lotan, 2013, p. 59) assessment to the formative values of teacher education are some of these tensions and dilemmas explored in the literature. Despite their origins, these assessment polices are "sites of struggle" (p. 10) as Cochran-Smith et al. (2013) conclude that not only have tensions among the particular agendas of the groups creating and advocating for these polices emerged, but these assessments are "…also interpreted, resisted, remade, and recast by practitioners working in particular local settings and/or collectively" (p. 23).

Methodology

Survey Design

This study follows a survey research design (Creswell, 2005). An online survey was used to collect quantitative and qualitative data, with follow-up semi-structured interviews providing further information. Using quantitative and qualitative data "provide analytic texture" and "strengthen the analytic findings" (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014, p. 43).

The brief online survey (Appendix A) was designed with assistance from a psychometrician. Online surveys are recognized as being convenient and cost efficient, providing access to large samples, and having the advantage of automated data collection, scoring, and reporting (Mertens, 2010). We used a simple descriptive survey design approach because we wanted, "…a one-shot survey for the purpose of describing the characteristics of a sample at one point in time" (Mertens, 2010, p. 177). The psychometrician helped refine the survey questions for clarity, wording, and brevity. The final survey (Appendix A) included a variety of response types, such as yes or no, scaled items for rankings, and open-ended questions (Mertens, 2010). The yes or no questions were branched so that respondents answering "yes" would receive a further prompt that was related to the question for a deeper response. The last part of the survey asked participants if we could contact them for a brief follow-up telephone interview (Appendix B) so we could probe for further information.

Sampling

The study was designed to target our recent graduates because they had completed the required teacher leadership task to obtain licensure. Thus, this was homogeneous sampling because we wanted to collect data from a subgroup of a population who share similar characteristics (Mertens, 2010). Although the university offers a variety of degrees from all areas of K-12 education, we targeted the elementary education graduates who had recently graduated with their Bachelor of Science degree. This population had the same coursework from the same professors in the same program with the same requirements, and these shared experiences as undergraduate students defined them as a subgroup. The beginning teacher support staff helped locate 65 graduates who had completed the teacher leadership requirement prior to their graduation in December or May of 2010, 2011, or 2012 and held positions as classroom teachers. All study participants received an email link to the online survey.

Data Collection

Fifteen recent graduates that represent 23% of the population surveyed responded to the online survey instrument. According to Fowler (2002) and Jackson (2009), this is a typical rate of return for an online survey.

Eight survey participants agreed to be contacted for the follow-up interview. Three participants were actually interviewed because the others had provided wrong numbers or would not return phone calls, despite several attempts and messages. Information gleaned from these three participants during the follow-up telephone interview provided depth to the survey findings because the participants elaborated on their responses. All three were White females from the same elementary education program in a mid-sized, public university in the rural mountains of the southeastern United States. Approximately 85 elementary education majors graduate per year from this institution (87 in 2010, 78 in 2011, and 84 in 2012). Since the three participants had graduated in the same academic year, they had the same coursework from the same professors and the leadership requirement was the same. The three follow-up interview participants had completed one year of teaching in public schools in the same state at the time of the follow-up interview.

Data Analysis

Once survey data were compiled, researchers met for a preliminary exploratory analysis of the data (Creswell, 2005; Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014) and determined the procedures for conducting follow-up telephone interviews. We decided to divide the list of eight participants willing to be contacted in half and assigned the top half of the list to one researcher and the last half to the other.

During the initial meeting, we (the researchers) combed through the numeric survey data together and noted any surprising findings and lingering questions. We decided to read the open-ended survey question data independently to see what stood out, following Creswell's (2005) and Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña's (2014) recommendations for coding qualitative research data. While pouring over the open-ended survey data, we each determined codes at the phrase, sentence, and paragraph level. The codes were collapsed into themes (Creswell, 2005; Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014), and then we mined the data for quotes to support those themes. After three weeks, another research meeting was held for discussing themes present in the data; we further refined and came to a complete agreement on the themes.

Meanwhile, we collected the telephone interview data from three participants. Interviews were transcribed for sharing in another research meeting. The researchers discussed the findings of each of the three interviews, thinking about those individual participants and what was learned from each participant regarding teacher leadership development. Next, interview findings were compared to the teacher leader assignment (Appendix C) that the three participants had completed for licensure requirements as student teachers. By doing this, we were able to determine changes in their thinking of teacher leadership by examining the content of the teacher leader assignment and what they shared in the interview. Thus, this part of the data analysis took on a narrative approach (Creswell, 2005; Mertens, 2010).

Results

Findings from the Online Survey

The first two questions on the survey were related to consent and the last question asked for contact information if they agreed to participate in the follow-up telephone interview. The survey contained seven questions related to pre-service teacher leadership in ways that prompted "yes/no" or "check all that apply" responses. Two questions required open-ended explanations.

Numeric data. Fourteen participants responded to the question asking if they remembered their teacher leader essay requirement from the teacher preparation program. Thirteen indicated that they did remember their essay and one did not. If they selected that they did remember their essay, the next prompt was to "check all that apply" from a menu of three options. The leadership essay requirement allowed the pre-service teachers to demonstrate leadership in a variety of ways, which meant that they engaged in more than one activity.

Of the 13 that remembered their teacher leadership essays, 10 recalled doing "after school/out of school events (school dances/events, afterschool clubs, fundraisers, field trips)," 11 indicated that they did "in school/classroom events (meetings/committees, classroom events)," and six recalled doing "parent-oriented events (parent events such as conferences/PTA/PTO)." Those 13 respondents were then prompted to "check all that apply" to divulge how they decided on the activities that they submitted in the teacher leader essay. Nine indicated that the activity was a suggestion from their cooperating teacher, seven shared that it was their own activity, and one selected that it was an activity with a fellow student teacher. The same 13 respondents were then asked how much this activity (or these activities) helped them understand what it meant to be a teacher leader. Ten of the 13 indicated "significantly" (2) or "somewhat" (8), while three selected "only a little" (2) or "none" (1). All 13 respondents were then asked how much this activity (or these activities) contributed to their current performance as a teacher leader. One participant selected "significantly," six selected "somewhat," five chose "only a little," and one selected "none."

All of the survey participants were prompted to answer the question asking whether their understanding of teacher leadership has changed since graduation. Eleven of the 14 respondents indicated that their thinking had changed "significantly" (8) or "somewhat" (3), while three indicated that their thinking had changed "only a little" (1) or "none" (2). Twelve participants answered the question asking, "To what degree do you consider yourself to be a teacher leader?" One responded "significant," nine selected "somewhat," two chose "only a little," and no one opted for "none."

Open-ended response data. Eleven participants addressed the open-ended question, "If your understanding has changed to any degree, how has it changed?" One participant began to address the prompt but stopped mid-sentence. Thus, we had to discount that incomplete response and acknowledge that 10 participants fully answered the question. All of the participants demonstrated through their responses the way their thinking about leadership changed.

The researchers noticed the following four themes in the 10 responses: Movement within the novice stage, community, change from classroom to community, and subtle leadership. The following quotes provide illustrative examples of the four themes.

Four participants addressed the theme of movement within novice stage. This particular quote speaks to the idea of the student teacher not truly being the leader in the classroom because the cooperating teacher is ever-present as a mentor and a guide whereas once they became a teacher they did not have that built-in support system.

> You are essentially the "leader" because you have to be, but you have your [cooperating teacher] to fall back on if need be . . . the students you have in your room become like your own children. You become invested in them because you care and you know everything about that student.

In the following quote, this participant acknowledges that the teacher leader essay was merely a task to complete for licensure and did not apply to the actual classroom. "I believe that even what I did . . . seemed to only be an assignment and not [applicable] to the actual classroom."

Three participants addressed the theme of community in their responses. This participant's response is particularly telling:

> I am more aware now that I need to have a voice in the school and the community. The leadership opportunities that I chose showed me that many people can pull together for a cause if someone voices their concerns for that cause. I feel as though I fight for the rights of my kids to be as ready to learn as possible.

Three participants addressed the theme of change from classroom to community in their responses. This participant spoke to the changes in understanding teacher leadership from focused energy on the classroom to recognizing that teacher leadership extends beyond those classroom walls into the larger community. "As a student, I felt that leadership was only about the classroom and the students within. However, leadership is those, but also it is a lot of out of the classroom roles, as well."

To further illustrate the change from classroom to community, we must consider the following quote because this participant directly stated the shifting focus from the classroom to the school and to the community for a greater purpose of shaping the future.

> I see the importance of being a leader in the community and school much more now. In college, I viewed it as more of a leading in the school. But as teachers, we are affecting the generations coming after us who will be in charge of our communities, cities, and maybe even country one day. We are leading on a much bigger scale…

Two participants addressed the theme of subtle leadership in their responses. The quote that follows illustrates this participant's understanding of the subtle nature of teacher leadership and hints at the complexity of it.

> I have also realized that there are subtle ways that teachers lead among their peers that I did not recognize during my time as [a student teacher]. Also, [teacher leadership] is not as simple as I probably thought prior to graduation.

Ten participants responded to the open-ended question, "Given your experiences since graduation, how would you define teacher leadership now?" The following four themes in definitions stood out in participants' responses: Risks (being open or vulnerable), perceptions from others, advocate, and planner. Illustrative examples of each of these four definitions follow.

While eight participants addressed the definition of teacher leadership by mentioning risks (being open or vulnerable) involved, this participant summed it up in a clear and direct way:

> Teacher leadership involves sharing resources and strategies as well as being knowledgeable of the curriculum. Another important aspect of teacher leadership is taking risks. Teachers need to be open to trying new activities and strategies that will engage and inspire their students.

Five participants spoke to the definition of teacher leadership as the perceptions from others. This quote summed up this definition in a succinct way: "Teacher leadership is defined by how you portray yourself in your environment; how you act with your co-workers."

Three participants defined teacher leadership as being an advocate for students, as well as for public education. For instance, the following two quotes illustrate the different contexts of the advocate theme. This participant addressed the advocate theme in light of students' education at the community level. "Teacher leadership is rallying for what you believe should be the best education for your kids. This is going above and beyond teaching in the classroom and extending yourself into the community to show your compassion for education."

This quote demonstrates the advocate theme at the community and state levels, "Leaders in the community often know little about our schools and it's our job to keep them informed. Teachers must also lead in the state and fight for what is best for our schools and our students."

Two participants specifically defined teacher leadership as being a planner, but in different ways. The first quote is limited to the school level, about being involved and organizing various school events.

> Teacher leadership is taking on responsibilities in your school that go beyond just teaching in the classroom. It is being a leader for your grade level or hallway. It is being involved in planning activities such as reading nights and wellness fairs.

The second quote mentions planning at the school level, but the participant offers a broader scope of leadership in the profession and at the community level to inspire students to be leaders.

> I have just automatically taken on leadership roles on my team, for example organizing Student Lead Conferences and creating master schedules when they must be changed due to events going on in the school (i.e., assemblies). Although, my definition of teacher leadership has changed, it certainly involves more than simply being a committee head. In the school, there are various ways that teachers can lead in their profession that include working in the community as well as being a leader to your students in hopes that they will be inspired to become a leader in their own life.

Findings from the Follow-Up Interview

To deepen our understanding of the survey, we asked for respondents to indicate if they would be interested in a follow-up interview. Eight participants indicated they would be available, but only three were able to be contacted and interviewed within the timeframe of the study. These three graduates from our program exemplify three distinct, yet clearly novice-stage perceptions of teacher leadership while allowing us a glimpse into the impact that the teacher leadership licensure requirement had on their thinking.

Yvonne. Yvonne graduated in 2012 and taught for a year in large metropolitan district in an inclusive education classroom. At the time of the interview, she was currently seeking employment

near her hometown. Yvonne's teacher leader essay activities focused on taking roles that were needed at events such as assisting with conferences, parent-teacher organization (PTO) events, and attending meetings for the School Improvement Team. After her first year of teaching, teacher leadership became a more complicated concept. In her interview, she said, "I used to think of teacher leadership as behavior management" but now it includes settings beyond her own classroom and students. She concludes that she does feel like a teacher leader because of her work in the classroom, which she implies is appropriate for a first-year teacher.

Aurleigh. Aurleigh also graduated in 2012 and taught for taught for a year in large metropolitan district and is currently moving to another city where she is seeking employment. Aurleigh's teacher leader essay activity focused on parent communication through the creation of an interactive classroom website with an accompanying hardcopy newsletter. She wrote in her teacher leader essay:

> I also realized that being a leader in the school and developing a new project requires quite a bit of planning and enthusiasm. It is easy to get discouraged when developing something new, but it is worth all of the frustration when the final product turns out better than expected.

In her follow-up interview, this idea of trying new things was present. During the interview, Aurleigh explained that leadership now meant "being open to trying new things and getting outside of my comfort zone; open to sharing ideas – teachers were eager to hear about what I'd learned at college." Aurleigh does not feel like a teacher leader despite her colleagues' inquiries. She indicates that she is open to being a teacher leader by putting herself "out there" and concludes that she is a teacher leader "[a]s much as I can be as a first-year teacher. I'm not ready to train the whole school or anything."

Beryl. Beryl graduated in December 2011 and worked in a nearby city for half the year. For the following year, Beryl taught 5th grade in a rural location near the university. Beryl's teacher leader activity was a multipart fundraising event via Heifer International that her cooperating teacher actually did annually. Along with another student teacher, Beryl raised money and used a provided curriculum to help students understand the big idea behind Heifer International. The culminating event included a press-covered event of the principal "kissing a cow" because a certain amount of funds were raised. She wrote in her essay:

> Being able to work with others on something so important is extremely rewarding, especially when you are helping other people. Knowing that the school worked together to help other families makes me very proud to be a part of this community.

In her follow-up interview, the idea of teacher leadership as a service to the school community was present, as well as the relevance of how others perceive her. She indicated that teacher leadership now is about "stepping up and taking the role… making yourself known and people respecting you," and she does this by volunteering to be on committees such as the Wellness Committee and the 4-H liaison. This idea that teacher leadership is perception from others was reiterated when she reflected back on her Teacher Leader project. Beryl shared, "I wish that I would have gotten quotes from the students about that leadership role. We did things in the classroom, but I never had them reflect, or a reflection from the school in general. Like was this effective?"

Discussion

This small but useful sample provides a glimpse into how the leadership licensure requirement impacted these beginning teachers' ideas about teacher leadership. While survey data indicated that participants believe their thinking about teacher leadership changed significantly, their perception of themselves as teachers leaders was in the "somewhat" to "only a little" categories. This is supported by the follow-up interview data. All three novice teachers indicated that the idea of teacher leadership was more complex now that they were teachers but that their ability to demonstrate leadership was impacted by school context as well as perceptions of others in the school, whether they viewed them as potential leaders (Carver & Meier, 2013).

The school context is very different once the pre-service teacher becomes an in-service teacher. While the required teacher leader task may have helped with technical skills, such as communication and organization, we believe that the required leadership task had very little impact on their ability to see themselves as teacher leaders prior to entering the classroom. Once they have had teaching experience as first-year teachers, they are still within that novice stage as our theme "movement within the novice stage" indicated. Thus, while the novice teachers understand the roles of teacher leaders, they themselves are tentatively expanding their own experience with leadership through small steps in their new teaching contexts. This directly connects to our notion of teacher leadership development, which maps onto the findings from previous research on the development and concerns of novice teachers (Ryan, 1986; Veenman, 1984). For instance, three survey participants addressed the teacher leadership licensure requirement as a meaningless task that had to be completed in order to graduate. Two participants' comments to the survey question of how your understanding of teacher leadership has changed provided a third-party/outsider stance, where they addressed recognizing teacher leadership in others rather than in themselves: "…I am much more aware of which teachers act as leaders for their school or grade level" and "…I do see some of the difference of the important role that teachers play as leaders." This implies that they recognize leadership in others but not in themselves. While they are aware of others' actions and share their perceptions of those actions, they do not readily state how they are leaders or how their perceptions of their own actions make them leaders.

Limitations

With survey research and follow-up interviews, we must acknowledge that these are self-reports and so "…the validity of the information is contingent on the honesty of the respondent" (Mertens, 2010, p. 173). While we trust the information that our participants provided us was truthful, a potential limitation to this study is the Hawthorne Effect or "reactivity" (Maxwell, 2005), where participants could have shared information they thought we wanted to know in the survey and/or during the follow-up interviews because they were participants in a study (Mertens, 2010). The participants knew who the researchers were when they consented to participate in the study and had taken classes from the two researchers in the recent past. Thus, participants could have responded to survey items and/or follow-up interview prompts in ways in which they thought the researchers would want them to do so.

Another limitation is the lack of diversity among the three interviewed participants. Zumwalt and Craig (2008) asserted that most (75%) teachers in the U.S. are female. Addressing the lack of diversity in the U.S. teacher demographics, Cochran-Smith and Villegas (2015) state, "…the teaching force is overwhelmingly White" (p. 11). According to Boser's (2014) recent study, the state of North Carolina's teaching force is 84% White. Our university's elementary education program consists of predominately

White females, which reflects state and national trends. Indeed, the elementary education graduating class from spring 2012 was comprised of 56 White females and 2 White males. Thus, the interviewed participants reflect U.S. teacher demographics and our university's elementary education program population.

School context could play a role in opportunities for teacher leadership, as well as teachers' self-perceptions about leadership. Future research should investigate the influence of the school context on teacher leadership.

Conclusion and Implications

Teacher leadership is a diffuse concept as demonstrated by the existing body of research. Previous research, in addition to this follow-up study, support the idea that while novice teachers view teacher leadership along a spectrum of possibilities, they are constrained by their own experiences and contexts (Carver & Meier, 2013; Rogers & Scales, 2013).

While the concept of teacher leadership should be addressed in the preparation of teachers, it is questionable as to whether teacher leadership should be part of a high-stakes assessment tied to licensure. Cochran-Smith and her colleagues (2013) see these assessments as "sites of struggle" for teacher educators and policymakers, but perhaps they are not meant for the pre-service teachers. Our data supports the idea that developmentally many pre-service teachers see these assessments, in particular the teacher leader essay licensure requirement, as yet another a task to be completed instead of as a meaningful or authentic leadership opportunity.

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Appendix A: Online Survey Questions

Thank you for taking the time to take this quick survey on your experiences with the Teacher Leadership Essay at Western Carolina University!

Sincerely,

Dr. Scales & Dr. Rogers

1. I have read and understand what is expected of me if I participate in this study. I am at least 18 years old. My consent to participate is indicated below.
   - o Yes
   - o No [If "no," the survey skipped to the end message of "Thank you!"]

2. My consent for the researcher to quote me directly in their research is indicated below.
   - o Yes
   - o No

3. Do you remember your Teacher Leader Essay from your Western Carolina University Elementary & Middle Grades Education Program?
   - o Yes
   - o No [If "no," the survey skipped to the end message of "Thank you!"]

4. If yes, what did you do? (Check all that apply)
   - o After school/out of school events (School dances/events, Afterschool clubs, Fundraisers, Field Trips)
   - o In school/classroom events (Meetings/committees, classroom events)
   - o Parent-oriented events (Parent events such as conferences/PTA/PTO)

5. How did you decide on the activities you submitted in the Teacher Leader Essay? (Check all that apply)
   - o Your own idea (please name the activity)
   - o A suggestion from your Cooperating Teacher (please name the activity)

- With a fellow intern/student teacher (please name the activity)
- Other (please explain)

6. How much did this activity or these activities help you understand what it means to be a teacher leader?
   - None
   - Only a little
   - Somewhat
   - Significantly

7. How much did this activity or these activities contribute to your current performance as a teacher leader?
   - None
   - Only a little
   - Somewhat
   - Significantly

8. Has your understanding of teacher leadership changed since graduation?
   - None
   - Only a little
   - Somewhat
   - Significantly

9. If your understanding has changed to any degree, how has it changed?

10. Given your experiences since graduation, how would you define teacher leadership now?

11. To what degree to you consider yourself to be a teacher leader?
    - None
    - Only a little
    - Somewhat
    - Significant

12. Could we call you for a brief follow-up interview? If yes, please provide us with your name and contact information below.

Thank you!

Appendix B: Follow-up Interview Questions

Perceptions of Teacher Leadership

Follow-up telephone interview questions are for clarification purposes only. The questions are as follows:

1. When you were completing the Teacher Leader Essay for the Western Carolina University Elementary and Middle Grades Education Program requirements, what was your thought process?

2. What or who influenced you when planning for the Teacher Leader Essay?

3. Can you expand on your response to the following online survey prompts?

    a. Now that you are a classroom teacher, please describe what "teacher leadership" means to you now.

        i. Your response indicated _____. What did you mean by that?

    b. Have your thoughts about teacher leadership changed? If so, how? Briefly describe the change. What has influenced that change?

        i. Your response indicated _____. What did you mean by that?

    c. Do you consider yourself a Teacher Leader?

        i. Your response indicated _____. What did you mean by that?

    d. Briefly describe how you are a leader in your classroom, school, and/or community.

        i. Your response indicated _____. What did you mean by that?

4. Would you like to share anything else with us about the Teacher Leader Essay requirement or how to develop teacher leadership?

Appendix C: Teacher Leader Essay Directions

Each teacher candidate will complete a **Teacher as Leader Essay** to document leadership in the school, professional development, and collaboration with families.

Directions. Each teacher candidate will participate in at least two activities that show experience and in-depth understanding of the concept of "Teacher as Leader." The activities may involve direct

participation in the School Improvement Plan and meaningful interaction with parents/families. There must be a minimum of five hours of participation in the activities. The final reflective essay will be submitted electronically to demonstrate proficiency in leadership and collaboration, along with verification forms as evidence of participation.

Involvement in the activities must be substantial and meaningful and can take the form of, but is not limited to:

1. semester-long participation on a school improvement team;

2. evidence of planning and collegial work with the cooperating teacher (and/or another teacher in the school) on a project or problem of concern addressed in the school's improvement plan;

3. participation in the development of an IEP or an IFSP;

4. meetings with the parents/guardians at the school, phone calls to the home, and so forth;

5. planning of and participation in a school-wide event (e.g., field trip, band performance, assemblies, open house, senior projects, health fair, parent conferences, bicycle safety program)

6. planning of and participation in a school system-wide event (e.g., Special Olympics, Odyssey of the Mind, fundraiser, health and wellness initiative, science fair, writing contest, fine and performing arts events)

The format is as follows:

1. A one-page maximum description of the activities participated in for this evidence. Activities are to be clearly identified by name and described briefly. The description is to include who sponsored the activities (e.g., teacher, school, PTO, club, school system) and when and where they were held. Any other pertinent details should be included.

2. A Participation Documentation Form (see below) for each activity, to which you will attach a one-page maximum narrative description of your involvement in each activity.

3. A five-page maximum reflective essay that describes the successes and limitations of each event and what you learned about leadership, professional development, and collaboration with families. Be sure to respond to the prompts below:

    - **What are the concrete details of your leadership and collaboration activities and how did they influence your understanding of leadership and collaboration?** For example, a supporting statement provides a further explanation such as: "I know that the event was successful because several parents responded with positive feedback"; "The event raised $100.00 to support X organization"; or "This helped me value the importance of leadership and collaboration in the school community because . . . "

- **How did what you learned in college affect your ability to perform leadership activities as a student teacher?** Think critically about all of your experiences, such as course work, field experiences, extra-curricular activities, or special programs that you attended.

4. A verifying artifact of at least one of the activities, such as a printed program or announcement, video clip, or digital photo.

Evaluation. The Teacher Leader Essay will be scanned into one document and submitted and evaluated electronically using a rubric to determine the level of proficiency in the above-mentioned descriptors. This will show evidence of leadership and collaboration.