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Shared Leadership on a Career and Technical Education Campus

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Many students enter career and technical education (CTE) programs to pursue the attainment of job-specific skills. K-12 career and technical education program educators help prepare students for careers after high school by offering students a way to establish and improve upon industry-based skills (Treschan & Mehrotra, 2014). Through CTE programs, educators train students to become global competitors in the workforce by introducing them to career practices that are prominent within their fields (Conley, 2013; Gordon, 2014; Stone & Lewis, 2012).

CTE programs are driven by the needs of business organizations (Scott, Annexstein, Ordover, Esters, Bowen, & Reeve, 2003). As models of teaming are being implemented in the workforce, it is advantageous for students to learn the skills necessary to be productive in a team. Teaming requires students to be able to work collaboratively, think critically, and communicate effectively; these characteristics have been deemed 21st century skills. Similarly, these skill sets can be found within successful models of shared leadership, as shared leadership requires teams of people to work together toward a common goal (Fletcher & Käufer, 2003).

Merits of shared leadership include distributing responsibilities, utilizing a collaborative process, and working toward a common goal. If a goal of CTE program educators is to graduate high school students with 21st century skills, educators need to offer experiences relevant to those that students will encounter in the workforce. One such way educators could provide experiences for students in the 21st century skills of collaboration and communication is to employ models of shared leadership in which teams work toward shared goals. Little research, however, has been conducted to examine CTE teachers and their perceptions of shared leadership models. This study was conducted to examine teachers' perceptions of shared leadership at a comprehensive public career and technical education (CTE) high school. A secondary purpose was to explore the impact of shared leadership on teachers' job satisfaction.

Background Literature

In the 1930s, people began to view organizations as social interactions (Barnard, 1938; Mayo, 2003; Roethlisberger & Dickson, 2003), which led to leaders considering their employees' psychological needs to improve productivity (Pearce, Conger, & Locke, 2003). This growth mindset has led organizations to form teams of people to lead production in the corporate world (Pearce et al., 2003). Utilizing teams of people within educational practices has become

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prominent in the education world as students must graduate with experiences similar to those they will encounter in the workforce (Avolio, Walumbwa, & Weber, 2009; Pearce et al., 2003).

The implementation of teaming requires collaboration, critical thinking, and communication among teammates, all of which are considered 21st century skills. Researchers have urged educators to provide high school students with experiences similar to those in which the students will engage in the workforce (Hughes & Jones, 2011; Kapp, 2009; Sykes, Moerman, Gibbons, & Dean, 2014). These skills can be exemplified through a shared leadership model in which team members work together toward a common goal. Merits of working together can be seen within models of CTE where students work in collaborative teams.

In 2013, Texas legislators increased the stakes within CTE courses by implementing House Bill 5, which required high school students to choose a path of endorsement for graduation: science, technology, engineering, and mathematics; business and industry; public services; arts and humanities; or multidisciplinary studies. These career-specific courses have created a need for industry-certified teachers to enter the field of education (Brand, Browning, & Valent, 2013).

During the 20th century, vocational programs of education focused on minority students labeled as at-risk of not graduating from high school (Gordon, 2014; Stone & Lewis, 2012). Courses within vocational education often were gender-based and job-specific; boys were placed into agriculture courses in agriculture while girls took home economics classes. In contrast to vocational tracks, CTE programs provide students with options to multiple pathways through which students can obtain the skills they will need after high school (Gordon, 2014; Treschan & Mehrotra, 2014). The 21st century saw the evolution of career and technical education programs and the preparation of students for entrance into the workforce after high school.

Researchers have indicated that productivity of employees is impacted by the employees' levels of satisfaction in the workplace (Graen, Novak, & Sommerkamp, 1982; Loke, 2001; McNeese-Smith, 1997). In order to investigate the attributes that affect teacher job satisfaction, Halkos and Bousinakis (2012) analyzed levels of stress versus teachers' productivity. Through the collection of 425 surveys, the researchers found an inverse relationship between productivity and stress; the lower amounts of stress teachers experience, the higher their levels of productivity.

Theoretical Framework

Complexity theory was used to frame the current study. Through the implementation of complexity theory, or more specifically aggregate complexity theory, researchers can provide an analysis of the many interactions that occur in complex systems (Manson, 2001). Aggregate complexity is defined by the linked components within a system and attempts to analyze the system as a sum of these interactions (Manson, 2001). Rather than being analyzed piece-by-piece, complexity theory decisions are examined as a sum of all parts involved (Manson, 2001). A team's internal structure depends upon each member bringing various strengths to the team; resources the team utilizes are considered to be the surrounding environment.

Shared leadership should not be viewed simply as a cause-and-effect relationship (Morrison, 2006). Instead, via complexity theory researchers can take a holistic approach to understand the ways shared leadership affects teachers and students. Researchers can examine shared leadership

as the sum of its parts rather than limiting the discourse of shared leadership to specific components (Morrison, 2006). Utilizing complexity theory within this study of shared leadership allowed for the acknowledgement and examination of the various links of interaction that occur within an educational campus (Manson, 2001).

Methods

Utilizing a method of general qualitative inquiry, semi-structured interviews were conducted with teachers employed at a career and technical education campus. The study was undertaken in order to discover: 1) how the teachers at a secondary CTE campus perceive shared leadership, 2) how complexity theory relates to shared leadership on a CTE campus, 3) and how shared leadership impacts teachers' perceived job satisfaction at a CTE campus.

The 13 teachers who participated in the study worked at a comprehensive, public, CTE high school in the southwestern United States. The campus was a comprehensive high school that housed all core, elective, and CTE courses for students in grades 9-12. Students remained on campus for the entire school day, other than to attend internships within their respective career pathways. Students chose a career pathway of focus during their four years in high school. Students worked toward earning industry-recognized certifications while also completing the requirements for a diploma. The school was unique in its application of CTE as traditional extracurricular activities such as fine arts groups and sports teams were not offered. Instead, there was a strict focus on preparing for college and careers. School district employees did not assign students to attend this campus through attendance zones; students made the choice to attend the school.

This study took place following the first year of implementation of a shared leadership model. The educators at the campus implemented small learning communities (SLCs). Within the SLCs, the administrators grouped teachers and students into four concentrations, which were then developed into four content-specific colleges. The SLCs were created in order to allow the integration of students' career pathways into their core classrooms. As a part of the SLC model (Felner, Seitsinger, Brand, Burns, & Bolton, 2007), three persons led each group of teachers and students. Each leadership team was made up of a triad: a principal, a counselor, and a SLC coordinator. Other personnel also were invited to serve in leadership roles. These groups of CTE teachers and leaders utilized a model of shared leadership and met every other day to determine the direction of their respective college.

Each participant had experienced at least two models of school leadership. The questions the participants were asked pertained to their perceptions of the shared leadership model at their campus and how the implementation of the model impacted their job satisfaction. In order to broaden the scope of perception and experience (Norris, 1997), experts in the field reviewed the interview protocol prior to the interviews. As a part of the data collection process, analytic memos (Yin, 2015) were written for each interview. Interviews were conducted until data saturated.

The data were combed through in order to develop a list of significant quotes and notes on the subject matter. Keywords were assigned to each statement within the participants' interviews.

Transcripts were read over multiple times in order to understand the essence of the data. The keywords were grouped into chunks of data based on the repetitive ideas throughout. Units of meaning were assigned to the collected data (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The data were compiled into one description of findings associated with each of the research questions. This report was based on the themes that became apparent throughout the interviews. In this horizontalization of data, all quotations initially were viewed as equal and themes were allowed to emerge and a textual description was created (Creswell, 2012).

In order to ensure the trustworthiness of this study's findings, each participant was asked to review his or her transcribed interview to check for accuracy. Member checking (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) was utilized as two educators who are experts in CTE reviewed the data to confirm the accuracy of translation.

Findings

Four themes emerged as a result of the participants' responses to the interview protocol: 1) collective accountability was vital to the success of the CTE campus; 2) participants' responses regarding their perceptions of shared leadership mirrored characteristics of 21st century skills that students need to be successful in the workforce; 3) the building of relationships impacted the effectiveness of the teachers' practices; and 4) the shared leadership model positively impacted the CTE teachers' levels of job satisfaction by including teachers in the decision-making process.

Within a shared leadership model, individuals work in teams toward a shared goal (Pearce et al., 2003). The participants expressed that a shared purpose was created within their group. Day and Sammons (2013) argued that leaders are most effective when they bring all stakeholders into the decision-making process. The implementation of the model within this study seemed to have done just that; shared leadership brought the teachers together by allowing their input toward the ultimate goal of student achievement. Participants with backgrounds in teaching core courses and those with backgrounds in teaching CTE courses held similar perceptions of the shared leadership model.

Backgrounds of Participants

Of the 13 teachers who were interviewed for this study, six taught core courses (English, math, science, or social studies), and seven taught CTE courses. Only five of the 13 participants held an undergraduate degree in the subject area they taught. Including the three teachers who held cosmetology certificates in place of bachelor's degrees, six participants did not have an undergraduate degree that related to their content area. The majority of the participants who taught core courses did not hold an undergraduate degree in the area in which they were certified to teach, whereas all of the participants who taught CTE courses either had work experience or an undergraduate degree focused in their content area.

Nine of the 13 participants worked in a non-teaching field prior to becoming educators. When these nine participants began their teaching careers, six taught CTE courses and three taught core classes. Six participants had taught only CTE courses, six had taught only core courses, and one had taught both English and CTE courses during his career.

The participants' average years of teaching was approximately 9.5 years. Only three participants had more than ten years of experience, while eight had been employed in the teaching field

between five and ten years. All but two of the participants had experience leading a group of either teachers or students.

Collective Accountability. Participants perceived that collective accountability was vital to the success of the team. The participants said that they previously believed that decisions were made at the administrator level and then trickled down to the teachers. In contrast, the participants found decision-making to be a team process within the shared leadership model. Within the model, they were allowed input at the beginning of every meeting and asked to contribute to the vision and mission of the college. Participants felt that they were free to make comments related to decision making without fear of reprimand. Contributing to decision-making was a new behavior that emerged through this model of shared leadership and resulted in participants feeling relevant.

While bringing more people into roles of leadership, opportunities arise to spread the responsibilities that formerly may have been assigned to one person (Pearce et al., 2003). Creating a team of leaders allows the multitude of duties to be distributed among various persons, in turn alleviating some of the stress that would fall on the shoulders of a leader acting solo. The participants said that they felt comfortable approaching any member of the leadership team for any reason, as they understood that everyone in the building was working toward the same goals.

The participants' discussions of teaming related to Fletcher and Käufer's (2003) merits of shared leadership. The authors indicated that implementation of the model can lead to an increase in productivity and promotion of distributed responsibility, participative processes, and working toward a shared goal.

According to the participants, strength in relationships was key to the success of the CTE campus. Participants shared that leaders cannot prosper without building positive working relationships, and perceived that leadership effectiveness increases when teachers build personal relationships with their leaders. Additionally, multiple teachers posited that positive relationships increased the levels of trust among the team, which was a key factor in reaching goals.

The implementation of the model was not without challenges. Several teachers shared that they were not sure of the purpose of the model, that they did not know who to go to, and that some teachers took longer to buy-in to the style of leadership. After administrators had delineated the purpose of the model, including the role of the teacher leader, several participants in the current study commented on how nice it was to have a teacher within their leadership team. They said that the teacher leader was a colleague simply trying to make their teaching better, and would often give them tips for their classroom of which they had never considered.

Modeling of 21st Century Skills. Shared leadership on the CTE campus allowed students to experience the 21st century skills of collaboration and communication through adults modeling a form of teaming. Participants voiced many perceptions of shared leadership that elicited merits of the skills students must acquire to become both college and career ready. Of the 21st century skills mentioned, those of collaboration and communication were voiced most often. Participants expressed that the collaboration among teammates was extremely helpful in understanding the

big picture and purpose of the model. All of the participants appreciated being able to collaborate with team members and felt that they better understood the purpose of CTE thanks to the model of shared leadership. This model of shared leadership led to an increase in participants collaborating with each other, a characteristic that Katz and Kahn (1978) argued is inherent within shared leadership models.

Participants utilized skills of communication and collaboration within the model of shared leadership. Many of the participants argued that communication was key to the success of the model, and some said the whole system would have fallen apart without true communication. With 21st century businesses requiring teamwork, these are two skills that students must master before entering the workplace (Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2013). According to the participants in this study, implementing a model of shared leadership on this CTE campus with the purpose of preparing students for the workforce allowed students to observe teams of people working toward a common goal.

Complex and Newfound Relationships

The participants built relationships that impacted their teaching effectiveness. Persons in various departments were given time under this new model to sit across the table from one another and share thoughts and ideas on schooling and the methods by which students were taught. Similar to Kouzes and Posner's (2012) ideas that regard leadership as relationship-based, all of the participants expressed an enjoyment of the new relationships, and many of them shared that they learned new methods of teaching from the varying experience levels and content knowledge within the group.

The participants perceived that these relationships would not have been created under a hierarchical model of educational leadership, as the shared leadership model allowed time for cross-curricular conversations to occur. This model of leadership allowed persons to come together and share teaching practices, discuss student achievement, and create an overall positive impact on their productivity. The participants shared that their conversations with teachers in other content areas broadened their understanding of the application of CTE in schools.

Additionally, teacher conversations led to further collaboration with leaders regarding their teaching practices. One participant expressed that getting to sit down with an administrator who was concerned about his lesson plans was unheard of under a model of traditional educational leadership. The participants perceived that these relationships teachers formed with the leadership team led to greater effectiveness in the classroom.

Impact of Job Satisfaction

During the interviews, the participants described various aspects of their job satisfaction during previous years of top-down leadership style and during the school year in which the shared leadership model was implemented. Song, Martens, McCharen, and Ausburn (2011) found that creating a supportive learning climate and implementing effective school leadership were key features in lowering teacher turnover rates on a CTE campus. In the current study, participants discussed enjoying the support of leadership within the model; they especially benefitted from the new, cross-curricular relationships they built through the shared leadership meetings.

One participant's negative remarks were in relation to the students she taught, rather than toward the leadership team. Teamwork was the focus of many of the positive responses, specifically the ability to have a voice in decision-making. Participants also shared that they enjoyed having three leaders who were focused on their group, and their group alone. The teachers expressed having felt more valued as a result of the input they were allowed to have in the decision-making process. Overall, they stated that having someone simply listen to their ideas and follow through with suggestions positively impacted the way they felt about their jobs.

All but two participants discussed how much they valued their job as a teacher. The majority of the participants shared that the success of their students made them feel the most appreciated. Frustrations that participants voiced from years prior centered on the logistics of being a teacher: paperwork, directives, and lack of communication. Discipline also was mentioned as an irritant within the participants' careers. A noteworthy difference in frustrations during the shared leadership model was the lack of complaints about directives; none of the participants mentioned having any frustration involving directives during the year of shared leadership.

The teachers listed appreciation from students as their primary source of acknowledgement in years prior to the implementation of the shared leadership model. When asked about the year of shared leadership, discussions included their ability to provide input toward the vision and mission of their team. Participants listed the verbal affirmations they received from their campus administrators both in prior years and during shared leadership, with distinction including the frequency and specificity of the affirmations from the leaders within the triad model. In addition, two teachers mentioned receiving positive evaluations as a form of leadership appreciation. Finally, multiple participants spent time outlining how much they valued being able to have input toward the goals of their group.

Discussion

The relationships teachers made within their first year of the implementation of the shared leadership model positively impacted their teaching practices and allowed for teachers to make better connections between CTE and core classes through cross-curricular teaming. The participants who taught core classes expressed having a better understanding of CTE programs after the implementation of shared leadership due to their newfound professional relationships with CTE teachers. As traditional implementers of leadership in education often do not carve out time for cross-curricular conversations (Fletcher & Käufer, 2003), a shared model of leadership could impact the vision of CTE campuses by preparing students to be both college and career ready.

When the participants were asked about their overall job satisfaction, 8 of the 13 teachers expressed a definitive positive impact. The methods of bringing teachers into the decision-making processes eliminated many feelings of resentment toward directives teachers felt in the past. Consequently, when the participants were asked to delineate their frustrations with shared leadership, no participant mentioned directives as an issue. The teachers utilized characteristics of 21st century skills related to teaming, built cross-curricular relationships that added value to their teaching practices, and experienced positive impacts on their perceived levels of job satisfaction.

Implications for Practice

Teachers' increases in productivity, relational-capacity, and effective teaching practices were all found to be results of the shared leadership implementation. With these benefits, shared leadership should be considered by leaders who seek to increase levels of teacher involvement on campus. The impact the model had on these participants led to larger amounts of productivity, as well as new ways in which to teach content.

Some participants were concerned about who they should contact to receive assistance on certain topics. Asking leadership teams to create a graphic model with various overarching topics could help teachers understand who should handle what type of situations and could alleviate some of the role ambiguity of implementing new leadership roles. To prevent any feelings of isolationism and ensure that the larger leadership team is on the same page, campus leaders should meet with teachers to create a shared vision for the school. Teachers and administrators could discuss the campus vision as a whole, and the sense of division that teachers sometimes feel could be decreased.

Recommendations for Further Research

This study was limited by the fact that it included just one CTE campus. Conducting a similar study with a larger number of participants could broaden the understanding of shared leadership. Further research is needed to examine the effects that additional educational practices in CTE programs have on teachers. As students are the focal point of education, it is imperative that further research be conducted based on student perceptions of leadership on CTE campuses. The perceptions of campus administrators in regard to shared leadership also could prove valuable to persons hoping to implement a model of shared leadership on a CTE campus.

In this study it was found that a group of CTE teachers held similar perceptions of those who taught core courses. Persons involved in teaching CTE echoed the same sentiments as those teaching core classes within a shared leadership model. As CTE is still a growing realm in the world of education, researchers should investigate various topics through the eyes of those teaching CTE classes.

Conclusion

CTE programs are facilitated by many schools' educators to address the concern with students becoming college and career ready. Through this study it was found that utilizing models of shared leadership can be an effective means of modeling 21st century skills for students entering the workforce after graduating from high school.

Effective shared leadership can lead to higher levels of productivity and increased teacher effectiveness. Further, the implementation of shared leadership can increase participants' perceived levels of job satisfaction through their impact on the decision-making process. As shared leadership participants utilize characteristics of 21st century skills, the implementation of this model of leadership could be beneficial to students who seek to meet workforce demands by helping them to graduate high school with skills such as collaboration and communication among teammates.

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