
Preface

Uncovering Teacher Leadership: Essays and Voices From the Field

This collection of teacher leader voices brings together treasures from the past as well as contemporary gems. We bring to print these essays and stories as examples of the profound effect that teacher leadership can have on the quality of schools, not only as an influence on the schools themselves but also as a means of defining innovative leadership in the 21st century. Teacher leadership is not a separate entity, but part of a much larger continuum that gives it meaning. Collecting these voices mirrored many of the same challenges that schools face in marshaling the remarkable energies and talents of the teachers that work in them. It has been a humbling task because as far and wide as we have searched, we know there are remarkable stories yet to be told. The lessons in the stories of people in the field and in the essays by thinkers and writers on leadership are not the action-step or fix-it type. They surface the issues, expose some underlying ideas, provide different perspectives, and generate more questions about the inner work buried in this powerful phenomenon. The challenge for us is to honor the voices of teachers and give the term *teacher leader* real meaning today.

Teacher leadership itself continues to hold some ambivalence for teachers wondering about their role as leaders and shapers of responses to schoolwide pressures, all the while fully immersed in the demands of their individual classrooms. Teachers have untapped wisdom about the practice of teaching and deeply held beliefs about what is in the best interests of children and their learning. Outside influences, certainly, can build teachers' capacity—both in each individual and within a whole faculty—for leadership in governance, curriculum development, and reform. Principals, especially, are key to supporting teachers as they participate in

x **Uncovering Teacher Leadership**

leading colleagues. But teachers' inner resources and capabilities must be harnessed as well. They need to take risks, make mistakes, and reflect on their strengths and weaknesses both as teachers and as leaders. They must have courage, yet be vulnerable, fight the comfort of isolation and seek the critique of colleagues. For every leadership impetus outside the classroom there is equally strong inertia holding teachers there. Overwhelming responsibility for children's learning drains teachers mentally and emotionally; they may lack skill and confidence in dealing easily and effectively with other adults; power and authority issues, whether real or imagined, can undermine their sense of efficacy as leaders. Nevertheless, good teachers are increasingly aware of the need for their voices to be heard in many educational arenas. The challenges that teacher leaders confront are the same as those of all school leaders. They struggle for control over their work lives as they try to mobilize others on behalf of children and their learning. Although they may experience conflict with the school culture and within themselves, their goal is to catalyze others to work as hard as they do and care as deeply about what happens in classrooms and schools.

Teacher leadership still faces heavy odds today. It must compete not only with vested interests in traditional assumptions about leadership but also with schools that are still a bit uncomfortable with the idea of teacher leaders. It must endure school systems and bureaucracies that confuse certification with preparation and, sadly, the neglect of many school leaders themselves who think self-knowledge an expendable luxury. Fortunately, the domain of leadership and learning in schools is not restricted, and there are forms of enlightened action and leadership that lie ready and waiting within the lives of every teacher in a school. The practices of teaching and leadership demand no less.

Our understandings about teacher leadership come from years of working with teacher leaders as well as reading authors who have advanced the conversation through their published work. This volume draws on their stories, examples, evidence, insights, research, guidance, and wisdom. Organizing this collection has required creating a delicate interplay of voices along distinct but related pathways that honors the uniqueness of each and reveals more about the essential nature of teacher leadership. The goal is to offer teacher leaders insight into their situation by revealing some of the ways veteran writers have made sense of teacher leadership and leadership generally. The voices of teachers immersed in the experience of leadership echo their wisdom. In hearing the unique voices of teacher leaders, other educators—all teachers and leaders, too—may gain awareness of their own inner struggles as they strive to improve student learning.

The book is divided into five parts. We provide an introduction for each one to help the reader follow the "discussion." We have book-ended each part with "on-the-ground" leaders' voices. We see these beginning and ending pieces speaking to the theoretical and research-based articles

by revealing practitioners' thoughts and feelings about their school leadership roles. At the end of each part, we include questions for reflection and conversation as well as protocols for helping people translate the ideas into meaningful action.

Part I, *Looking at Teacher Leadership*, reflects on what is meant by teacher leadership itself, revisiting and testing assumptions based on empirical studies as well as theoretical and interpretive work. Its six authors cast a wide net by looking at the way teacher leadership has been conceptualized through a steadily emerging knowledge base. Part II, *Teacher Leaders Everywhere*, explores the etiology of teacher leadership. The authors in this section provide distinctive and complementary rationales for the emergence, presence, and sustainability of teacher leadership.

Collected at the center of the book in Part III are stories of teachers who have allowed themselves to look into the heart of their leadership. These are snapshots of their sense-making. To gather these "raw" pieces we encouraged people we knew and contacted others through friends and acquaintances to cull through their diaries, blogs, and journals to bring to the surface once again the understandings they have of their own teacher leadership forged in the dailiness of their lives. The voices in Part III speak directly to teachers who are struggling with the tugs and pulls of leadership life. These slices of teacher leaders' inner lives tap into the teacher in all educational leaders who wrestle with the same thorny issues: What is my role? Who am I to take this on? What inner resources must I have to do this kind of work? Can I afford to be vulnerable when I step out of my comfort zone as leadership demands? These pieces expose the inner lives of teacher leaders. Throughout this section, Sarah facilitates the conversation by referring to other pieces in the book whose themes resonate with the teacher leader voice. Thematically, these stories are about growth, becoming, learning, and voicing a new identity as a teacher and a leader. They do not offer simple techniques for becoming leaders or recipes for quick successes. What they do is share, in the words of teachers, their inward and outward paths to cultivating their own voices in the service of responsible and responsive leadership at a time when our schools need it the most.

Part IV, *Keeping the Teacher in the Leader*, provides multiple perspectives on the organizational contexts of teacher leadership. The articles here, many written by teacher leaders-turned-researchers, explore the authors' most pressing questions and tensions about the experience of teacher leaders moving in and through leadership life. Part V, *Nurturing Teacher Leaders*, describes a number of integral ways organizations can support teachers and teacher leadership inside and outside of schools.

The book concludes with two pieces from Sarah and Richard. Sarah offers a new vision for teacher leadership, elaborating on the central idea many of the scholars and practitioners voiced: namely, all teachers can be leaders, and all leaders are teachers. Richard has the final word on teacher leadership.