Teachers at the Forefront: Learning to Lead

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Teachers have assumed leadership in both formal and informal ways and now have been studied for over two decades. Several important collections of research on teacher leadership is now available (Smylie & Denny, 1990, York –Barr & Duke, 2004) and there is interesting data on a variety of programs in the U.S. Teacher leadership is an important idea and gaining popularity throughout the world. Yet we still need to understand *how* teachers learn to lead and the different kinds of *organizational conditions* that are developed as they assume a professional orientation for their work in mostly bureaucratic settings (Talbert, 2010). The purpose of this chapter is to analyze three different programs that create organizational arrangements that support teacher leaders as they learn to negotiate the inevitable tensions of their new role. All of these programs create opportunities for leading and provide different arrangements for teacher learning. All have a core of strategies, tools, and structures that can be identified and all are able to disseminate their work to different contexts without losing the essence of their programs. By looking at these programs in some depth, I hope to get at how teachers engage in particular types of activities and what it takes to support them as they are learning to lead. These various programs can help us understand some of what it takes to organize and support teachers to supplant a haphazard way of simply announcing new teacher roles without the necessary intellectual, emotional and organizational supports needed to do the job well. The programs include: The National Writing Project (NWP), The New Teacher Center (NTC) and the Teacher Learning and Leadership Program (TLLP) in Toronto.

The National Writing Project (NWP)

The National Writing Project started in 1974 by Jim Gray who had been a secondary English teacher for many years. His principal periodically provided professional development from outside consultants. Gray constantly complained that the English Department was doing many interesting things in their classroom. Why couldn't the professional development be done by the teachers themselves? During the summer of 1974, now a supervisor of student teachers at U.C. Berkeley, Gray got some support for starting a Bay Area Summer Institute for the teaching of writing to be held on the Berkeley campus (Lieberman & Wood, 2003).

He invited twenty-nine teachers that he knew to come to the institute finally getting an opportunity to think differently about professional development. The big idea was that *teacher knowledge was to be the starting point for learning (*p.3). This idea, along with several other propositions, has come to be known as the core principles of the NWP.
- Teachers teach one another *their* "best practices"
- Teachers write and present *their* work for feedback and critique
- Teachers read, discuss, and analyze research, reforms and other literature during the institute.

• A "site" is a group of local teachers in partnership with a university and/or a college.

This first "site" attracted immediate attention and within a year or two, there were as many as 18 "sites" in California starting what was to become over a thirty year professional development effort on the improvement of student writing which, at its height had over 200 sites throughout the US.

In 1998-2000, Diane Wood and I studied two sites of the Writing Project in an effort to get an inside view of *"how"* the learning took place and to understand first-hand the kinds of conditions created by the NWP that made teachers say "going to the Summer Institute is like magic" (See Lieberman & Wood, 2004).

After sitting through two summer institutes, one in Los Angeles at U.C.L.A. and another at Oklahoma State at Stillwater for five weeks, we had collected a lot of data. L.A. was an older site and Oklahoma State a relative new one. One was clearly in an urban area and the other a more rural and suburban site. The important ideas we observed we ended up calling a set of *social practices*. When taken together, teachers literally changed the way they thought about their teaching, each other, and themselves. They gained a professional learning community for many that became a lifelong connection. Many became teacher consultants (TC's) who took responsibility for professional development, not only in their own school but in their districts as well. The activities became so powerful that many teachers felt, not only that they would change the way they taught in their own classrooms, but felt empowered to provide this kind of learning for their peers. This kind of learning leadership clearly showed the power of "learning by doing" an idea first written about by John Dewey almost a century ago.

The social practices we saw were:
• Approaching each colleague as a potentially valuable contributor
• Honoring teacher knowledge
• Creating public forums for teacher sharing, dialogue, and critique
• Turning ownership of learning over to learners
• Situating human learning in practice and relationships
• Providing multiple entry points into the learning community
• Guiding reflection on teaching through reflection on learning
• Sharing leadership
• Promoting a stance of inquiry
• Encouraging a reconceptualization of professional identity and linking it to professional community

What we learned was that all these practices, when integrated into a three-five week institute, were so powerful as the teachers in the institute were the knowledge givers rather than those of an outside developer. Everyone was accepted no matter where or why they had come, and in a short time a community was developed where teachers were both

learners and leaders in a variety of activities. As quickly as the second day, teachers were teaching their best lesson to the group, and others were reading what they were writing and getting feedback, while others were sharing their books and reading research together. It slowly felt as if the teachers (rather than the directors) were leading the institute. Teachers were both the teachers of others some of the time, and learners at other times. There were experiences where the teacher could be a leader in the morning teaching their best lesson, and a learner in the afternoon listening and engaging in reading research. This trading of roles was both exciting and educative! Teachers clearly learned that engagement was a powerful form of teaching. More than that, teachers felt respected, trusted, and supported in what they had learned as teachers! Going public with their teaching became the norm of the institute, and teaching one another and giving feedback to each other was at the heart of the days and weeks in the institute. Many vowed on the spot that they were going to create such activities in their own classrooms and it was not hard to see that teachers realized the enormous power of engaging learners and building a community, rather than directly **teaching them** as individuals.

From Institute to Classroom

In our study we visited three teachers at each site, one brand new teacher who had just taken the summer institute, and two who had taken it a while ago. We did indeed see that all the teachers used many of the strategies that they had learned in the summer institute. We realized that we got close to the *how* teachers were learning and that the summer institute with its social practices was clearly the organizing strategy. It worked in Los Angeles as well as in Stillwater and its history has shown that the core ideas travel well without being distorted by differences in context. Along with the social practices, we also realized that teachers felt that their knowledge was important, respected and honored for its complexity and authenticity. The fact that *their* lessons and *their* writing and *their* discussions of books and research was central seemed of critical importance to their learning and the development of leadership.

The New Teacher Center (NTC)

Well over fifteen years ago, Ellen Moir who had been a teacher in Santa Cruz, CA. realized that there had to be a way to support new teachers for their first few years. Many teachers quit as new teachers because they find it hard to figure out alone how to improve and learn how to teach their students well – regardless of their socio-economic background. These ideas were to become the centerpiece of the New Teacher Center which specializes on "the induction years", the first two years of a teachers' life. Moir was an important participant as the state of California voted to "mentor" teachers during these years.

Moir and her colleagues built a program that, like the NWP, has some core pieces that have been developed over time. These core programmatic structures are now introduced to different districts throughout the U.S. (Moir, Barlin, Gless, Miles, 2009). This program has developed in an interesting way. Not only have the core pieces developed over time, but

Moir sent a researcher to learn what mentors struggle with as they develop into teacher leaders. Hanson interviewed mentors for their first four years to find out "how" they were doing with their mentees. Janet Gless and I were invited to look with Hanson at the data from these years and together we wrote a book about mentors as they learn to lead (Lieberman, Hanson & Gless, 2012). These data taught us that mentors negotiate a series of tensions as they learn to lead. They are:

• Building a new identity
• Developing trusting relationships
• Accelerating teacher development
• Mentoring in challenging contexts
• Learning leadership skills

For mentors, these themes represent the "*how"* of how they learn to lead.

Like other teacher leader roles, mentors struggle with what it means to teach someone else how to teach, even though they were picked because they have been excellent teachers.

Somehow mentors feel confident about what they have learned from their classroom experience, yet they are also faced with learning new knowledge about school cultures, all of which makes them uneasy about claiming a new identity.

Most mentors in the U.S. work in several different schools, so they must learn how to build trust with principals, veteran teachers and other personnel in the schools besides the mentees they are supposed to help. Mentors very quickly learn that they must play a supportive role with their mentees despite the increasing demands being placed on teachers in this era of reform. Building trust among the various players in most schools is a necessity despite their central work which is to help novices learn how to teach.

The main job for the mentor is to learn to accelerate the development of their mentees. This too represents some serious understandings as the mentor must learn where to start their help, despite a number of problems that the mentee may have. The NTC teaches the mentors how to start with the problems as the mentee describes them, but, in the face of different subject areas, school cultures, and personalities, this too is complicated.

Many mentors work in dysfunctional schools as they are trying to facilitate the learning of their new teachers. Supporting beginning teachers despite depressing situations, sometimes non-supportive principals, or teachers not happily engaged with their students, is an incredible challenge, yet the mentors must figure out how to help their mentees, make the profession worth the struggle, and somehow support their mentee despite the poor context within which the mentor and mentee find themselves.

Despite the difficulties of the leadership role of the mentor, this is the very stuff of leadership that mentors must face. Their position as mentor puts them in a spot where they must learn to broker resources for their mentee, support their mentee in difficult situations not of their making, and help create communities of practice where their mentee can learn

to teach as the mentors learn to lead. Supporting, organizing, negotiating, teaching and collaborating are all parts of the leadership that mentors learn in the NTC.   Lieberman, Hanson & Gless. (2012, p. 5)).

Mentor Academy Series

What makes the New Teacher Center a significant program is that it too has a number of organizational tools and structures that have been developed over time. These tools are as important to the mentors and their leadership as they are to the mentees who are learning to teach. And like the NWP, these tools are the very thing that supports the mentor's growth as a leader. As the NTC has grown, so has the sophistication and importance of the tools that lie at the center of the supports for teachers during their induction years.

Mentors use what the NTC calls a Formative Assessment System that has a number of tools that are used during the development of the relationship of mentors to their mentees. Within this system is a most important organizational structure in the NTC called the Mentor Academy Series which is actually a curriculum that has been developed over the years. This series of sessions helps mentors with a complex array of practices that they need to understand and internalize as they work with a variety of mentees in different contexts throughout the U.S. The Mentor Academy series is divided into three years consisting of eight three day sessions during the first two years, followed by three two day sessions in year three. In Year One, mentors learn how to "inquire into practice". These sessions consist of understanding what is meant by instructional mentoring as well as formative assessment. The mentors learn how to assess growth (in the mentee) while they help them deepen their practice. During the second year, academy sessions are concerned with "equity in education". In these sessions, mentors learn about language development and how to reach "all" students. In year three, mentors learn how to inquire into their own practices and how to read and inquire into research.

A number of tools have been created by NTC which serve as part of the Assessment System. They include:
• The Collaborative Assessment Log (CAL) – This helps the mentor guide the structure of the session they will hold with the mentee.
• Assessing Student Work (ASW) – This shows how to measure progress when examining student work for the mentee.
• Co-assessing Teacher Practice in core capabilities – This tool helps the teacher assess their own practice and helps them see their strengths and next steps in improving their practice.(see New Teacher website for more details).

Helping mentors learn the complexities of how to organize their approach to their mentees and attend to teachers in their first two years is an incredibly complex process. They are not only learning how to approach new teachers helping them slowly learn to teach well, but they must also learn how to negotiate different school cultures, working with principals and veteran teachers. Mentors themselves are moving from being excellent teachers, to holding

leadership roles in sometimes fractious and complicated schools. Learning *how* to mentor successfully as we can see in the NTC example demands a serious curriculum with built in supports (Moir, et. al, 2009). NTC is successful precisely because it has a "core" curriculum that embraces both an organizational and curricular structure as mentors learn leadership and their mentees learn to teach well.

Where the NWP has a summer institute that serves as the core organizing structure, the NTC has a Formative Assessment System with its Mentor Academies and opportunities to learn in a community of practice. Each of these programs has shown that the core ideas can be disseminated and learned in other districts, states, and now even in international settings. Where the NWP helps develop a large number of professional developers, the NTC develops mentors for teachers during their first two years of teaching. Each supports their teachers with a core set of knowledge and practice. The last program is different in that the learning is self-directed, while the supports are developed and run by a collaboration of the Ministry of Education and the Ontario Teachers Federation.

Teacher Learning and Leadership Program (TLLP)

The Teacher Learning and Leadership Program (TLLP) is much younger than either of the other two programs discussed above. This program attempts to provide opportunities for both learning and leadership of teachers. In 2005 a Working Table on Teacher Development was established between the Ministry of Education in Toronto and the Ontario Teachers Federation (OTF) - the organization of several teacher unions. A new Minister of Education announced that teachers are professionals and the Working Table was an opportunity for the teachers and ministry to develop a program of teacher learning together.

The group met for two years working out a proposal for teachers to both learn and take leadership.

In 2007 the first TLLP was announced to the public. Its goals were straightforward:
• To support experienced teachers to undertake self-directed professional development
• To help teachers develop leadership skills in sharing their learning and spreading exemplary practices and
• To facilitate knowledge exchange by working and collaborating with others, creating materials, developing new knowledge and working collaboratively with teachers.

Professional development was to be initiated by and run by teachers. Teachers could write a short proposal of their intention to organize professional development in their own school or within the province. Suggestions were made to encourage working with another person or a team, but teachers would essentially be in charge of their own learning. All proposals would also submit a budget for the year's work. From one to ten thousand dollars was a suggested amount. And if the program needed more, the door was open for continuous discussion during the year.

Developing a Proposal

To gain approval the proposal needs to attend to five characteristics put forth by the working table which include:
• Coherence built on the 3 R's of respect, responsibility and results.
• Attention to adult learning styles including choice, collaboration, differentiation.
• Goal oriented – be job embedded and connected to student learning
• Sustainable – be supported over time
• Evidence informed – be built upon current research as well as formal and informal data.

Choosing a Topic

Topics could include such areas as: teaching and learning strategies across the content areas; innovative approaches of all kinds; community partnerships; technology integration; professional learning communities; competencies and strategies for teaching in minority contexts, as well as other ideas created by teachers. Over time funding became more flexible. Technology equipment can now be funded as well as other resources needed in the professional development being proposed. Also included in a proposal is the quality of the idea; the background and experience of the proposer; its potential; its impact on students; and the plan for sharing.

Gaining Approval

A school board committee involving a Board member and a member of OTF reads and selects at least two proposals for each Board (like a district in the U.S.). The choices are then sent to the Provincial representatives (again including a Ministry representative and an OTF representative) for final approval. After awards are announced teachers, with the winning proposals, are invited to the first of two gatherings to meet, learn, and start thinking about launching their project.

Providing the Supports

When a cohort is selected, teachers are invited to the first conference entitled: *Leadership Skills for Teachers* which includes a few speakers, introduction to the program, and a series of carousels that include budget knowledge, how to deal with conflict, how to initiate your project and more. The entire program is to support teachers in their self-directed programs paying attention to how they initiate their work, how they can develop an understanding of the process of change and improvement as well as offering moral support for the awardees. Towards the end of the year, teachers are invited to a *Sharing the Learning* summit to provide posters and any other demonstrations of their work. Teachers go around and learn from one another and come to see themselves in a growing community of teachers who have in fact developed, organized and run professional development in their schools and beyond. Many have become professional development leaders as a result of fulfilling the obligations of their winning proposal.

Providing Research Evidence

To date there have been 600 projects developed and 3,300 teachers in seven different cohorts who have created and developed projects of all kinds. In 2012 a small research project collected data on a few key research questions which included:

1. What is the value of TLLP for teachers? And what can we learn about professional development organized the TLLP way?
2. To what extent have the overall goals of TLLP been realized?
3. What lessons can be learned so far? (Campbell, Lieberman, Yashkina, 2013)

In observing the events, interviewing both Ministry and OTF representatives, analyzing a percentage of the final reports (20%), and reviewing descriptive data, we collected some important data to answer our questions (See Stanford Center for Opportunity Policy in Education (SCOPE) website for final report on TLLP).

Teachers overwhelmingly said that this form of professional development was important and meaningful in helping them learn as well as supporting them in learning how to gain experience in organizing professional development with their peers. The average number of people on a project team is approximately four. Fifty three (53) out of three hundred and two projects (302) were one person projects. The program encourages teachers to work with others. Over 85% of those projects in the first four cohorts, teachers work with at least two people and sometimes a team. While the projects are teacher initiated, they are also aligned with school board and ministry priorities.

Most Popular Topics

The most prevalent topics chosen by the teachers were:

a)   differentiated instruction
b)   literacy
c)   technology and
d)   professional learning communities

There were teachers who worked on math literacy, student assessment, media literacy, arts, to name a few others. Teachers promised to improve knowledge and understanding, develop strategies and skills, develop new learning tools, establish better relationships with the community as well as build learning communities in their own schools.

Organizational Supports for Teacher Leaders

Perhaps the most interesting support in the TLLP is that the Ministry (policy makers) and the OTF (representing practicing teachers) have truly collaborated on this program.

The policies for the TLLP enable the growth and development of both learning and leadership. Both groups have created the program and both also facilitate, trouble shoot and make themselves available for help throughout the year. The two large meetings Leadership Skills for Classroom Teachers at the beginning of one's project, and Sharing the Learning Summit showcasing the completed projects, both provide the support that teachers rarely get. They have been given money, time and support for self-directed learning and first-hand knowledge and practice in how to develop leadership. Over 95% of the participants reported that they were satisfied or very satisfied with these events.

The Development of Teacher Leadership

In TLLP the experience of actually organizing a project, figuring out how to create activities, materials, structures for learning – all put the teachers in a position to learn.

They must work with their peers to figure out how to improve a particular area of the curriculum, find the time to meet, establish a way of working, get a focus for their work, and produce not only knowledge, but a way of operationalizing it in practice. Many learn for the first time how to spend money and keep within a budget; organize a scope of work that is doable in a year; sometimes create materials together and try them out in their classrooms; lead their peers in activities that push ideas forward; share these ideas with a growing number of teachers; and learn together how to improve in a given area. Some teachers are knowledgeable in a given area and want to do more; while others pick areas where they need to know and do more. The respect and dignity that teachers feel in the TLLP is palpable. A few titles make these projects come alive like: Working Together to Improve Boy's Literacy; or Engaging Young Readers with E-Books; or A Plan for Work-World Readiness; or Using Graphic Novels for Struggling Readers.

This program, like the NWP provides opportunities for the teachers who write successful proposals to learn leadership by actually doing it; organizing their peers to participate together in some improvement area. From this early study (Campbell, Lieberman & Yashkina, 2013), teachers have overwhelmingly reported that this is powerful professional development and many have also spoken about their opportunities to learn leadership. So far, the goals of the program have been realized.

There have been challenges too. Most teachers state that there is not enough time to do the work, but many figure out how to organize their own time so that they can teach and do the project too. Also many learn that some teachers are resistant to change and find it more difficult than they thought to gain other teachers' commitment to engage in a professional development effort (even tho it is sponsored by one of their peers). But despite these challenges, so far the program appears to be a raging success.

What can we learn from these development efforts?

All three of these programs put an emphasis on the teacher as primary learner (even though student learning is the ultimate goal). The NWP does it by having the institute focus

on teachers as writers as well as teachers teaching other teachers their best lesson and generally learning together. The NTC puts its emphasis on the new teacher during their first two years, but focuses much time on the mentor as leader constantly using field problems, even as the Mentor Academy focuses on building a system and tools for the mentor to use with their mentee. The TLLP focuses on the teacher as THE professional developer. It is their idea, their organization of the idea, and their mode of working on the professional development – whether it be materials, learning technology, advancing knowledge in a given area, or organizing their community, to name a few.

All three of these programs also support teachers, even though they give it in different ways. The NWP has the Summer Institute and in all areas where there is a site, there are meetings throughout the year to keep people connected. The NTC offers The Formative Assessment System which systematically teaches the new mentors, even as they are working with their mentees. They are constantly learning about new tools to use in their work. The TLLP provides money to enact a proposal and builds confidence in teachers who write successful proposals to do professional development in their own school. The partnership of the Ministry and OTF and their Boards are all involved in support of these projects and when troubleshooting is necessary all are available for help.

Ultimately what we learn is there are many different ways to support teachers in their efforts to improve and to eventually take on leadership responsibilities, but a key idea is for the teacher to have opportunities to learn in the practice of *doing* professional development or mentoring, or writing, as they are being supported by outside knowledge. In this way, experiences of inside knowledge of classroom and school practice are mated with outside knowledge (of research). In the process of paying attention to teacher learning *first,* teachers feel respected and raise their expectations of themselves beyond "*I am just a teacher*" and get opportunities to think and act differently. It is not only about their own learning, but about their work with others as well as their growing leadership responsibilities and the possibilities of building a community with their peers. These programs provide us with a different way of thinking about professional development, the growth of teachers as leaders, and the kinds of organizational support that must accompany real changes in schools and classrooms. Their successes lead us to think hard about *how* teachers learn and the variety of organizational conditions that must accompany good and lasting teacher development efforts.

Notes

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