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Teacher Leaders+ Reflective Teaching = A Collaborative Leadership Approach to Establishing Public School and University Partnerships

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Introduction

This research project takes both a philosophical and methodological approach to collaborative leadership, teacher leaders, and reflective teaching practices within the context of secondary schools and institutions of higher education. The philosophical core of this research is rooted in the educational philosophies of Pragmatism and Experimentalism with a focus on the works and ideas of John Dewey. Metaphysically speaking, this project evokes one to explain all the particulars in a particular experience, including connections and meaning, to obtain the ultimate reality of the experience while providing a place for both meaning and value.

Educational administrators are often responsible for making programs "work" in a diverse and pluralistic environment alongside the day to day work with the total school community. Both the philosophical research and field experience then allowed for assimilation of information as a means to help individuals craft programs and practices that are useful in resolving problems while simultaneously contributing to the growth of the organization and individual members within that organization. Teacher education and leadership programs must further emphasize education and work are not merely a means to an end but rather a cycle of meaningful existence where knowledge is what we should believe and values are hypotheses about what is good in action and theory.

Historical Perspective

As a personnel practice, collaborative leadership is rooted in educational philosophies, such as Pragmatism and Experimentalism. Overall, pragmatism follows a similar pattern as that of the scientific method in that if the problem can be defined then it can be solved. However, one must scientifically test the consequences of their actions, form a statement that is based upon the application of the hypothesis to solve the problem, and then judge their methods and ideas based on the consequences when the technique is acted on. Essentially, the logic of this process follows the scientific method in that it is experimental. Under the idea of Pragmatism, truth is derived from human experience not separate from human experience. Additionally, values are experienced within the context of ethical and aesthetic problems. In such case, issues are charged by unique features of particular situations. In essence, success is judged in terms of consequences that come from transforming the human environment (Gutek, 1997, pp 76-79).

To provide a sharper and more prescriptive focus, this article then turns to the ideas and philosophies of John Dewey. Though Dewey was considered a pragmatic, he tailored and specified the ideals of Pragmatism through his philosophy of Experimentalism. The ideals of

Experimentalism will assist one in communicating the results of an analysis of the current programs in place at a given site of study, identify opportunities for improvement, and offer suggestions for those improvements. Overall, Dewey believed that all learning was particular and contextual to a given time, place, and circumstance (Craver & Ozmon, 2008, pp.137-144). In turn, social education was a means to bring students into gradual contact with the realities and needs of society. Experimentalism emphasized the social role of the school as the agent that generated community. In terms of this study, I would refer to the community as the collaboration of all the members of the school community (Parents, staff, students, community members, school board members, and community stakeholders). This article provides contextual examples and applications that are demonstrated through the nurturing of total school programs and interdisciplinary ideals, that reaffirm the necessity of Dewey's emphasis on relationships between ideas, curriculum, practice, activity, and problem-solving while simultaneously displaying the benefit of collaborative leadership in schools. Moreover, this practice can become more prescriptive to the needs of the organization and its members through the creation of teacher leaders and implementation of such practices as reflective planning and evaluation within in each individual school building.

Definitions

According to Lee's *Effective Communication: Collaborative Practices for Educators* (1999), the words collaboration can be broken down into two aspects to provide a working definition of this concept. Part one of the word is *co*, meaning with or together. Part two of the word is *labor*, meaning work. In conclusion, collaboration means working with others and working together (Lee, 1999, p.5).

According to Rubin's *Collaborative Leadership* (2002), *collaboration* is "a purposeful relationship in which all parties strategically choose to cooperate in order to accomplish a shared outcome (Rubin, 2002, p.17). Essentially, because this a voluntary ideal, the success of collaboration depends on at least one of the collaborative leaders ability to build and maintain relationships.

So, how does Rubin define a *collaborative leader*? According to Rubin (2002), "a collaborative leader is anyone who has accepted responsibility for building or helping ensure the success of a heterogeneous team to accomplish a shared purpose" (Rubin, 2002, p. 18).

Beyond the idea of collaboration and collaborative leaders is the process that helps bring the two concepts together, *relationship management*. Through both my research and in the field experiences, I learned the essentiality of building and maintaining relationships to make collaboration a successful process for not only the school organization as a whole but also for all the individuals involved. Rubin (2002) defines relationship management as, "the purposeful exercise of behavior, communication, organizational resources to effect the perspective, beliefs, and behaviors of another person to influence that person's relationship with you and the

collaborative enterprise” (Rubin, 2002, p.18). In all, relationship management is the combination of the tools, strategies, and ideas that a collaborative leader implements and practices.

In totality, Rubin pulls all of these ideas together to form a working definition of *collaborative leadership*. Rubin (2002) states, “collaborative leadership is the skill-full and mission-oriented management of relevant relationships. It is the juncture of organizing and management” (Rubin, 2002, p.18). After reading Rubin’s work, I concluded that collaborative leadership is how collaborative leaders use their resources and manpower to build structures to support and sustain relationships over a given amount of time.

In discussion of the process of collaboration and current programs in place involving collaborative leadership, reasoning is heavily involved in the process of implementation and maintenance of successful collaborative relationships and programs. In such case, it is necessary to provide a definition for *reasoning*. According to Dewey (1910), reasoning is “the process of combining meanings to draw conclusions from manipulations” (Dewey, 1910, p. 27).

According to Dewey (1902), *learning* is “the process of solving problems in the given environment” (Dewey, 1902, p.78). In the eyes of Dewey, an individual knows and learns through their experiences. To help classify the connection between learning and experiences Dewey created the idea of an *experimental continuum*. Dewey’s experimental continuum states that people are what past experiences have made them and the future comes out of the present state (Dewey, 1966, p.94). Essentially, the past, present, and future are one flow of on-going experiences. The experimental continuum is also when both private (individual) and public (group) modes of experience are blended (Dewey, 1966,p.79).In this case, the ideas and experiences are coming together to form a personal and collective past. From this learning and experimental continuum comes growth. Dewey (1910) defines *growth* as “any time the learner is aware of interrelationships of experiences and consequences that follow an action” (Dewey, 1910, p.35).

Types of Collaboration

Itinerant Collaborations: These are short-term projects to achieve a specific goal or outcome. In this type of collaboration, a specific number of individuals convene to tackle specific and clearly defined outcomes that are usually achieved quickly in designated amount of time. These types of collaborations are defined by a unique agenda, problem, or need that should be addressed for both collaborative and individual partnerships. Generally, the purpose of these collaborations is to produce a meaningful product while providing practice for providing more complex and sustainable relationships. Additionally, this type of collaboration is beneficial as it strengthens personal relationships between leaders and collaborating partners.

Sustained Collaborations: Planned and managed systems of on-going interactions of individuals that is part of their job descriptions. These types of collaboration usually have long-term and

flexible goals. Moreover, the purpose of this long-term planning and collaboration is to advance an agenda more effectively than it would be being advanced individually. A positive aspect to this type of collaboration is that it builds collaborative and shared visions, goals, and relationships that are both consistent and compatible with all the individuals developing the school mission, practices, and self-interests of those collaborative members.

Role of Collaborative Leaders

Overall, collaborative leaders organize and create collaborative partnerships. However, the main difference is that the collaborative leaders, whether administrative or teacher leaders, these individuals are taking the initiative to begin a process. A collaborative leader helps each individual partner understand and sustain a personal connection to the attaching each individual partner's work and self-interests to the whole. For example, teacher leaders could represent an department, professional learning community, organization, or interest-based group and bring such work and ideas to the head collaborative leader, the administration, in order to contribute to the whole (the overall mission/vision).

A main aspect of teacher leaders, collaborative leadership/partnerships, and reflective practice is the idea of relationship management. Relationships are the vehicles to accomplish the purpose of why a particular skill or program is being developed or cultivated. Rubin (2002) states, "Collaborative Leaders are interpersonal and interinstitutional relationship managers that connect personal needs and motives to a shared purpose while working with others to create a bigger impact, more broad ownership, and higher meaning" (Rubin, 2002, p.67). To me, Rubin is saying collaborative leaders at any level, administrative, teacher, or higher education, create strategic relationships involving individuals and the institutions that they represent. In terms of local school institutions and institutions of higher education, these individuals build relationships of trust through departmental/subject/team collegiality and through the formality of the contracts and agreements that are binding them with their work and institution. In essence, this supports the notion that teachers really do more than simple teach.

Collaborative Leadership and Teacher Leaders

Purpose of Teacher Leaders within the scope of collaborative leadership and reflective practices

First and foremost, one must realize that schools exist for a social mission and purpose and not for profit, efficiency, or even personal gain. A school's overall mission/vision should be based on the principles of infusing knowledge and change regarding the core principles of cultural, ecological, and individual capacities. In essence, schools affect the lives of all people involved, thus demanding both collaborative and interpersonal skills of both the leaders of an institution (administrators) and participants (teacher leaders, teachers, support staff, ect) all of which are in charge of implementing and aligning the overall mission/vision of the institution. In particular, the leader's role is to be the "keeper" and recruiter of the set social missions of the institution, such as rallying support and resources to achieve a social mission. These individuals

should be mission driven leaders of schools that also serve as agents of collaboration for the sake of these missions to develop the collaborative skills in their staff to achieve them. Additionally, there is a need to recognize that a teacher's leadership role must be supported to increase student and improve student achievement. According to the Galileo Institute for teacher leadership at Oakland University (2011), "Realizing the potential of teacher leadership requires a fundamental change in the culture and structure of schools, the preparation and continuing professional development of teachers and administrators, and the political, legal and fiscal context in which schools operate" (Galileo, 2011). In all, institutions need to have principles of sound management and organization in place before starting the collaborative process that ultimately should take a comprehensive yet integrated approach of meeting the educational, health, and cultural needs of the total school community in which it serves.

Experts' Perspective: Purpose of Teacher Leaders

"Teacher leaders are in a unique position to make change happen. They are close to the ground and have the knowledge and ability to control the conditions of teaching and learning in schools and classroom. We believe that they are critical partners in transforming schools." (Lieberman and Miller, 2004)

"The growing research shows that the most important factor in a child's education is having a good teacher...By inviting expert teachers to assist in improving learning conditions throughout the school we aren't removing our best teachers from the classroom, we are extending their reach." (Scherer, ASCD Education Leadership, 2007)

"School improvement depends more than ever on the active involvement of teacher leaders. School administrators can't do it all." (Danielson, 2007)

Mission of Collaborative Leadership within the scope of teacher leaders and reflective practice

Just as one expects educational institutions to have missions, visions, and goals behind all aspects of the organization's operation's, one also should expect a mission behind implementing and practicing concepts of collaborative leadership, teacher leaders, and reflective practices within an educational institution. Overall, the mission of collaborative leadership within an educational setting is to provide the tools and strategies needed to bring both diverse individuals and the diverse institutions they represent together in an effort to focus their work on developing the relationships necessary to accomplish a purpose that otherwise could not be done on an individual basis. Organizing such practices requires leaders to organize venues to build one-on-one relationships on an interinstitutional level to accomplish both short and long-term

collaboration projects and to encourage reflective teaching practices all in an effort to support the institutions overall mission, vision, and goals.

Benefits of a partnership between collaborative leadership, teacher leaders, and reflective practices

Turning first to Howard Rubin's book *Collaborative Leadership* (2002) to gain a background on such a partnership, the following is a list I have compiled of the possible benefits of such a partnership if it is organized, implemented, and revised correctly and continuously in the scope of an educational setting at either the level of primary/secondary schooling or at levels of higher education:

Partnership Benefits

- All key decision makers will be represented in this partnership. This includes stakeholders, school board members, community members/businesses, district administrators, and building-level heads and leaders.
- A clear purpose for the partnership is created for all individuals that are involved
- Each partner will be granted the opportunity and venues to contribute so that they can align their individual work and interest with those of the partnership as a whole.
- Partnership will target specific and achievable outcomes
 - Leads to early success
 - Early success then leads to an increase in morale, contribution, and support for the partnership and its missions
- Partnership will create and strengthen relationships
 - Provides a venue for individuals to communicate about what and how each partner can contribute to the success of the whole partnership.
 - Improve communication and relationships in the partnership to accomplish more
- Such a partnership would allow schools to take advantage of integrated instruction, team teaching, professional learning communities, interest-based groups, school improvement efforts, and various fundraising efforts often associated with collaboration.

Process

The biggest area of need in terms of collaborative leadership and reflective practice is the ability to build, sustain, and direct relationships with the various individuals and organizations that one must collaborate with to achieve the mission at hand. According to Rubin (2002), three main aspects must be present in this process.

1. A clear and common vision is needed in order to be an effective collaborative leader
2. A model of collaboration or project at hand is needed for individuals to follow
3. A curriculum is needed
 - a. A series of questions or content needed to teach an individual to be an effective collaborative leader at the appropriate level they hold.

(Rubin, 2002)

Building off of Rubin's (2002) list, I have formulated three additional aspects:

1. A front-end investment in building trusting relationships with individuals and creating a sense of shared ownership and meaningful existence in order to build sustained collaboration.
2. Relationships should link institutional success through the structural and procedural practices are compatible with those members of the organization.
3. Individual relationships must be strong and effective to make institutional relationships successful.

Overall, an effective collaborative leader has the ability to build and sustain relationships that bind at both the institutional and individual levels. In such case, an effective collaborative leader at any level has the ability to find common self-interests with the diverse missions and goals of various independent organizations. Nonetheless, collaborative leaders succeed with and through people, thus demanding strategic planning, flexibility, and management systems that entail both formality and structure.

Relationship Management

A main aspect of teacher leaders, collaborative leadership/partnerships, and reflective practice is the idea of relationship management. Relationships are the vehicles to accomplish the purpose of why a particular skill or program is being developed or cultivated. Rubin (2002) states, "Collaborative Leaders are interpersonal and interinstitutional relationship managers that connect personal needs and motives to a shared purpose while working with others to create a bigger impact, more broad ownership, and higher meaning" (Rubin,2002,p.67). Rubin (2002) is saying collaborative leaders at any level, administrative, teacher, or higher education, create strategic relationships involving individuals and the institutions that they represent. In terms of local school institutions and institutions of higher education, these individuals build relationships of trust through departmental/subject/team collegiality and through the formality of the contracts and agreements that are binding them with their work and institution. In essence, this supports the notion that teachers really do more than simple teach.

An Exemplary Collaborative Approach: The Partnership

Overview

Creating a collaborative partnership between local school districts, University teacher education and preparation programs, and departments of educational leadership and administration provides an exemplary example of my practical application for my established collaborative leadership approach presented in this article. The scope of this collaboration would then span across a diverse population of individuals and concentrations to create leaders within each discipline while meeting the needs of the organization that each individual serves. Moreover, this collaborative process will allow in-service teachers to begin the teacher and collaborative leadership process while serving those individuals novice in the field, such as pre-service teachers. A collaborative process between university teacher preparation programs, pre-service teachers, specialists within each academic discipline, and school districts already is pre-existing through clinical experience programs for pre-service teachers such as, observations, practicum, and student teaching. Essentially, in-service teachers innately become teacher leaders to these clinicians that they host in their classrooms. Going through such programs myself, I stand that these relationships must be collaborative to be successful. Additionally, these hosting teachers must be “leaders” to not only their grammar school students they teach daily in their classrooms but also to the student of educational studies they are hosting in their classrooms.

What is a “Leader”

The question then arises, what is a leader? For example, too often university teacher preparation programs approach individuals at the various local school districts to host these students, and no preparation on collaborative or teacher leadership is provided by either the cooperating university or the local school districts. This notion supports the above quote given by the Galileo Institute for teacher leadership at Oakland University (2011), “Realizing the potential of teacher leadership requires a fundamental change in the culture and structure of schools, the preparation and continuing professional development of teachers and administrators, and the political, legal and fiscal context in which schools operate” (Galileo, 2011). In essence, roles and responsibilities must be set forth, agreed upon, and communicated regarding what qualities, characteristics, practices, and procedures that reflect a teacher leader and a collaborative partnership. The notion of what good teaching, leadership, and collaboration looks like must also be communicated, modeled, and reflected upon at all levels of the system from pre-service teachers to school administrators and university professors. The change in culture and structure of schools must be initiated through the collaboration of federal, state, and local officials in addition to each school district’s members and community stakeholders. The structure of this process is initially set out by the federal and state agencies of education, including the National Department of Education, the State Department of Education, and local regional offices of education. Essentially, these agencies provide the foundation for the required change in the political, legal and fiscal context in which schools operate that is stated by the

Galileo Institute. From here, it is the responsibility of local universities and school districts to aid with the transition and school culture needed to support collaborative leadership and teacher leaders at all levels of the educational system. With the growing idea of processional learning communities, mentoring programs, and teaming both seasoned and novice individuals need training, practice, and professional development on the roles, practices, and qualities of teacher leaders and effective skills to supplement this ideal with collaborative leadership.

The Network and Conceptual Framework

The key to creating and cultivating teacher leaders while encouraging collaborative leadership among members of the entire educational community is to create a network of school and university administrators that is committed to advancing learning, teaching and student success. However this can only be accomplished through an approach that promotes reflection and critical thinking through an all inclusive learning community and network that is established with local school districts, universities, community members, and community stakeholders. Faculty within the scope of these teacher preparation and teacher leader programs should be committed to excellence in teaching, service, and collaboration with not only community members but the professionals within the field. To create teacher leaders and overall reflective practices among all members of a school community and through teaching practitioners, the following should occur to build a conceptual framework:

Conceptual Framework Steps

- Create and value high standards in gaining and applying professional knowledge and skills in subject matter and pedagogy.
- Value the achievement of students at all levels (from pre-service to in-service teachers/administrators) and advance their success in accordance with national and state standards.
- Create, nurture, and value an inclusive, collaborative, and reflective learning community and environment.
- Encourage and provide venues and resources for creative, critical, and reflective thinking and practice.
- Ensure and value ethical practice by the total school community and the partnerships that exist within this community.

Review the Literature

Pre-service teachers and pre-service administrators should study and apply the literature of collaborative leadership including: team building, visioning, and inspiring through in-service seminars, professional development opportunities and activities, and through continuing education. As a supplement, pre-existing school administrators and university personnel should be teaching, modeling, and communicating the components and practices of reflective teaching and planning, and the aspects of collaborative leadership, such as team building. Moreover, these

individuals should create structured activities that integrate the aspects of collaboration and reflection that is desired on all levels such as the organization as a whole, individual teaching teams/departments, and on an individual level. To involve members of the total school community these administrators and university personnel could empower constituents and stakeholders connected to the learning organization to be involved in the development, activation, and reflection components of both collaborative leadership and reflective teaching and planning. Moreover, these individuals could mobilize resources, time, and knowledge for the needs in the changing school culture and the professional development/training, and support necessary to form a strong network that supports not only the overall mission/vision of the organization but also the community and the members these stakeholders and school members serve on a daily basis. Moreover, stakeholders, community members, and university personnel can collaborate and partner with the school district, university practitioners, and community organizations to provide necessary training and resources for both pre-service and in-service teachers and administrators.

Roles of School Districts

Throughout the process of collaborative leadership, developing teacher leaders within an organization, and practicing reflective teaching and planning members of all levels of a school organization play a vital role in the success of these aspects and the network formed with community members/stakeholders and outside organizations/institutions. According to Rubin (2002), the institutions' goal is to persuade parents, teachers, and school board members that collaborative leadership and relationship management skills are both teachable and learnable priorities of Institutional programs (Rubin, 2002, p.84).

Role of Superintendents and Principals

One must remember that educational leaders are more than site-based managers. Rather, these individuals also serve as community-wide advocates and mentors. Both district and building administrators must embrace the notion that relationship management is central to recruiting, preparing, and certifying educators to work not only in their districts but also in the field of education. A successful educational leader that embodies collaborative leadership, utilizes teacher leaders within the district, and mandates reflective teaching practices in turn realizes both a balance and focus should be incorporated on the academic content of what the teachers teach in the district with the social and civic skills that children and clinical students must learn to be successful members of today's society. According to Rubin (2002), these individuals "need the ability to rally and sustain the attention and resources of the entire community in relationships that enhance the meaningful existence of the educational achievement of their students" (Rubin, 2002, p. 107). To me, these individuals' role is to convene the diverse array of individuals and resources that will "collaborate" with one another to accomplish objectives and improve educational outcomes.

Suggestions for Administrators

- Promote culturally proficient policies and practices that recognize and value the diverse needs, culture, and self-interests of the total school community to ensure equity.
- Manage fiscal, physical, and human resources to ensure an effective, safe learning and working environment.
- Collaborate with members of the total school community to respond to the diverse interests and needs while mobilizing community resources at the local, state, and federal level.
- Model ethical practice, strong communication and collaboration skills and practice, and the development of leadership capacity in the total school community.
- Understand, direct, respond, and influence the political, social, economic, legal, and cultural contexts of education.

Conclusion

Teaching Teachers Collaborative Leadership Practices and Reflective Teaching Practices

John Dewey states the purpose of a school is to infuse both social and civic skills in children both through world views and the material that is taught to them throughout the course of their education (Carver & Ozmon, 2008, pp. 141-142). In essence, Dewey is telling individuals that it is the responsibility of the individuals within the school, such as teachers, to define each individual's capacity through effective teaching strategies and assessments so students can see and reflect on their own performance and capacity. However, before this can be achieved, teachers must first be taught and modeled collaborative leadership practices and reflective teaching methodologies and assessments. For teachers, this aspect can be achieved through professional learning communities, mentoring programs, curriculum alignment processes, special interest groups, and cross-curricular planning meetings. On a more individualized basis to incorporate individual needs that exist within the institution, one may suggest continuing education classes, training seminars, or conferences. An administrator could also monitor progress by collaborating with staff members on an individual basis through short classroom walk-throughs, weekly lesson plan review, and professional portfolios. Before teachers can begin to cultivate this skill in their own students and model to clinical teacher/administrative education students, teachers also need the training, practice, and skills needed to build and manage relationships that are necessary for both learning and applying knowledge. In all, one must remember that just as many students learn best by doing, so may adults. Continual practice, revision, and cultivation of such skills must be offered through diverse

activities, school organizations, and through relationship management. In order to have an applied reflection there must be a component of social learning that accompanies this.

Suggestions for Practical Application

Reflective Instruction Opportunities in Educational Institutions

- Learning through both working and observations with a skilled mentor (In-service individual) or through clinical experiences (Practicum Student, Student Teacher, Internships: Pre-service-Individuals)
- Implementation of Character education and service learning programs (K-12).
- Address developmental skills of building and sustaining relationships for both personal and public productivity.
 - Team-building activities
 - Interdisciplinary practice
 - Communication exercises.
 - Conflict and stress management strategies
- Service internships
- For pre-service and new educators, limit the “sink or swim” philosophy by providing preliminary training, practice, and observation to acquaint individuals with particular content, work, or field of study.
- Using data and technology effectively to assess student achievement, evaluate staff and programs, and plan and implement accountability systems.

Universities with pre-service teachers and pre-service administrators

- In required coursework for students in teacher education programs, incorporate competencies of collaboration and relationship management.
- Provide Group-Work activities, learning-by-doing, role play, and shadowing activities.
- Assess and discuss the relationship between personal values and organizational values.
- Assess and analyze multiple models of effective communications in P12 schools/districts.
- Develop and articulate a personal code of ethics of leadership that prepares the leader to deal effectively with the complex and conflicting demands in P12 schools/districts.
- Using case studies and site visits, analyze the best match between leadership styles and an institution’s needs in different social and political contexts.
- Evaluate his or her relationship to students, faculty, staff, parents and the community at large to ensure the establishment of ethical relationships grounded in an understanding of the importance of those leader/constituent relationships for the efficient functioning of P12 organizations and student success.
- Describe how collaboration among an institution’s leaders can improve student performance.

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