

Empowering Teachers As Leaders

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Abstract

This article presents the need for what some view as a rather radical change in educational leadership. An argument for this change is proffered by reviewing the current leadership methodology and, for comparison, empowerment is explored as it relates to teacher leadership.

Empowerment, also referred to as shared decision-making, is essential to school reform and to the changing demands in a global world. The principal is the building leader who structures the climate to empower both teachers and students at the site. Empowerment translates in to teacher leadership and exemplifies a paradigm shift with the decisions made by those working most closely with students rather than those at the top of the pyramid. It is natural that the principal should be the leader in implementing and supporting empowerment and teacher leadership.

Throughout the educational institutions across America, principal leadership is being scrutinized by the people who are being led, the teachers. Traditionally principal leadership has been looked upon as being authoritarian. It has evolved into a type of leadership described as being coercive, manipulative, and controlling. These negative tactics have proven counter-productive.

The empowerment research agrees the conditions under which teachers work are often set up in such a way as to deny teachers a sense of efficacy, success, and self-worth. There is often too much isolation and surviving on ones' own.

Paramount is the role a principal plays in faculty empowerment and teacher leadership. It is essential that a principal create an environment conducive to empowerment, demonstrates empowerment ideals, encourages all endeavors toward empowerment, and applauds all empowerment successes. The successful schools will be the ones where leaders are best able to apply the creative energy of teachers toward constant improvement. An effective approach to adopt constant improvement as a way of life is through empowerment and teacher leadership. Teachers can be uplifted through empowerment; this encouragement will allow them to flex those muscles that perhaps have been allowed to atrophy.

Unfortunately, many teachers go through a period of teaching under the supervision of principals who are described as authoritarian. The teacher becomes bored, resentful, and unhappy. Many wake up in the morning saying "I really don't want to go." Many contemplate leaving the teaching profession altogether. On the other hand, many teachers find themselves working "with" principals instead of "for" principals. Their opinion has merit. Freedom allows them to take risks in the curriculum and other areas of their job. Their teaching techniques reflect their personality as they are allowed to be empowered and creative. These teachers attribute their success in the classroom to the fact that the principal has empowered them.

We must expand the knowledge base of empowerment to enhance teachers to be effective leaders. Knowing what empowerment has done for some teachers (Erlandson & Bifano, 1987), it is essential that teachers nationwide began to experience the same opportunities other teachers have experienced first-hand the growth and development empowerment provides. Empowering teachers as leaders was seen as a way to put teachers at the center of the reform movement, to keep good teachers in education, to entice new teachers into the profession, and to reverse a general trend toward treating them as employees who do specific tasks planned in detail by other people. By introducing these new paradigms, the teaching profession will become a truly rewarding experience.

In surveys taken across America concerning the nonmanagerial work force, a considerable gap exists between number of hours people are paid for working versus the number of actual hours spend productively. Approximately 75% surveyed admitted that they could be significantly more effective. The lack of leadership empowering the work force has been cited as the number one reason for this crisis (Blase, 1990).

Similar leadership problems plague the educational system. Since present methods of educational leadership have been considered ineffective (Peel & Walker, 1994), teacher empowerment resulting in teacher leadership is among the numerous proposals for restructuring schools in the next century. According to *Breaking Ranks: Changing an American Institution* (1996), the principal is referred to as the one who must draw on the strengths of teachers if such changes are to prevail. The principal is described as the leader who will foster an atmosphere that encourages teachers to take risks to meet the needs of

students. In addition, teachers will be called upon to provide the leadership essential to the success of reform.

Current Leadership Methodology

In the book, **Zapp in Education** (1992), a principal experienced first-hand leadership qualities through a time machine. The principal witnesses his own typical leadership scenario every day in the school. The principal was seen walking away from a teacher who was trying to communicate. The principal was seen telling the secretary how to do the job and does not listen to ideas or feelings. The principal rushed over to someone who is having a problem and immediately takes over to solve the problem. Teachers expressed concern among themselves for they had no idea how well they were performing as educators. Negative comments comprised the conversations among the staff regarding both the principal and the students. A letter of reprimand caused a teacher to dread going into the school.

Much "top-down" management was being practiced. Within the school, the climate appeared to be dim and gloomy because none of the teachers had vitality and enthusiasm. Finally, in the scenario, the principal came to terms with a list of what demoralizes people:

- lack of responsibility, no authority, and no time to solve problems;
- meaningless work, no challenges, assignments that are always the same;
- no way of measuring your own performance;
- lack of trust and poor communication;
- rigid, bureaucratic policies, and confusion;
- not enough knowledge, skills, or resources to do the job well;
- lack of support, coaching, and feedback; and
- people treated exactly the same, like interchangeable parts (Byham & Cox, 1992).

Unfortunately, principals have no way to watch their own actions such as that illustrated in **Zapp in Education** (1992); otherwise, the research conducted by Michigan State University (Blase, 1990) would tell a different story. Ninety-two percent of the teachers surveyed in the study indicated that their morale was substantially affected by the tactics employed by their principal. Such terms as "apathetic," "alienated," and "less satisfied" (Blase, 1990, p. 731) were used. In addition, teacher involvement in school-wide activities was reduced substantially. Teachers' low self-esteem was attributed to the fact that the principal made them feel as if their thoughts and opinions were not valid or important. Feelings of the teachers included anger, depression, and anxiety. The study concluded that all of these morale and self-esteem factors impeded teacher input and leadership.

According to the study conducted by Blase (1990), who examined politics in the educational setting, administrators were not revered as respected, caring, popular people by the people they lead and manage. An overview of the data indicated that a great majority of the principals used control tactics. These school principals were seen as manipulators and rewards were associated with resource distribution, administrative assignments, appointments, and advancement opportunities.

Further in-depth investigation of politics within schools revealed that control tactics were seen as deceptive and self-serving (Blase, 1990). Not uncommonly, control tactics were experienced as coercive; they were defined as forceful, stressful, and punishing. Control tactics were perceived as reactive and unilateral. The direction of influence was from principals to teachers, as well as the end goals were seen as predetermined and nonnegotiable. According to the data, the control tactics and its related strategies were employed by principals almost entirely with teachers. The principals were found to use control tactics frequently associated with the manipulation of resources, work factors within the classrooms (class loads, class size, homeroom responsibilities), work factors outside the classroom (strict rule enforcement, unwillingness to bend rules), opportunities for input in decisions (extra curricula, curricula), support, and opportunities for advancement. The manipulation of merit salaries, evaluations, and work contracts was discussed less frequently. Teachers also claimed that some principals used the threat of sanctions to obtain compliance.

Likewise, principals were seen as manipulative—involving favored teachers. Those teachers who went along with the politics reaped the benefits.

Some principals used harassment as a control tactic (Blase, 1990). Usually such a ploy was used to force the teacher to leave. Principals created pseudo opportunities for teacher participation, leadership, and decision making. Frequently principals employed the subordinate status, emphasizing the authority differences: "I'm the boss, you are here to do a certain job" (Blase, 1990, p. 740).

Another control tactic employed by principals was categorized as the protective strategy which involved three classifications: acquiescence, ingratiation, and inconsistency. Principals were perceived as using this tactic to reduce the vulnerability they could otherwise experience from criticism, and demands from both external and internal publics. Acquiescence involved submissive behavior which tended to direct decision making to please the community even when it went against sound educational standards. People with money used their influence to get something for their child. Ingratiation included the promotion of activities and programs to satisfy the community even when it is total nonsense. Inconsistency referred to the contradictory changes in day-to-day decisions and policies in response to conflicting external pressures. External pressures many times included the superintendent and board members (Blase, 1990).

According to Bennis (1989), "leadership is the wise use of power" (p.194), but as stated by Reitzug (1991), traditionally, principal leadership has not demonstrated wise use of power. Principals have always told their subordinates how to act. Teachers have had little voice in workplace issues, such as the choice of curriculum material, the types of tests used to evaluate instruction, the scheduling of classes, and the allocation of instructional resources. Teachers have not exerted much control over their profession as a whole. They lack the structures and processes present in other professions, like law and medicine, that control entry into the profession and weed out those deemed unqualified to practice. A lack of autonomy and control on the part of teachers has been problematic because it affects productivity and commitment to the workplace therefore, ultimately affects their teacher leadership capabilities (Reitzug, 1991).

Covey (1989) further interpreted the literary material that has flooded the leadership professions. In his opinion, the past 50 years of published advice has been superficial. Leadership advice include methods involving "personality growth, communication, skill training, and education in the field of influence strategies and positive thinking" (p. 34). He viewed the "so-called good human relations techniques" as manipulative. He believed "what we communicate" is far more powerful than anything we say or do (p. 51). Control tactics produce many successful people who have outward success, but yet internally are miserable because of the conflicts they create to reach success. Too often these people depend on others which leads to destructive relationships. The conflicts result due to perceptions people develop over time within their own personal experiences. Perceptions influence the way one interprets things and how one reacts. Unfortunately, one tends to assume that one's perception of a situation is the only way and every one sees it the same way. Attitudes and behavior grow out of these assumptions. Others see the same thing differently from their own apparently equally clear and objective point of view. "Where we stand depends on where we sit" (Covey, 1989, p. 22). Clearly, Covey's analysis summarizes the underlying causes for ineffective leadership as it exists in education.

Radical Change: Methodology of Empowerment

Leadership is necessary to help organizations develop a vision of what they can be, then mobilize the organization change toward vision. The contexts of leadership involve commitment and credibility (Foster, 1986) and, it is suggested here, involve a radical change in thinking to achieve leadership effectiveness. The vision of empowerment exemplifies a paradigm shift with the decisions made by those working most closely with students rather than those at the top of the pyramid. The pyramid must be reversed with the decision making occurring at the bottom. The argument can certainly be made that in this new model, the roles of principals and teachers as leaders are greatly expanded. Yet what exactly is the definition of empowerment? Wellins, Byham, and Wilson (1991) indicated empowerment occurs when power goes to employees who then experience a sense of ownership and control over their jobs. Byham and Cox (1992) stated empowering employees involves helping them take ownership of their jobs so that they take personal

interest in improving the performance of the organization. According to McKenna (1990), empowerment is a building of personal self-esteem, and possibly the motivation for the worker to further their training and education. Wellins et al. (1991) indicated an organization empowers its people when it enables employees to take on more responsibility and to make use of what they know and can learn. In essence, a more empowered work force is a more productive work force.

Although the definitions of empowerment have emerged from the corporate world, the concept of teacher empowerment parallels employee empowerment in a business. Bolin (1989) defined empowerment as investing teachers with the right to participate in the determination of school goals and policies and to exercise professional judgment about what and how to teach. Lucas, Brown, and Markus (1991) defined teacher empowerment as a function of the readiness of building-level administrators to share their autonomy with those whose commitment is necessary to make the educational program function at the highest degree of efficiency. Lee (1991) shared this outlook by defining teacher empowerment as the development of an environment in which the teachers act as professionals and are treated as professionals. He further explained that empowerment means that school authorities provide teachers with the authority to make decisions that have, in traditional systems, been made for them, a time and a place to work and plan together during the school day, and a voice in efforts to deepen their knowledge and improve their teaching. The most effective leaders are those whose teachers have ownership in the mission of the school and a vital interest in its effectiveness. Lucas et al. (1991) stated that the more power that is given away, the more powerful all the leaders becomes; leaders who create leaders are more powerful than those who do not.

Covey (1989) suggested that a leader must begin with "self" to become effective. He suggested that the more aware one is of personal paradigms, the more likely one can take responsibility for their own paradigms. A paradigm is defined as the way one perceives, understands, and interprets everything going on. Covey (1989) believed one needs to examine one's paradigms against reality, listen, and be open to other people's perceptions. A larger, more objective picture results. Many times a way of thinking changes when one experiences the unthinkable such as a divorce, a death, or a loss of a job. Instantaneous shifts are not common occurrences. Covey stated that one's character is a composite of his habits and through tremendous commitment, these habits can be changed to bring about success. Covey defined a habit as "the intersection of knowledge, skill, and desire" (1989, p. 23). Knowledge is the what to do and the why. Skill is the how to do. Desire is the motivation, the want to do. In order to develop a habit, all three have to be incorporated. Covey developed seven habits for highly effective leaders and suggested that all seven habits must be developed and continuously practiced. Self-awareness, an in-depth study of self, serves as the basis for the seven habits.

Empowerment does not mean that principals relinquish power or that teachers must continually challenge authority. Empowerment is defined as teacher liberation, meaning the teacher is free from the "unwarranted control of unjustified beliefs" (Prawat, 1991, p. 749). These unjustified beliefs can be remedied by practicing Covey's strategies.

Bennis and Nanus (1985) promoted similar strategies for empowerment which interrelate to Covey's seven habits. The leader must have the innate ability to have vision. A vision refers to a future state that does not presently exist. A leader operates on a vision which is based on values, commitment, and aspirations. Successful leaders do a lot of asking and listening. Two-way communication is established to gain access to these ideas. A great deal of time is spent interacting with people. Three sources from which to seek guidance include the past, present, and alternative image of future possibilities. Reflection of past experiences from one's self as well as others assist in building a mental picture of what did and did not work. Present practices give similar insight. To acquire vision for the future and allow spontaneous leadership requires much research for ideas. A vision cannot be implemented by edict or by coercion. It is more an act of persuasion, of creating an enthusiastic and dedicated commitment to a vision because it is right for the times right for the organization, and right for the people who are working in it (Bennis & Nanus, 1985).

Research found in **The Leadership Challenge** (1987) confirmed strategies already discussed. Kouzes and Posner (1987) stated that the best leaders lead by example. The intensity, vigor, and passion of a leader's

commitment to one's true values determines how seriously one is taken. Constituents pay more attention to the values leaders use than to those they say they believe in. No one sees the values themselves; they're intangible. What they see is the tangible evidence that people are true to their beliefs through their actions (Kouzes & Posner, 1987). Thus, the leader develops credibility.

In schools where teachers are empowered to be leaders, the focus of control for the substance of organizational change shifts from the principal to teachers. It is an evolutionary process that is totally dependent upon principals trusting teachers and teachers trusting their principals. The principal who has great trust in the abilities of staff members would be classified as a Theory Y principal (McGregor, 1960). They believe that:

- Work was as natural as play or rest.
- Persons would exercise self-direction when working together toward meaningful objectives.
- Commitment is related to the rewards associated with achievement.
- Individuals learn to accept and seek responsibility.
- The capacity to help the organization solve its problems is widely distributed among the members of the organization.
- In most organizations the intellectual potential is only partially utilized.

Holding Theory Y attitudes about the teacher leader's in one's organization encourages a principal to trust others. Also, while the Theory Y tenets have been around for years, many teacher leaders would still consider the full implementation of Theory Y to be a radical change and new concept to today's management procedures. The principal's role shifts from prescribing substance to facilitating methods in which substance can be discovered. Both in working with individuals as they critique their practice, or with a larger portion of the staff as they reflect on school-wide policies and practices, principals should spend more time asking questions and suggesting a variety of alternatives that expand conceptions of how organizational tasks might be accomplished, than telling organizational members how these tasks must be accomplished (Reitzug, 1991).

Teachers must be convinced that teaching is a profession. Many say it is a profession but few believe it. Everything must be done to project that image. Dress, mannerisms, behavior, and participation in professional activities can enhance their leadership qualities and capabilities. Teachers should put their diplomas, certificates, and awards on their walls to demonstrate their competence and leadership abilities. Teachers should be proud of their academic and personal accomplishments. Like other professions as well, teachers should have personalized business cards (Whaley, 1994).

Teachers need to collaborate and share their expertise. Principals should foster teachers sharing and learning from each other. Professional growth and development must be encouraged and accommodated. Achievements such as higher degrees, additional certifications, special seminars and workshops, presenting, doing research, writing a journal, receiving grants, partnerships, and/or honors should be encouraged and recognized.

As a principal, trust should not be something that has to be earned. It should automatically be granted upon arrival at school. However, it can be lost and then it must be earned back. Communication of this is crucial. Where trust prevails, teachers feel free to be creative and risk takers. Both successes and failures need to be supported. Failures are often the best teachers. Such initiatives should not go unnoticed. Notes in mailboxes as well as verbal praise both privately and publicly should take place often to encourage teachers. Principals need to be truly interested in what takes place within the classrooms in their schools. In addition, the principal must be willing to attend workshops and conferences with the teachers. The principals' conferences should not be limited to administration nor should teachers be limited to only teacher organizations.

The principal must use the staff to help make decisions. Every decision cannot be submitted for input and vote; however, financial, curricular, and staffing decisions can be made. Teachers collectively can, along

with their expertise, be used as often as possible. Keaster (1995) believed in the power of ownership and its ability to produce quality decisions and commitment.

Outstanding principals go beyond merely involving teachers in decision-making. Principals implement three strategies: (a) provide a supportive environment that encourages teachers to examine and reflect upon their teaching and on school practice; (b) use specific behaviors to facilitate reflective practice; and (c) make it possible for teachers to implement ideas and programs that result from reflective practice. Within the area of providing a supportive environment, teachers are allowed to teach in the manner they feel is most appropriate; however, they do have to justify their methodologies. Other perspectives through creative use of staff development provides opportunities to share. Professional articles are shared by the administrator. Another aspect of a supportive environment creates teaming structures for collective responsibility.

Facilitating reflective practices enables teachers to study their teaching in a proactive manner. As stated earlier, questions asked by the principal place the responsibility for developing solutions and resolving conflicts upon those involved. Additionally, the principal critiques by wandering around and encouraging the teachers to do likewise. The purpose of wandering around is to give teacher leaders the opportunity to clarify their personal visions, that strengthen the organizational vision, and also provide them opportunities to remove themselves from the traditional classroom setting and hone their observation skills of just how a total school building operates. Teachers must be afforded the opportunity to break out from the four walls of their classrooms to collaborate, facilitate, and feel they have the freedom and flexibility to pursue professional growth.

In order for teachers to have the opportunity to implement ideas and programs, resources in the form of money, materials, time, and opportunity must be available. When the request cannot be met by the principal, other options should be discussed instead of a flat "no." Other possibilities include grants, local businesses, and state incentives (Reitzug & Burrello, 1995). Principals must view teachers in the leadership capacity role as being capable of making pertinent contacts outside of the school other than with only parents.

Both administrator and teachers alike are faced with more decision-making responsibilities than ever before. Without empowerment and teacher leadership, neither side wins. As pointed out by Covey (1989), the win/win situation is the ultimate goal. As research has shown time and time again, schools where principals lead with the opinion that they must be in total control, the education system suffers considerably. Covey (1989) appeared to suggest that there is a quick fix if his seven habits are practiced consistently and continuously; however, some personality characteristics do not lend themselves to change. Many of these types appear to more commonly invade the educational systems as administrators. People can lead, but not everyone in power is capable of trust, a key element to empowerment. As previously stated, without trust, leadership quickly is viewed as authoritarian. The most valuable advice for success is lead by example.

To assume that implementing more teacher leadership to make decisions guarantees success is ludicrous. If teacher empowerment is to reign in the next century, schools will have to invest both time and money to train administrators and teachers. Additionally, schools systems must carefully select qualified people to conduct training sessions. Equally important to the implementation of empowerment is the constant assessment of the teacher leadership process for follow up and feedback.

It is rare that one finds a school filled with trust and respect, and when one does, it a cause for celebration. As we struggle with the concept and implementation of this paradigm called empowerment and restructuring, it has become increasingly evident that for one to be proud of the work one is doing and proud of the accomplishments of the school, one must have the power of shared governance. Trust is the foundation of shared governance, which provides the impetus for teacher leadership!

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