Abstract: For school improvement, more teachers need to function as leaders. Understanding the various dimensions of teacher leadership is requisite knowledge for encouraging the development of more teachers as leaders. Teacher leaders can fulfill multiple roles as they encounter obstacles in schools. The author addresses the challenge of supporting teachers in leadership roles, presents a model, and recommends ways for administrators and teacher educators to shape teacher leaders.

Keywords: collaboration, first-year teachers, leadership, school improvement

In my work as a teacher educator over the past twenty years, the preparation of teacher leaders has been a guiding force (Phelps 1994). Informal surveys of my teacher candidates reveal that most intend to become leaders in their schools. Yet, achieving this goal involves more than a targeted outcome and willing participants. Helping teachers become leaders requires not only a desire to meet the challenge but also a definite plan. In this article, I present a model for shaping teacher leaders. Teacher educators, school administrators, and current teacher leaders can apply this tool to different work settings as they help more teachers to become leaders.

Defining a Vision

Before teachers can adopt leadership as a possibility, they must understand its meaning. Definitions of leadership abound; however, sometimes the simplest is best. In this case, Barth’s (2001) view of leadership as “making happen what you believe in” is ideal (85). By removing job position from the picture, this definition suggests that anyone can be a leader. As Danielson (2006) indicates, teacher leaders are not typically appointed to a designated position, yet they complement administrative leaders. Implicit also in this leadership viewpoint is knowing what one believes or espousing a vision and understanding how to achieve that vision.

Having a vision is an essential building block for teacher leadership (Barth 2001). At the preservice level teacher candidates should articulate their beliefs as part of professional education coursework and field experiences through journal entries and other reflective activities. Administrators and mentor teachers can assist beginning and veteran teachers with the refinement of their belief systems, going beyond the oft-touted “all students can learn” mantra. Time at faculty meetings can be devoted to sharing diverse beliefs about teaching and learning and discussing how teachers’ beliefs influence classroom practices. Administrators can encourage teachers to post vision statements on their Web sites and their classroom walls as well as include such statements on course materials provided to students and parents. Here is a teacher’s sample vision:

This school and my classroom should be a community of students and teachers who feel safe enough to make mistakes, to share insights, and to take risks. The primary goal of the learning environment should be to engage teachers and learners in the process of thinking. In creating this environment, careful planning and positive relationships are essential elements. Because modeling makes a difference in learning, I will strive to uphold high standards and expectations and to develop better problem-solving skills.
From this vision one can derive questions that challenge practices and promote growth: How can we best solve this dilemma? What is the smart thing to do? Does this decision or action enhance a more thoughtful community? Formulating one's vision in writing makes its achievement more likely. This is the initial step toward becoming a leader. Achieving one's vision takes additional work.

**Valuing the Roles**

Before a teacher can implement his or her vision, he or she must see the value of being a leader. Why should teachers want to be leaders when many forces already pull on their energies? The chance to make a difference is a major reason an individual chooses to become a teacher (Sadker and Sadker 2005). Teachers who lead extend their influence beyond their individual classrooms. Danielson (2006) sees this desire to expand influence as paramount to teacher leadership. Teacher leaders can change schools for the better. A willingness to assume a greater degree of responsibility allows a teacher leader to function as a school's conscience (Ackerman and Mackenzie 2006). Fulfilling this moral purpose, in turn, raises teachers' levels of contribution and multiplies their possible impact (Fullan 1993). When teachers recognize that leading increases their overall difference-making ability, they will be more inclined to seize the chance to serve in this capacity.

Once motivated to extend one's influence beyond the classroom, a teacher needs to know about possible outlets for impact. Even if willing to lead, a teacher may not see or seize the opportunity. Many teachers perceive that leadership responsibility rests solely with administrators. To change this view, principals should invite teachers to lead by making them aware of where the greatest needs exist. For example, principals and other administrators should state explicitly, “We need someone to help...” (for example, organize an open house, compile a summer reading list, examine homework policies, etc.). Such appeals for assistance allow teacher leaders to emerge and to mesh individual vision statements with school goals. Teachers can become involved in school leadership by chairing a committee, leading a faculty study group or professional development activity, serving as a mentor teacher, demonstrating instructional or technological skills, writing a grant, and in numerous other ways.

Danielson (2006) provides a helpful framework for understanding teacher leadership, which presents three areas of teacher leaders' influence: (a) “schoolwide policies and programs,” (b) “teaching and learning,” and (c) “communications and community relations” (25). For example, a teacher might recommend a new way to handle hall duty, demonstrate a strategy for assisting students with vocabulary acquisition, or share with other school personnel new ideas to connect with parents more effectively. Recognizing these three possibilities will broaden teachers' views of various impact targets outside the classroom. In case discussions, preservice teachers identify solutions that fit one or more of Danielson's areas of influence; in faculty meetings practicing teachers can be asked to make recommendations and share ideas within the same three areas. By making clear the unique challenges that a school faces, the principal opens opportunities for leadership.

There are multiple roles that teacher leaders can fulfill. Lieberman and Miller (2004) emphasize three roles: advocates, innovators, and stewards. **Advocates** speak up for what is best for student learning. They exhibit a keen ability to frame and reframe issues so that students and learning remain the central focus. Advocacy can take place in one-on-one encounters as well as in whole-group settings. Innovators act as change agents to transform schools. Unafraid to try something new, they make suggestions and implement new practices. **Innovators** are creative doers, not just thinkers. **Stewards** are those who positively shape the teaching profession itself. Stewards help raise the status of teaching. Stewards are not as vocal as advocates and innovators, but they consistently serve as models of continued improvement. An example of each role in action will provide additional insight.

Joe challenges his colleagues and the administration to pursue authentic learning in the midst of standardized testing. He believes that teachers can be accountable without being so tightly bound to the textbook and tests. In faculty meetings, Joe asks hard questions and focuses on improved teaching and learning. His manner is not confrontational; as an advocate, he practices in his classroom what he preaches in his elementary school. Schools need more teachers like Joe. Rather than be intimidated, administrators should seek out and develop these teacher advocates.

Mark is a teacher leader in his middle school. As an English teacher, he recognizes the need to promote literacy outside the classroom and motivate reluctant readers. Working collaboratively with a university-based teacher educator, Mark organized a book club for students before school and used preservice teachers as small-group facilitators. Mark is an innovator who inspires other teachers. Students are the main beneficiaries of teachers like Mark. Principals can reward these teachers with minigrant funds and peer recognition.

Mary is interested in the writing of a controversial educator whose ideas are intellectually stimulating. Because she wants other teachers to think about the implications of this educator's thoughts and desires to elevate the scholarly nature of teaching, she volunteered to lead a discussion of his most recent book. In addition, Mary wrote a grant to purchase copies of the book for teachers in the high school in which she
serves as a steward leader. Administrators and teacher educators should support teachers like Mary.

These three teachers illustrate different leadership roles. Present and future teachers should note how each type could affect school improvement. Grounded in reflection, the actions of each teacher will bring about positive change. Administrators should consider how to create a climate that encourages teacher leadership. Seeking teachers’ ideas and involvement stimulates leadership. Although teachers who lead can traverse a range of pathways as change agents, schools need all three types of teacher leaders.

Using the Model

Helping teachers become leaders involves the cultivation of certain knowledge, skills, and dispositions (see table 1). Planners of professional education at the preservice level and professional development at the in-service level can use this model to organize courses, activities, meetings, and workshop sessions. The knowledge base of teacher leadership consists primarily of the concepts of educational change and school culture (Barth 2001; Danielson 2006; Fullan 2001). Although teachers constantly experience change and interact in the existing school culture, they may have few opportunities to learn about the change process itself and discuss implications for their daily work. Changing the existing school culture is often considered taboo by those closely involved with it; school culture is often seen as static (e.g., “That is how we do things here”). There may be a number of nondiscussables—important issues not talked about openly (Barth 2006). Critically examining the dimensions of a school’s culture (that is, values, beliefs, attitudes, and rituals) can lead to valuable insights (for example, “Why do we always do things that way? Is there a better approach?”). Additionally, becoming a teacher leader means being aware of reform recommendations (for example, Breaking Ranks II [National Association of Secondary School Principals 2004]) and understanding the notion of servant leadership (Gehrke and Romerdahl 1997). Professional conferences, workshops, and presentations can focus on these topics, and administrators can enlist teachers as presenters or facilitators.

Teachers can develop skills through opportunities to create vision statements, assume the role of another (that is, to practice empathy), or formulate important questions. Inviting educators to pose meaningful questions is a way for them to sharpen that skill. Their questions could then become organizing springboards for faculty meetings and professional development activities. In addition, teachers learn collaboration skills by working together in teams. To shape more teachers into leaders, educators must recognize and appreciate those who model leadership. For example, when a teacher demonstrates advocacy, others (not just the principal) should highlight this behavior in a positive manner. Taking initiative is another valuable skill for teachers to possess (Danielson 2006). At the preservice and in-service level, teachers who show initiative should receive appreciation and reinforcement. Furthermore, structured opportunities for professional inquiry enhance the development of teacher leadership. As Danielson noted, “Possibly the most important aspect of a school’s culture from the point of view of encouraging teacher leadership is the culture of professional inquiry” (54). To foster a culture of inquiry, principals can set up teacher-led study groups on issues of specific concern (for example, ability grouping, alternative assessment, or curriculum integration). When teachers feel it is safe to share ideas, raise questions, and seek answers, their leadership skills improve and their schools become better places.

The further development of vital dispositions requires their strengthening when they are evident. For example, risk taking is a fundamental disposition for teacher leadership (Barth 2001; Danielson 2006). Teachers who take risks should be acknowledged and other teachers should be encouraged to act similarly. One way to increase risk-taking behaviors among teachers is to design faculty meetings or supervisory conferences with participants sharing responses to a statement like the following: “One thing I tried recently in my classroom to promote student learning was . . . ” As teachers share their experiences and find that it is acceptable to experiment and to make mistakes, the tendency to take instructional risks will increase. Trying different

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Knowledge</th>
<th>Skills</th>
<th>Dispositions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Change (process and principles)</td>
<td>Advocacy</td>
<td>Risk taking and persistence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School culture</td>
<td>Empathy</td>
<td>Challenge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reform recommendations</td>
<td>Questioning</td>
<td>Service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Servant leadership</td>
<td>Vision creating</td>
<td>Efficacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Collaborating, networking</td>
<td>Resiliency</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
methods is the mark of a school that is improving. To be teacher leaders, Barth (2001) suggests posing this penetrating question: “How much are you prepared to risk of what is familiar, comfortable, safe, and perhaps working well for you, in the name of better education for others?” (186). Confronting this question may motivate teachers to become more effective supporters of improved student learning and consequently agents of change. To prompt teachers to focus on seeing the bigger picture, similar questions could be posted in the faculty lounge or sent as e-mail reminders by the principal.

Resiliency is another key disposition relative to teacher leadership; those who are teacher leaders will enhance their schools’ resiliency (Patterson and Patterson 2004). And the more resiliency aimed to create a resilient school culture, the more improvement will flourish. For instance, Pam is not defeated by the challenges her school faces. She shows resiliency by seeking positive solutions to low test scores or parent complaints. She nurtures other teachers’ growth by listening and exchanging ideas. Underlying effective teacher leadership is this tendency to exhibit resiliency. Closely related to resiliency is efficacy or taking responsibility for student learning. Teachers who lack a sense of efficacy will not function as leaders. According to Danielson (2006), being deeply committed to student learning is the primary focus of teachers who lead. Teacher educators and school administrators should expect teachers to reflect a high degree of efficacy in their words and actions. This professional orientation makes a significant difference in student learning.

**Facing Obstacles**

Becoming a teacher leader is not without obstacles. Teachers must understand the existence of possible barriers and work to overcome them. The constraints of limited time and heavy responsibilities are obvious impediments to leadership. Having a clearly defined vision is a way to operate within these constraints. Because having a vision makes it easier to focus on what is most important, distractions are less potent. There are also self-imposed constraints to leadership, mainly a lack of self-confidence. A supportive environment can help to build teachers’ confidence. Principals who view teachers as valuable resources and listen to their solutions extend the school’s capacity for improvement.

Barth (2001) suggests that colleagues can often be the greatest obstacles to change. They can oppose new ideas, hamper enthusiasm, block discussions, and discourage problem solving. In schools in which teachers are leaders, collegiality flourishes (Barth 2006). A collegial culture is characterized by open communication, support among colleagues, celebration of successes, and talk about teaching. Increased collegiality is a primary benefit of teacher leadership.

Improved collegial relationships may result from understanding the Jack and Jill phenomenon in schools in which Jill is a superhub (or the go-to person) and Jack is a negative, toxic hub (Reeves 2006). Both teacher types powerfully influence school improvement efforts. Open discussions about this challenging reality can lead to a deeper comprehension of how school culture impacts change. Teacher educators can help preservice teachers seek out the positive forces in a school and avoid the negative ones, as well as inspire the desire to become more like Jill. Likewise, principals and teacher leaders can offer more frequent interaction opportunities with Jill than with Jack and can seek out occasions to enlist Jack’s input and support. The importance of cultivating leadership among teachers should not be underestimated as a powerful way to improve schools (Danielson 2006). True colleagues are committed to communicating, compromising, and seeking alternative solutions.

Those teachers who do not become leaders are typically satisfied with the status quo, easily discouraged, sometimes cynical, perhaps burned out, and may engage minimally in professional development activities. Basically, they lack the necessary knowledge, skills, and dispositions that compose teacher leadership. All teachers possess the potential to become leaders and, with guidance, patience, and a little nudge by another caring leader, may do so (Ackerman and Mackenzie 2006). Applying the model presented here moves us closer to having more leadership among teachers. Our students and our schools deserve nothing less.

**REFERENCES**

Patterson, J., and J. Patterson. 2006. Improving relationships within the schoolhouse.