Chapter 12
Teacher Leadership:
A Conceptual Analysis

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ABSTRACT

This chapter focuses on teacher leadership, an important variable in the classroom and school improvement literature. The concept of teacher leadership has attracted increased attention in the past two decades. Teachers are assuming more responsibility for leadership roles and functions within schools. Despite the considerable amount of scholarly effort and time spent on investigating the teacher leadership concept, less is known about how it flourishes in the school context and how it relates to classroom and school improvement. Therefore, this chapter tries to shed some light on the teacher leadership concept and discusses its meaning, teacher leadership roles, factors influencing teacher leadership, the relationship between teacher leadership and classroom and school improvement, and future research areas on teacher leadership. Offering a framework for teacher leadership, this chapter is expected to contribute well to the guidance of further research on teacher leadership.

INTRODUCTION

The pressures on schools to improve and sustain the standards of student achievement and engagement have forced them to change the ways they operate and also find alternative perspectives for conventional leadership notions. Schools need to encourage all members to assume leadership roles and to build an understanding of leadership which focuses primarily on improving classroom instruction (Harris & Muijs, 2003a) as educational improvement at the instruction level includes leadership by teachers within and beyond the classroom (York-Barr & Duke, 2004).

A line of researchers have argued that traditional leadership approaches which place the responsibility of leading a school on solely the school principal are far from meeting the needs of students and society as a whole (Barth, 1990; Beachum & Dentith, 2004; Harris & Lambert, 2003; Harris, 2002a, 2003, 2005; Harris & Muijs, 2003a, 2003b; Lambert, 1998, 2003;

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Leithwood, 2003; Murphy, 2005; Sergiovanni, 2007; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Gronn (2000) makes it clear that school principals and teachers have reciprocal roles in the school leadership process and that leadership comes from these relationships among school members. This may refer that effective school leadership practices come together with the collaboration of school principals and teachers. Beachum and Dentith (2004) suggest that new approaches and practices of school leadership are required in order to build a more collaborative, democratic and instructionally-driven school environment and to respond well to the diverse needs of students. In line with this argument, Muijs and Harris (2003, 2007) claim that teachers' knowledge, skills and dispositions are regarded as crucial factors in the school improvement journey. Harris and Lambert (2003) further emphasize that encouraging all members of school to assume the responsibility of leadership roles may be one of the reasonable ways to increase the internal capacity of a school by which school may improve the quality of its learning and teaching environment. It is therefore possible to argue that teacher leadership is based on the assumption that teachers as leaders within and beyond their classrooms can contribute well to the quality of instruction and school improvement.

Recent years have witnessed a great deal of research effort on teacher leadership (e.g. Aslan, 2011; Beycioğlu, 2009; Beycioğlu & Aslan, 2010, 2012; Can, 2006, 2009a; Anderson, 2004; Angelle & DeHart, 2011; Ault, 2009; Burgess, 2012; Cosenza, 2010; Fraser, 2008; Frost & Durant, 2003; Frost & Harris, 2003; Harris & Mujis, 2003a; Kendall, 2011; Kenyon, 2008; Kölükçü, 2011; Muijs & Harris, 2003; Nolan & Palazzolo, 2011; Özçetin, 2013; Pounder, 2006; Rutledge, 2009; Scribner & Bradley-Levine, 2010; Whitaker, 1997). Katzenmeyer and Moller (2009) argue that the notion of teacher leadership claiming the idea that teachers must assume leadership roles to contribute to the school improvement has become a prominent issue among scholars in the field of educational administration. York-Barr and Duke (2004) further assert that principals are no longer likely to manage schools on their own because of the pressures of higher quality of teaching and of meeting student needs. Similarly, Harris and Lambert (2003) suggest that teachers as potential leaders have begun to be accepted as key factors in achieving a higher level of student achievement. It is therefore possible to state that teacher leadership may strengthen school capacity for change and improvement by enhancing an environment of collaboration and collegiality.

The purpose of this paper is to examine the concept of teacher leadership in detail. In this regard, the present review aims at addressing following issues: (1) presenting and arguing various definitions of teacher leadership, (2) clarifying teacher leadership roles, (3) investigating the factors that influence teacher leadership, (4) examining the relationship between teacher leadership and classroom and school improvement, (5) discussing future research areas on teacher leadership and (6) conclusion.

DEFINING TEACHER LEADERSHIP

Teacher leadership refers to a context where teachers display leadership behaviors inside and outside the classroom and participate in the process of creating a learning-oriented culture in school, best instructional practices are developed, implemented, and evaluated, and colleagues motivate one another (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2009). Harris and Muijs (2003a) define teacher leadership under three topics (p. 40):

1. The leadership of other teachers through coaching, mentoring, leading working groups;
2. The leadership of developmental tasks that are central to improved learning and teaching; and

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