



Leadership NOTES

The Importance of Teacher Leadership

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Teacher leadership is important because leadership is important.

Leadership is the human capacity to imagine and seek a future, for ourselves and others, that is not right in front of us. Leadership offers us the ability to change the trajectory of our lives, relationships, and careers. Leadership allows us to live out our aspirations and not just our reality. Stephen R. Covey, author of the best-selling business book *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* (Covey, 1989) said “*All things are created twice. There’s a mental or first creation, and a physical or second creation to all things... through imagination, we can visualize the uncreated worlds of potential that lie within us.*”

In nautical terms, the officers and crew of seagoing vessels have the ability to choose a destination for a voyage that is different from where the ship might naturally drift. This is the essence of leadership, to choose and not merely to drift. Teacher leadership is important then, because teachers are in key positions to provide the blessings and benefits of skillful leadership to many, themselves included.

Teacher leadership is important for classroom success.

When teachers are equipped with leadership knowledge and skills, they are immediately more effective as leaders of their own classrooms. Classrooms are microcosms of society. When classrooms are effectively led, they prosper, succeed, and generate significant gains in learning and development.

Teachers who are not only capable instructors, but are also capable culture shapers, direction setters, team builders, decision makers, and change agents are significantly better positioned to create the classroom conditions that lead to achievement and success for all students.

It is also the case that classrooms that are rich in teacher leadership are more likely and better positioned to develop leadership skills in students. This builds student agency, autonomy, and voice- all important attributes of long-term achievement and success for students.

Teacher leadership is important for school improvement.

The education researcher and author Thomas Sergiovanni was the first to refer to the concept of leadership density in schools. Sergiovanni defined leadership density as *"the extent to which leadership responsibilities and practices are located deep within the faculty"* (Sergiovanni, 1987, 2001). There is much compelling evidence that when leadership is distributed throughout the faculty and staff, rather than concentrated in the roles of a few top administrators, there are significant positive effects for school improvement and student achievement. (Hallinger & Heck, 2009; Leithwood & Mascall, 2008).

A deeper understanding of the concept of leadership density reveals that teacher leadership, in its best expression, is a complement to effective administrative leadership, not a substitute or countermeasure toward it. It seems that schools can have a single repository of leadership or they can have multiple containers of leadership, each one amplifying and multiplying the total positive effect.

Teacher leadership is important for the long-term success of schools.

One of the fundamental tenets of servant leadership is that servant leaders take a long-term, sustainable view that includes attention to future leadership transitions. They make decisions based on what will benefit their constituents today and tomorrow, even a tomorrow which may not include them. In schools that are high performing over an extended period of time, instead of just for a brief span, leadership is systemic, renewable, and sustainable. When leadership is concentrated in just a few key people, it is subject to wide fluctuations as these few people matriculate into other positions and new leaders take their places. Schools with high leadership density are much better equipped to endure and even thrive through the inevitable transitions of individual leaders into and out of key leadership positions.

A quote from the management consultant and author Tom Peters has always resonated with me and, I think, captures the rich history, substantial impact, and future possibilities for teacher leadership. Peters said *“Leaders don’t create followers. They create more leaders.”*