

WHY WE NEED LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT TRAINING FOR TEACHERS

BY Herb Rubenstein

Two books have come out in a span of one month on leadership development for PreK-12 teachers. *Leadership Development for Educators* by Rubenstein, Miles and Bassi (Rowman and Littlefield, December, 2009) and *Teaching As Leadership* by Steven Farr of Teach for America (Jossey Bass, January, 2010). This is on top of Charlotte Danielson's book *Teacher Leadership* (ASCD, 2007) and many other groups that are working on this idea, including the Educational Testing Service, The Educational Commission for the States. School districts such as the Harrison School District of Colorado are already training their teachers in leadership development and are achieving some of the highest test score improvements of any school district in the state of Colorado.

In addition the Gates Foundation has just committed \$335m for teacher improvement. All of these developments point in the same direction. That direction is the recognition that in the current role of teacher, leadership skills and aptitude are essential. Yet, rarely in the United States do we provide a rigorous curriculum or training for teachers in leadership development. Teacher certification programs do not require leadership development training. Recertification programs, and even national board certification programs for teachers do not require teachers to take leadership development programs.

There are many approaches and definitions of "teacher leadership." Some argue that it is instructional leadership, or curriculum development leadership. Some argue that there must be a new "role," a new place in the organizational chart for teachers, with appropriate pay differential for "teacher leaders." Some argue that teacher leadership means that teachers are put into some formal position as a mentor of other teachers. Farr's new book views teaching as leadership and lists hundreds of leadership acts and six principles of leadership to guide teachers into how to become better leaders, and, he argues, better teachers, with improved student outcomes.

These are all valid positions to define teacher leadership. Another view is simpler and more profound than any of these views. It is simply that teachers are leaders in their classrooms, in their dealings with parents, in their own lives, and in dealing with their students outside of the classroom. This view propels the simple proposition that all PreK-12 teachers in the United States should be trained in leadership development and that leadership is a core competency of teaching.

Leadership is a core competency of teaching because one of the first jobs of a teacher is to create a community in the classroom. Second, teachers deal with diverse students in the classroom, and as ICF International, a leadership development training firm has noted, diversity is a leadership competency. Third, teachers must motivate and enroll their students, and their parents. Motivation and enrollment are key skill set and knowledge areas of leaders. Fourth, teachers have tremendous time pressures and

it is a leadership skill to be able to manage one's time brilliantly and delegate what can be delegated effectively.

Grover J. (Russ) Whitehurst, the Director of the Brown Center on Education Policy of the Brookings Institution asks, "Where is the body of evidence that shows that improving the leadership skills of teachers will improve student outcomes?" The answer is that there is such body of empirical evidence that conclusively proves a positive, causal relationship between improving the leadership skills of PreK-12 teachers and student outcomes. There are thousands of anecdotes, and logic suggests that enhanced leadership skills learned and developed through rigorous leadership development training, will not only improve student outcomes, they will improve important areas including teacher satisfaction, teacher retention, and increased parental involvement in our children's education.

The answer to the question, "Why Do We Need Leadership Training for Teachers?" is rooted in the fact that we do not have empirical evidence of its impact, over time, on key achievement metrics in our public school system. Once we train 10,000 teachers in leadership development, we would have a handle on many of the questions surrounding this currently unstudied, unfunded area. We invest billions and billions of dollars in training teachers, but we might be missing one core competency that teachers need to help close the achievement gap and help promote all children to learn at or near their potential for learning.

Finally, providing leadership development training for teachers is not just for students, or even parents. It is for the benefit of teachers who, with this training, will be able to improve the management of their classrooms, their professional and personal lives, and gain greater satisfaction from their interactions with other teachers when they are mentored and when they mentor other teachers. Leadership development training will not overnight fix all of our schools' challenges. But, it is no accident that in the private sector, in business, we spend over billion dollars providing leadership training. And, it is no accident that librarians, since 1998, have had to take leadership development training.

This is an idea whose time has come. Students, teachers, parents and the entire school system will likely benefit from this investment. Teacher leadership is one of the new buzzwords in education. Now it is time to put time and money into helping our teachers become the best leaders they can be.

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