Teacher Leaders

For many years, teachers have served as informal leaders in schools. However in 1986, the Holmes Group[1] and the Carnegie Forum on Education and Economy[2] working independently of each other, both proposed a 'ladder system' for teachers. One wrote about "career professionals" while the other described "lead teachers." In each case they were referring to teachers who would remain in the classroom but would assume other leadership responsibilities in their schools.

Since the 1980's there has been an increasing number of articles and books on teacher leadership.

Alma Harris and Daniel Muijs (2005)[3] discuss the nature and role of teacher leadership and they define teacher leadership as follows:

"Teachers who are leaders lead within and beyond the classroom, identify with and contribute to a community of teacher leaders and learners, and influence others towards improved educational practice."

Harris and Muijs (2007)[4] looked at three case studies of contrasting schools and in these studies they define teacher leadership as teachers having the opportunities to lead school improvement and to partake in decision making in schools.

Lai and Cheung (2015)[5] reviewed the teacher leadership literature and conclude that there is a "lack of a clear, agreed- upon definition of teacher leadership." They look at common facets of the concept and conclude that while teacher leadership can be "individually or collectively based", informal teacher leaders tend to be community based and "gain their influence through earning the respect from students and colleagues through their expertise and practice." They also state that teacher leadership is transformational in nature, that it functions in communities of practice and that it supports school development at different levels. They write:

"Teacher leadership consists of three major acts, namely teacher participation in educational improvement endeavours, teacher learning in communities of practice and teacher influence beyond the classroom."

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[1]Holmes Group. (1986) *Tomorrow's Teachers: A report of the Holmes Group*. East Lansing. MI: Author

[2]Carnegie Forum on Education and Economy (1986). *A Nation prepared: Teachers for the 21st century. The report of the task force on teaching as a profession.* New York, NY: Carnegie Corporation.

[3]Harris and Muijs (2005): *Improving Schools through Teacher Leadership*

[4]Harris and Muijs (2007 Teacher Leadership in Action: Three case studies of contrasting schools. *Educational Management, Administration, and Leadership* 35(1): 111-134):

[5]Lai and Cheung (2015) Enacting teacher leadership: The role of teachers in bringing about change *Educational Management Administration & Leadership 2015, Vol. 43(5) 673–692*

Finally, they identify the two distinctive qualities of empowerment and agency which distinguish leadership activities from collaborative activities. Empowerment is frequently highlighted in the literature and they describe it as:

"Teacher empowerment entails the sharing of power by principals with their schools' teachers, which gives teachers legitimacy to take on leadership roles and to participate in the leadership process, such as initiating new practices and mobilizing other teachers to join them with the goal of improved teaching and learning practices."

In relation to agency, they quote Campbell (2012)[6] "the state of agency enables individuals to make free or independent choices, to engage in autonomous actions, and to exercise judgment in the interests of others and oneself."

Smylie and Eckert (2018)[7] focus on leadership development and they look at four key insights which can be drawn from the literature on teacher leadership. They state firstly, that developing new leadership means developing a new system of leadership for all as "new leadership cannot be developed without developing current leadership." This highlights the importance of developing the school principal so that they use "more collaborative forms of leadership" in order that they in turn, can play an important part in the development of their teachers.

The second insight is linked to the first. They conclude that "the primary locus of and responsibility for teacher leadership development is in the school and district." It is in the school that teachers will build the leadership capacity, therefore it is important that school leaders at every level create a climate that is conducive to developing teachers.

For the third insight, they draw on the work of many authors and in particular on Day (2001)[8] and they state that there is a distinction between the development of the leader (the person) and the development of leadership (the process and practice). They conclude that "the implication for teacher leadership development is that while developing the capacity of the teacher for leadership is important, it is insufficient. A crucial focus of development should be on the employment of this capacity in the practice of leadership."

Fourthly, they note that teacher leadership development should be informed by research including that on "adult and career development" as teachers and schools are all at different stages of readiness and motivation. Difference they say should "be acknowledged and accommodated." Context therefore plays an important part in teacher leadership development and schools carry a substantial responsibility to develop teachers.

In summary, teacher leaders are those who are willing to work alongside others to build a better school community, to overcome challenges and obstacles and desire to improve the learning for the students in their care. Teacher leaders flourish in an environment where

[6] Campbell E (2012) Teacher agency in curriculum contexts. *Curriculum Inquiry* 42(2): 183–190.
[7] Smylie and Eckert (2018)Beyond superheroes and advocacy: the pathway of teacher Leadership Development *Educational Management, Administration, and Leadership* 46(4): 556-577
[8] Day DV (2001) Leadership Development. A review in context. *The Leadership Quarterly* 11(4) 581-613

they are supported, empowered and encouraged by their principals and where they are given opportunities to practise leadership.