

Preface

THE PURPOSE

The purpose of this book is to support and empower teachers. By taking a comprehensive look at some new and empowering images of teacher leadership, we hope this text reveals the unique and profound opportunities teachers have today to inspire transformative change in the classroom and beyond. While we seek to inspire you with clear images of what teacher leadership can mean, we also have provided numerous Monday-morning-ready strategies and action steps in each chapter. These will help you not only understand what it means to be a teacher leader today, but will support you in your transformation. We hope this effort is a shared one and that you and teaching colleagues from down the hall and around the world can work together to redefine what teacher leadership can mean for your professional journey and the future prospects of our profession.

THE MIRROR

You most likely remember the morning before your first day on the job as a teacher. As you zipped, buttoned, and straightened your clothes, you may have looked in the mirror and tried to envision yourself as a teacher. Your brain conjured up images of teachers you'd known and images of teachers from movies and literature. You reflected on the new teacher in the mirror and how he or she would "look" in the classroom.

It is no secret that our actions are driven by the visions we have of ourselves. A new lawyer may visualize him- or herself

trying the case of the decade. A local pianist may see him- or herself playing to a sold-out crowd at Carnegie Hall. Our advancement in our chosen profession is driven by these images we carry with us for what we hope to become. The pursuit of this vision is driven by what we see in the mirror and what we believe will someday be staring back at us.

We use the image of the mirror throughout this book because we believe the teaching profession has been flooded with negative, disempowering images of what we do and who we are. We believe our work is heroic and transformative. Yet there are so many images of teaching that portray our journey as pedestrian and dull. Teachers themselves are often characterized as pedantic and uninspiring.

We hope new generations of teachers will look in the mirror each morning with a renewed sense of what's possible in teaching. We hope they see a dynamic teacher leader capable of leading transformation for their students, their school, their community, and the world. For teachers to see these new images, we must do a better job of creating a vision for what it means to be a teacher leader in schools. This book seeks to provide that vision.

OLD REFLECTIONS, DEFINITIONS, AND MISCONCEPTIONS OF TEACHER LEADERSHIP

Many people believe teacher leadership in school is demonstrated by quasi-administrative behaviors. Through the decades, we have known numerous well-intentioned, high-performing teachers who have seen their ascent in the profession limited to providing input in areas in school governance that are more about management than leadership. Rather than developing a meaningful voice in school, these teachers instead find themselves giving input on policy handbooks and building budget allocations. While it certainly takes management to lead, our profession has summarily underused the thoughtful creativity of veteran teachers.

A second misconception involves the difference between teacher leadership and delegated leadership. In many schools, the principal is an excellent delegator. He or she may carefully choose some of the most talented teachers on the staff to execute certain tasks or projects. Thus, teacher leadership has often been seen as the development of highly skilled, “go-to” delegates.

The advancement of teacher leadership should go beyond this model and put teachers at the center of the change process. This enables teachers to help construct a vision, establish a plan for change, and then own the implementation of the change as well as the results. We aren’t against delegation. We advocate an evolved notion of what is possible when teachers are given the chance to lead change.

Current Academic Definitions

The literature is replete with definitions of teacher leadership. In 2002, for example, Crowther, Kaagan, Ferguson, and Hann described teacher leadership as an “action that transforms teaching and learning in a school, and ties school and community together on behalf of learning, and that advances social sustainability and quality of life for a community” (p. xvii).

Patterson and Patterson (2004) said that teacher leaders are identified as those who collaborate with colleagues with the intent of improving teaching and learning in both a formal and informal capacity. Teacher leadership has also been defined as “the building of capacity to transform schooling” (Lieberman & Miller, 2005, p. 153) and “the leadership role from one individual to a community of professionals committed to improved student learning” (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001, p. 2).

Scholars have noted that teacher leaders are “committed to continuous learning for themselves and their colleagues . . . use systems thinking as a tool to examine complex organizational problems . . . and work toward reconstructing their teaching practices to include roles as servant leaders and change agents in their organizations” (Childs, 2005, pp. 25–26).

Each of these definitions has certainly helped bring us to this point. As such, *Mirror Images: New Reflections on Teacher Leadership* is built on the work of our predecessors. The book is our effort to shed light on what is possible with the advancement of teacher leadership as a mechanism to transform the profession.

New Reflections and Mental Images

In recent years, we have learned that constructing a mental image or vision is a complex, neurological exercise. The visions in our head are shaped by our history, our mental models, and the context from which we work (Reason, 2010). Based on the latest research, we seek nothing less in this book than to construct a new vision of teacher leadership.

To assist in this effort, we have created ten new mental images to represent ten types of teacher leaders. In the chapters that follow, we will elaborate the ten types and discuss their origins and applications. Each type of teacher leader is illustrated with its own icon, or symbol. We did this because teacher leadership can appear to be squishy, theoretical, and amorphous. We hope these symbolic representations will help you to quickly conceptualize each of these visions of teacher leaders and turn those images into actions.



The Learning Advocate: Learning Advocates are teacher leaders whose actions and priorities revolve around one ultimate mission: learning.



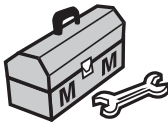
The Believer: These passionate teacher leaders believe in their students, colleagues, parents, and the community. They also believe in the lofty aspirations of their profession and are proud of the fact that they teach.



The Transformationalist: The Transformationalist is a teacher leader with an acute capacity to visualize, articulate, and then implement an ambitious, inspiring, and transformative vision for change.



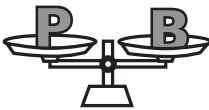
The Synergizer: The Synergizer's gifts involve the capacity to develop and nurture professional networks of support and influence both locally and beyond.



The Method Master: The Method Master is exceptional in the art and science of selecting, learning, and applying research-based, best-practice instructional methods.



The Fully Invested Owner: Fully Invested Owners aren't dabbling in teaching; they are all in. They are invested in "their" students, "their" colleagues, and "their" school.



The Present Balance Keeper: These teacher leaders understand the concept of time better than most and they know that investments in themselves will allow them to serve others more effectively and for a longer period of time.



The Servant: The Servant is a teacher who leads by supporting and developing others.



The Inquisitor: Inquisitors are teacher leaders who inspire their students, their colleagues, and themselves with thoughtful, strategic, purposeful, and emotionally bound questions.



The Detective: Teacher leaders as Detectives solve mysteries and notice things that the untrained eye can't see. These sleuths spot untapped creativity and potential in their students and colleagues alike and help bring forth and nurture those hidden talents.

PERFECT TIMING OR A PERFECT STORM?

Teacher leadership is a concept that many of us have embraced for some time. In this section, we present six current trends in education and discuss the degree to which teacher leadership will be important in responding to these shifts. While the argument can be made that teacher leadership has always been important, there are certainly a number of trends emerging today that make the establishment of teacher leadership more important than ever!

Trend #1: Greater Levels of Complexity in the Profession

Our classrooms are more heterogeneous than ever before (George, 2005). This means that our teachers and students come to school with greater dissimilarity in their personal experiences, cultural context, and language. Greater diversity will ultimately result in an improved learning environment. Moving away from a homogeneous perspective is a challenge for many schools and the complexity of dealing with this evolution will certainly require leadership. It will also test our capacity to change at the granular level; and it will be important that teachers themselves are at the heart of this change.

Trend #2: Continued Focus on Accountability and Results

As the era of accountability evolves, teachers will increasingly be required to own their results. To do that, teacher leaders must take part in constructing the vision and establishing an

action plan to achieve new outcomes (Leithwood, 1995). Teacher leadership is a perfect approach to create these deeper levels of ownership and accountability.

Trend #3: The Overwhelming Trend Toward Personalization

Technology has allowed us to personalize our lives in unique ways. We can get our news from sources that match our beliefs. Our computer desktops and the cell phones in our pockets allow us to make personal our learning and communication spaces. In a culture that involves high levels of personalization, we are sure to be more resistant to change that is top-down and doesn't consider personal thoughts and ideas.

It has long been acknowledged that leaders are more successful when they can connect on an individual level with those who represent an integral part of the change process. In a culture where we have higher expectations for personalization and involvement, the need for teacher leaders will be greater than ever as we will grow to expect them to either lead the change themselves or be instrumentally involved with whatever changes are necessary in leading schools.

Trend #4: Embarking on the Age of Learning

In an age of information where bodies of knowledge grow exponentially every year, our culture will become increasingly focused on learning capacity and opportunities (Bonk, 2009). The future will bring both accelerated learning expectations and a greater need to develop the capacity to learn in a variety of places and modalities. Lifelong learning will be nonnegotiable and our ability to adapt and continue to learn will arguably be just as important as any learning we have gained up to that point.

Who better to lead the way in an era of learning than teacher leaders?

Trend #5: The Influence of Networks and Open Sourcing

As teachers become more adept at networking, it is likely that national and international cohorts of teachers who serve students at similar points in their development will come together to share ideas, resources, and key innovations. In business and the world of software development, they refer to this practice as open sourcing, wherein challenges or problems are shared in an open “space” and innovations and solutions are offered and debated with fellow professionals. With technology today, those connections could be made down the hall or across the world. The influence of networks and open sourcing will help the teaching profession to continue to evolve in an organic fashion with teachers leading the way thanks to collaboration.

Trend #6: The Emerging Learning Needs of Teachers Who Are Digital Natives

Increasingly, P–12 education will be dominated by teachers who, by one definition or another, are digital natives. Fewer and fewer of us will have grown up without handheld devices and the Internet as constant companions.

People who have grown up with digital sensibilities face innovation and the challenges of change with a much different perspective on solutions than their predecessors. Digital natives are highly collaborative and willing to get input from multiple sources when making a decision. They don’t toil away in isolation and are willing to use technology to manage laborious tasks, freeing them to provide interventions at critical learning points.

The emergence of digital natives has created somewhat of a chasm between those who grew up digital and those who didn’t. Leaders in schools today can certainly feel this disconnect and the challenges that are created as a result. Teacher leadership will be important in helping these diverse populations work together effectively as they learn from one another

and reflect on best practices and approaches from both the digital-native and digital-immigrant perspectives.

ORGANIZATION AND APPLICATION OF THE BOOK

This book was designed with the busy working professional in mind. We have created simple and clear symbolic representations that we hope will help you remember the content. Each chapter begins with a brief, focused definition of one teacher leader type. We cover the rationale and advantages of each model early in each chapter and then address the specific challenges teacher leaders face when they promote this image of teacher leadership.

Each chapter ends with clear and actionable steps to take to promote and implement this type of teacher leadership in your school and within your own professional practice. Included are steps you can take on your own, as well as ideas you and your colleagues may embrace to make an evolved notion of teacher leadership a significant part of your professional lives.