CREATING A COMMUNITY OF LEADERS

by

Jeffrey R. Utecht

June, 2003
Abstract

The following paper discusses creating a community of leaders within the school setting. The process of creating teacher leaders and sharing leadership roles in the education system is a complicated matter that centers around relationships and allowing teachers to be a part of the decision making process. This paper focuses on the role of the principal as an integral part of the leadership building process, the role the principal plays and behaviors of a principal that foster a community of leaders within the school setting. This paper discusses factors that principals must keep in mind when building relationships and creating a community of leaders within their school.
Table of Contents

Table of Contents ii
List of Figures iii
Introduction 1
Leaders and Leadership 1
Building Relationships in Schools 3
Becoming Colleagues 8
School of Leaders 10
Conclusion 15
List of Figures

Figure 1: Staff Relationships: A Range of Readiness for Strong Working Relationships

??
Creating a Community of Leaders

Introduction

Within the school setting, there is a definite leader, the Principal. Someone whose job it is to oversee the day to day operations of the school as well as look to the future and lay out a road map of where the school is headed. In the current state of educational reform principals are becoming increasingly overwhelmed. To compensate, they have started to rely on staff members strengths to help them navigate the growing complex world of education. Building a community of leaders within a school is not easy. Teachers are natural leaders themselves in the classroom, and trying to bring twenty or thirty leaders together for a common purpose or common focus is not an undertaking for the light hearted.

This paper will examine the principal's role in building a community of leaders within a school. It will begin by defining what a leader is and what is meant by leadership. Secondly, it will look at building relationships among leaders and staff within the school setting. Finally, it will focus on becoming colleagues within the school and a community of leaders.

Leaders and Leadership

Defining what and who a leader is, is difficult. What qualities make a good leader? What do we mean when we say leader? "Scholars have been exploring this question for over a century, often with the assumption that leadership comes with the person, that certain individuals have some set of inherited or acquired traits that enable them to leave their mark on the world" (Lashway, 1997 pg. 16). Defining exactly what traits make a good leader is difficult. They
change from situation to situation. A person, who is a good leader of a growing company, might not be a good leader for a non-profit organization. So what traits do we look for in education? What traits do principals have and look for in others when hiring staff? In a study by Hord and Hall, they concluded that effective principals are those who are most actively involved with teachers and are highly visibly, "involved principals walk the hallways and poke their noses in classrooms rather than sequestering themselves in their office" (Lashway, 1997, pg. 19). John Gardner a leading scholar on leadership states:

"All we know about the interaction between leaders and constituents or followers tells us that communication and influence flow in both directions; and in the two-way communication, nonrational, non-verbal, and unconscious elements play their part. In the process leaders shape and are shaped." (Gardner, 2000, pg. 3)

In return, good principals look for the same traits in teachers, someone who is highly motivated and actively involved within the school. When principals are highly motivated and they have a staff of highly motivated educators, then the building of relationships and the forming of a community can take place. With communication flowing in both directions, a community of leaders begins to take shape.

Now that we have defined that a good school leader is someone highly motivated and actively involved within the school, we turn to leadership. Gardner defines leadership as follows: "Leadership is the process of persuasion or example by which an individual (or leadership team) induces a group to pursue objectives held by the leader or shared by the leader and his or her followers" (Gardner, 2000, pg. 3). Gardner goes on to say that within a group, individuals fill different roles and one of those roles is a leader. The leader cannot be an overseer of action, but must be an "integral part of the system" (Gardner, 2000, pg. 3). Principals
must build relationships within the school and amongst their actively involved staff in order for a community of leaders to begin to form.

Building Relationships in Schools

In order to build a community of leaders the principal must foster a positive relationship between him or herself and the staff. Principals face many challenges when trying to build strong working relationships with teachers. The principal must not shy away from these challenges, but meet them head on. Donaldson and Fullan (2001) remind us that "principals and teacher leaders are uniquely positioned to play different but complementary parts in the facilitation of relationships, the generation of commitment to purpose, and the belief in action-in-common." Both principals and teachers need to know their role as well as the role of others in order to build a successful working relationship. "In all cases, the partnership of principals and teacher leaders is the central force in the flow of school leadership" (Donaldson & Fullan, 2001, pg. 56). Overtime, a negative relationship between principals and teacher leaders can and will tear a school apart.

So what do principals do to help foster this partnership between themselves and the teacher leaders? In order for a community of leaders to be established, the relationship between the two parties needs to be in place for the community to evolve. Donaldson and Fullan (2001), state that the most important aspect of the principal teacher relationship is "giving attention and importance to interpersonal matters among faculty and staff." Principals must be able to manage the emotional relationship of the school faculty and staff. Talking about relationships and the way things are done in the school is a first step in opening the line of communication throughout
the school. Principals must validate others feelings about where they belong in the larger picture of staff and faculty. The principal must allow the teachers to have a voice and an opportunity to speak on issues that concern them, even in a larger context such as district, community, profession, and personal affairs. (Donaldson & Fullan, 2001, pg. 57)

Donaldson and Fullan (2001) also state that "Leaders help everyone be clear about roles and responsibilities with regard to each other's work." At the heart of this understanding is the ability to "shape and be shaped" (Donaldson & Fullan, 2001, pg. 58). School leaders must meet the needs of their staff by answering such questions as: What am I responsible for? How will I be cared for and treated justly? And who will have power over me and my decisions? (Donaldson & Fullan, 2001, pg. 58). Being able to talk about these questions and others that arise in an open group format allows all parties to know their role within the school, as well as the roles of others within the school. Knowing how all the pieces of the puzzle fit together, allows school staff to focus more on their job and less on the "What ifs" of school.

Lastly Donaldson and Fullan (2001) state "leaders sponsor and facilitate continuous, authentic connections among colleagues." Leaders sponsor direct experiences for staff and colleagues to gather and discuss topics in a non-threatening, authentic way. It is within these contacts with staff and other colleagues that trust grows and people begin to openly share ideas. It is also a place where concerns can be brought together and affirmed by other colleagues within the school. "Leaders support the development of healthy working relationships every time they arrange for staff to convene and participate with one another around issues significant to them" (Donaldson & Fullan, 2001, pg. 58). It is not enough for principals to simply have a staff meeting. It is necessary to set aside time for interaction among staff dealing with common issues.
and concerns. Figure 1 (Donaldson & Fullan, 2001, pg. 63) shows a range of readiness among staff working relationships.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fragmented</th>
<th>Unified</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• No Trust</td>
<td>• Most faculty and staff feel connected to many others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Staff closed to one another's views</td>
<td>• Trust, openness, and affirmation characterize school-wide interactions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Staff seldom Affirm one another</td>
<td>• Staff mobilize to meet school-wide challenges</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Independence is the preeminent value</td>
<td>• Continuity of leadership and staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Staff too large for personal connections</td>
<td>• Strong working relationships exist among formal and informal leaders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• History of conflict and staff turnover</td>
<td>• Trust and affirmation with formal leaders of school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Small groups formed around personal needs and purposes</td>
<td>• Groups/team s able to mobilize for change when team conditions require</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Trust and affirmation within these groups</td>
<td>• Trust and affirmation between groups or with administration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Little trust/affirmation between groups or with administration</td>
<td>• Small groups formed around professional purposes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Formal structures and rules dominate the culture</td>
<td>• Formal structures and rules dominate the culture</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There are many different aspects that need to be addressed in order to unify a staff and have a strong working relationship. Although figure 1 focuses on relationships between staff members, the principal plays an important role in fostering and allowing the opportunity for those relationships to grow. The principal needs to be seen as a partner in the leadership relationship.
The relationship between principals and teachers is a complicated one. "The principal brings to this relationship the formal baggage of the administrative role: hierarchical, historical, authoritative, political, and legal constraints that often contribute to the fragmentation of relationships" (Donaldson & Fullan, 2001, pg. 64). These constraints come with the job of principal and need to be used to help foster the relationship between principal and staff, and not hinder it. Donaldson and Fullan (2001) give four characteristics for principals to help shape their role and create successful open affirmative relationships. These are: You're different, You Have Access, You Can Enable, and You Alone Are Not Enough.

You're Different

The first thing that principals need to realize is they are no longer teachers. They have formal authority and presumed power over others. Principals must realize they are different, but must not let the differences divide them from their staff. Instead they need to use the differences as a starting point in conversation and opening up dialogue among staff. The principal must rely on their personality and intercommunication skills to build the personal and professional relationships among faculty members and not allow personal differences to distance and divide the school staff. (Donaldson & Fullan, 2001, pg. 65)

You Have Access

A principal has access to people that teacher leaders do not. Teachers are isolated, and spend very little of their time talking to others, while the principal has access to teachers, counselors,
parents, and community members. "These contacts are, from the standpoint of building leadership relationships, superb opportunities to unify and to counteract fragmentation" (Donaldson & Fullan, 2001, pg. 65). These contacts can come in many different forms for principals, but will mostly be "on the fly" during prep periods, lunch, recess, and before or after school. The principal has access to more people and information in a day then most teachers do. This access gives principals time to build personal and professional relationships that extend beyond the classroom. The challenge for principals is to understand the importance of relationship-building and putting the relationships first.

You Can Enable

Principals are in a position to make things happen in a school. They have influence over funds, curriculum, activities and other money supported school activities. The challenge is for principals to use this position to enhance the principal-teacher relationship and not allow it to divide and break down relationships. By giving teachers some of the decision making power and allowing them to be part of the decisions making process, the principal can use their position to positively impact the school and staff. (Donaldson & Fullan, 2001, pg. 68)

You Alone Are Not Enough

Principals must understand that they alone are not enough in running a school. With the average American public school at a ratio of 37:1 staff to administrators, and schools being spread out over large areas, and teacher schedules being different day to day and week to week, principals
need to understand they will not be able to control and manage the complex educational world by themselves. They need help from their teacher leaders. The sooner principals can admit they can not do it alone and allow teacher leaders to help with decision making and the everyday running of the school, the sooner the partnership between principal and staff begin to grow. The challenge that principals face is giving up the control of being the leader to everyone and everything. The principal must be able to entrust all staff to grow meaningful relationships with one another, and help to facilitate the overall growth of the school. (Donaldson & Fullan, 2001, pg. 67)

Becoming Colleagues

In order to work together successfully and for the betterment of the school, staff and principal, must practice collegiality. Collegiality in schools, according to Barth (1990), presents itself in four specific behaviors. Adults in schools talk about practice, adults in schools observe each other, adults engage together in work on curriculum, and adults in schools teach each other what they know about teaching, learning, and leading. These four behaviors help faculty to become colleagues centered around their work. It is the principal's job to make sure that the staff, as a whole, has the opportunity to practice these specific behaviors.

Although collegiality is usually not mentioned when talking about successful schools, it is a trait that all successful schools share. "There is evidence that when adults share and cooperate, students tend to do the same" (Barth, 1990, pg. 31). Collegiality among staff effects student outcomes, and therefore demands that time and energy is put towards it.
So how do principals go about introducing and facilitating the implementation of collegiality in schools? Barth (1990) points out that all parties involved need to understand that "collegiality requires that everyone be willing to give up something without knowing in advance just what that may be." This is a risk that all parties must be willing to take. If faculty and staff are not willing to take this risk, then the climate of the school will be one of isolation and separation, where teachers are isolated in their work and room, and feel separated from the rest of the faculty and administration. "Unless adults talk with one another, observe one another, and help one another, very little will change" (Barth, 1990, pg. 32). Once again, it is the principal's job to see that opportunities are put forth for collegiality to develop.

There are certain behaviors put forth by principals that help to foster a faculty of colleagues. Little (1981) found four specific behaviors that principal's possessed that were closely related to collegiality within the school setting:

1. States expectations explicitly for cooperation among teachers. "I expect all of us to work together, help one another, and make our knowledge available."
2. Models collegiality, that is, enacts it by joining with teachers and other principals working collaboratively to improve conditions in the school.
3. Rewards collegiality by granting release time, recognition, space, materials, or funds to teachers who work as colleagues.
4. Protects teachers who initially engage in collegial behavior and thereby risk the retributions of their fellows.

There are other ways to support collegiality among staff. Team teaching is another excellent model for opening up the lines of communication among teachers and allowing information to flow in all directions.

"Teachers working in any kind of team are provided with a built in support system, someone to observe and by whom to be observed, an adult with whom to talk about teaching, learning, and students. In short, teachers who work together can enjoy continuous professional, collegial relationships" (Barth, 1990, pg. 34).
Team teaching allows teachers to build collegiality around work relationships in small teams with either curriculum interest or grade level interest in common.

Another way to build collegiality is to have faculty engage in meaningful decision making processes for the school. Allowing staff the opportunity to meet in teams to discuss decisions that effect their work day, supplies, discipline, or classrooms, breaks down the walls of isolation and allows faculty to come together to discuss common problems, and solutions. Not allowing faculty in on decisions that affect them directly, can build walls of isolation between staff members and between staff and administration. "Just how ownership for school decisions is distributed has a huge influence on the capacity of a school to improve from within" (Barth, 1990, pg. 36).

In order for a school to be a community of leaders, there needs to be collegiality amongst the faculty. Everyone within the school needs to feel as though their voice is being heard and that they have a say in the decisions that effect them. Principals must make time and resources available so collegiality can take place. "It is meaningless to give people responsibility without giving them the resources to exercise that responsibility" (Barth, 1990, pg. 35). The principal must practice behaviors that foster collegiality amongst staff. Only after the principal practices behaviors of collegiality can they the faculty be expected to do the same.

School of Leaders

"When teachers are enlisted and empowered as school leaders, everyone can win" (Barth, 1990, pg. 128). Teacher leaders are teachers who are empowered to bring about change in a positive way for their school. Teacher leaders can be in charge of issues as large as fire safety
and as small as social committees. When teachers are empowered in leadership roles the teachers win by bringing about change in something they are passionate about, and principals win by giving up some of their responsibly to the teacher leaders.

"If the principal tries to do all of it, much of it will be left undone by anyone" (Barth, 1990, pg. 128). There are too many aspects to the modern day school for the principal to undertake by him or herself. The principal must use the resources he or she has available, and most of the resources come in the form of teacher leaders. Finding and tapping into teachers' leadership skills in specific areas will not only help ease the duties of the principal, but will also help build positive relationships within the school. "The principal gains influence and demonstrates leadership by entrusting some of it to others" (Barth, 1990, pg. 128). In giving up the leadership role in some areas helps others to entrust in the principal the leadership role of the school.

Building a community of leaders within a school is a relatively new idea that some teachers might not endorse. "It is commonly held that if you are a teacher, the only way to become a leader is to leave teaching" (Barth, 1990, pg. 128). This old mind set needs to be changed. No longer are principals looking for teachers who come to work, work inside their classroom and not influence the school as a whole. Principals want, and need, teacher leaders who want to use their knowledge of teaching and learning to help shape the school culture in a positive way.

"When teachers work for the common good, they give up a large measure of self-interest in the outcome" (Barth, 1990, pg. 129). Allowing teacher leaders to work for the common good of the school can help them to see a broader picture of what happens outside their classroom on a
daily, monthly and yearly basis. In becoming teacher leaders and seeing a larger picture of the school community, teachers give up their self-interests for the good of the school.

As Barth (1990) states, teachers like successful businesses will feel more ownership when involved in leadership roles and decisions.

"The literature of successful businesses, from Japanese hi-tech firms to IBM, offers evidence that when workers participate in decision making, both their satisfaction and the quality of their work rise. Teacher-leaders, too, it is reasoned, will become more invested in the school and in its success if they are stockholders. By sharing leadership, teachers will feel more ownership of and commitment to decisions."

Research also suggests that "the greater the participation in decision making, the greater the productivity, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment" (Barth, 1990, pg. 130).

If research suggest that allowing teachers to become leaders within the school will help the school community as a whole, how do principals go about making and allowing teachers to take on leadership roles? Barth (1990), gives eight points for principals to focus on when creating a community of leaders.

*Articulating the Goal*

In order for teacher leaders to emerge within a school, there needs to be a clear vision agreed upon by the faculty as a whole. The principal must be willing to share his or her vision with the faculty and staff if teacher leaders are to emerge. Only after a clear vision is in place and is shared with the staff can teacher leaders start to form their leadership roles and find their place within the school.
Relinquishing Authority to Teachers

Principals must relinquish authority power to teachers. Not all principals are comfortable with relinquishing power that has been given to them, and in the long run, they will be accountable for. Once a principal has relinquished the power to the teacher leader, they then must support the teacher leaders in their endeavor. When principals give up the power, they need to give it up with complete trust that the teacher leader is competent in the leadership role and must not break the bond of trust and take the authority back when the "going gets tough". It only takes a couple of incidents where the trust between principal and teacher leader in breached that the teacher leaders will shut down and not volunteer their services.

Involving Teachers Before Decisions Are Made

Principals must empower their teachers in the decision making process. Not make decisions and then ask for volunteers to oversee a decision that has been made. When teachers feel they are managing decisions made by others the leadership is taken away. The teacher views the job as "something I have to do" instead of "something I want to do" and this mind set can be the difference between a bitter teacher and a teacher leader.

Which Responsibility Goes to Whom?

Principals must be careful in choosing to whom they entrust responsibility, too. It is easy to always return to the "tried and true" teacher leader who has done a good job in the past
and who the principal knows can be trusted. But if a principal relies too heavily on a teacher leader, the teacher leader might start to feel bitter about doing jobs he or she is not paid to do. Also, principals might overlook a better candidate for the job, someone who maybe has not been given the opportunity to be a teacher leader, but has knowledge and experience in the problem at hand. Making sure that all staff are treated equally and have equal opportunity to become teacher leaders in their area can make or break a principal's partnership with staff.

*Shared Responsibility for Failure*

When a principal entrusts a teacher leader with responsibility, it is important to not "hang them out to dry" if there is failure in the process. The principal needs to convey that it is "we" that failed and help teachers to see that together with the principal they gave it their best shot. If teacher leaders feel as though they will be blamed for the failure, they will be unwilling to take the risk of teacher leader in the future, therefore destroying a community of leaders and returning to a school of isolated classrooms and teachers.

*Teachers Take Credit for Success*

As important as it is for principals to share the failures, it is more important for the teacher to take credit for successes. Principals have many opportunities to be seen as the hero, whereas teachers have only a precious few opportunities to stand in the limelight and be recognized for their accomplishments. Allowing teachers to take credit for successes encourages them to take on another leadership role within the school.
"I Don't Know How"

Admitting that you don't know how to do something can be hard for a principal. The expectation is that the principal can "do it all". Teachers know that principals do not have all the answers, yet for some principals, they feel as though they have to. If principals succumb to the mind set that they need to know it all, then a community of leaders cannot form, for it is within the "I don't know how" that teacher leaders emerge and take on leadership roles.

Personal Security

Just as teachers need to feel secure in their endeavors and risks, principals too need the personal security of knowing that someone is taking care of them. Principals need to feel secure in their job and know that someone is watching after their safety in order for them to open up and share the leadership role. If principals do not feel secure in their job, they will be less likely to share the control with teachers. Instead they will want to control all they can to ensure that their securities are being met.

Conclusion

Creating a community of leaders is not an easy undertaking. There is much to be done on both the part of the teacher and the principal. However, it is the principal who sets the mood when creating this community. The principal has the power to either facilitate a community of
leaders, or destroy one. It is the principal who must take the first steps in setting up a community
in which teachers feel safe in taking risks and trying something new, knowing that no matter
what the outcome, they will be supported by their principal. A community of leaders within a
school is a powerful and influential body that will reach beyond the classroom and the school,
and into the community.
Reference


