Teacher Leadership Final Essay

Tionna Pinkney

North Carolina State University

Raleigh, NC

How do I define teacher leadership? This has been a constant dilemma for me all semester long. How do I define this term so that it encompasses all that I believe it to be? In January, I developed my definition of teacher leadership based on the observation of others who I viewed to be teacher leaders. My definition only consisted of characteristics; therefore it was not really a definition. Now that it is April, I have come to realize that my original list of teacher leadership characteristics has changed. I define teacher leadership as a role in which one seeks to be daring in order to educate and advance others towards various goals. As I have read more material about teacher leadership, wrote down my reflections, and evaluated my own teacher leadership abilities, I have come to realize three major themes/patterns of teacher leadership: risk-taking, self-evaluating, and constantly learning.

In order to be a teacher leader you have to be a risk-taker. I came to realize this through the movie presentations we watched. Almost every main character took risks. They decided to do something that was unorthodox in order to be effective. Barth would have characterized those individuals as leaders who decided to, “…lick the envelope rather than the stamp,” because they saw a need for change and decided they were not going to wait for someone else to solve the problem (Barth, 2004, p. 2). I also noticed a risk-taking pattern in the readings that we had. All of the books had sections in which they discussed taking risk. I believe Barth emphasized risk-taking the most with the different stories he told in his book; while Katzenmeyer, Moller, Zemelman, and Ross taught us how to take strategic risk. But, with risk-taking you have to acknowledge there will be consequences. There will be times when you have support from others, in which, most people will agree with your plan and decide to follow you. But, there might be time when you have no support. This is when no one believes that your plan will work until they see the results. Risk-takers understand that their plan may or may not work, yet they still want to see what might happen.

The other theme/pattern that I noticed in regards to teacher leadership was the act of self-evaluating. In order to be a leader, you must first understand who you are as a person so that you may effectively lead. Without self-evaluation it would be like a blind person trying to lead someone who has perfect eyesight. Through the self-assessment and inventory in *Awakening the Sleeping Giant* by Katzenmeyer and Moller, I realized traits about myself that are beneficial for me to know. For example, I need to develop self-organization and better communication skills. As I reflected on most of the issues I have each school year, I realized they were caused by my lack of self-organization and communication skills. Self-evaluations force you to realize traits about yourself that could enhance or hamper your ability to be a teacher leader. In my opinion, one of the best pieces of advice about self-evaluation can be found in the article, “Managing Oneself” by Peter Drucker. This articles forces you to “go below the surface” of yourself, in order to discover who you are as a person and what you desire in life. Finally, self-evaluations allow you to be more conscious of how you treat others and considerate, because that is essential to teacher leadership. I remember one post we had in class where we had to discuss the way that we learned. After, completing that post I realized I had only been teaching my students the way I liked to learn (visually). I did not consider that it may not be the way that some of my students like to learn.

The final theme I discovered in regards to teacher leadership was the act of constantly learning. Teacher leaders must be open to constantly learning new things. One component of Katzenmeyer and Moller’s (2009) definition of teacher leadership states, “…identify with and contributes to a community of teacher learners…” (p. 6). Teacher leaders understand that students are not the only individuals that are required to learn, but, they must do the same thing as well. Learning could come through me attending professional development sessions, or simply reflecting on teaching. Learning should also include me discovering who my students are so that I can be effective in my instruction. This does not mean I must simply know my students’ names, but I must know their personalities and learning styles. I must also be open to learning about new concepts and ways to teach. Most important, I must reflect in order to learn from my experiences. Developing what Barth (2004) calls, “craft knowledge” is among the most vital attributes for becoming a teacher leader. Craft knowledge is developed through teaching experience. It is the knowledge you gain by learning from mistakes you made, or from colleagues (Barth, 2004). It is learning about what works, and what does not work when it comes to instruction. It even includes learning how to effectively communicate and interact with co-workers.

Personally I want to keep all of these themes in mind as I continue to enhance my teacher leadership abilities. My leadership Plan of Action will include many components. First, I will take more risk in my instruction by incorporating more hands-on experiences, and not being fearfully of allowing my students to learn through discovery. I will continue to be a leader by advocating for teachers. I am currently the K-2 Teacher Representative on my school’s Response to Intervention team (RTI). This platform allows me to support and advocate for teachers by providing them with the resources they need in order to effectively instruct students. I ensure that teachers are able to communicate their concerns to parents and the team members. I also ensure that the plan they are given for students can be implemented in their classroom. I will continue to serve on this team until the end of the year, and provide more resources that I have learned about from graduate school.

In regards to self-evaluation, I will develop a plan so that I can become better at self-organization and communication. Teaching in Chapel Hill/Carrboro City Schools has helped enhance my communication skills because I am required to have open communication with my parents regularly. I also plan to give myself more time so that I may think before I react in situations with my colleagues. This means I will start using the phrase Dr. Pope stated, “Give me a day to think about that”, when I am presented with overwhelming information. Before I move to Dallas, TX next year, I plan on taking Drucker’s advice from the article, “Managing Oneself,” by writing down what I expect to happen when I move there. Then, I will compare what actually occurred to my list of expectations a year later in order to determine what I need to change.

Finally, I will strive to be a learner next year. I will be open to learning about the Dallas’ school system and its curriculum format when I begin teaching. During the summer, I plan on researching effective ways to teach science because that is my area of weakness. In regards to contributing to teacher learning, I want to facilitate a professional development seminar about literacy and technology. I will share this desire with my principal to see if he/she will be open to me conducting a seminar of that type. If I am unable to perform that task, I will still share my resources with other colleagues.

In order to successfully carry out this Plan of Action, I will have to develop more confidence in my talents and skills. There are times when I lack confidence because I feel that I am too young, or I do not have enough teaching experience. But, now that I am getting my Master’s I have come to realize that I have many talents and skills that I can use to help lead others. I also need to focus more on my actions rather than other people’s reactions. I have to stop blaming others for events in which I can change the outcome. I noticed that I wrote about the negative traits of others in my Moodle posts and Personal Leadership Log. It is time that I stop doing this because positive change will not occur with me, or in situations if I spend a lot of time talking about negativity. In essence, I want my leadership to “look” effective and positive.

References

Barth, R. S. (2004). Learning by heart. California: Jossey-Bass.

Drucker, P. F. (1999). Managing oneself. Harvard Business Review, 100-109.

Katzenmeyer, M., & Moller, G. (2009). Awakening the sleeping giant: Helping teachers develop

as leaders. California: Corwin.

Zemelman, S., & Ross, H. (2009). 13 steps to teacher empowerment. Portsmouth, NH:

Heinemann.