

AN EXAMINATION OF HOW AND WHY TEACHERS PARTICIPATE IN
INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

A Dissertation

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Doctor of Education

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Title: An Examination of How and Why Teachers Participate in Instructional Leadership

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Instructional leadership is conventionally viewed as a principal's responsibility, practiced within a school distributed leadership configuration or other framework of school leadership. However, principals deliberately and visibly support teacher efforts in exerting leadership as teacher leadership practices are implemented for the improvement of student outcomes. This study reports on an in-depth analysis of the perceptions of instructional teacher leadership practices in public schools across the Eastern Seaboard.

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The instrumentation used captures descriptive accounts of leadership practice from seven teacher leaders who participated in the DOE Ambassador Fellowship program. They met the educational leadership experience guidelines determined by the U.S. Department of Education (DOE) for this program. Individual interviews were used to obtain the perceptions of teacher leaders. Data were collected for analysis of practices and behaviors of teacher leaders within a framework of distributed leadership. This study reports on why and how teacher instructional leadership practice choices were made within the experiences of the participants.

Findings support the promotion of instructional teacher leadership within a distributed leadership model for sustaining instructional reform initiatives. The study contributes to a more complete picture on how and why teacher leaders engage in their instructional leadership

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behaviors (Kenjarski, 2015, p. 182, Spillane, 2015). Recommendations for sustaining teacher leader approaches in school distributed leadership configurations are included.

Summary of Results

Teacher experiences captured by this study present similarities *across cases* (Creswell, 2012). The following themes emerged as perceived influences on implementing instructional leadership practice among teacher leaders, the “why.” There are opportunities to:

- exert a broad influence in their work
- draw critical parallels between their “school’s vision” and their individual “vision” for student learning outcomes
- engage professional development activities that are formative experiences to improve instructional practice
- situate instructional reflection as a school climate factor with wide-scope educator professional responsibility
- participate in identifiable areas of shared leadership where educators take an equal role
- contribute to school culture where school-leadership fosters openness, respect, and integrity and where principals value teacher contributions.

The interview questions were designed so that the “why” teacher leaders’ implementation of instructional leadership practice could be captured without requiring a defensive stance on professional conduct. Key words used by participants as indicators of “why” they served as instructional leaders are categorized to this study’s conceptual framework (King & Bouchard, 2011, see Figure 1):

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- Program Coherence (Newmann, Smith, Allensworth, & Bryk, 2001): designing the things necessary/background work, underpinnings that enable, really cut across the curriculum, just bearing fruit, real genuine commitment
- Distributed Leadership: invited to the table to have a voice, driving things here, really powerful thing, not in charge/learn together as a team
- Professional Community: everybody could be on board, enrich the school community, leadership team gets it, bring other people along, impact on the culture
- Teacher’s Knowledge Skills, and Dispositions: bring my prior experience, draw on the strength, ability to differentiate/tailor
- Technical Resources: fixture at the school, manifest itself in a school

This is not an exhaustive list, by any means, of the expressions indicating why teachers

implement instructional leadership practice. These expressions do indicate why teacher leaders

find instructional teacher leadership experiences rewarding.

The following themes emerged as the “how” instructional leadership is exhibited among teacher leaders. Instructional teacher leaders:

- use professional development training cadres, go through train-the-trainer programs, with information filtered back to other teachers (exhibit program coherence)
- schedule additional human capital resources in a school schedule and co-present it for adoption (exhibit program coherence)
- bring individual teacher research experiences to the classroom, implement them throughout the school curriculum, run workshops so that the experiences remain a part of

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the curriculum programming of the school utilized by all teachers (exhibit program coherence)

- coach new teachers, model some of the specific instructional practices of the specialized subject matter, and collaborate with administrators to determine what was and wasn't working (utilize specialized knowledge, skills, and dispositions)
- collaborate around instructional reflection with other instructors; facilitate in creating daily to-do lists, figuring next lessons, or detailing what is succeeding in the classroom in a greater scale (utilize specialized knowledge, skills, and dispositions)
- coordinate school and community events by collaborating with regional resources, law enforcement, rental supply vendors, food vendors, parking authorities, and prize givers, etc. (utilize specialized knowledge, skills, and dispositions)
- change school procedures such as school safety patrol programs, special subject activities; tie them to academic rewards programs with specific learning outcomes (contribute to distributed leadership)
- engage in broad instructional improvement goals that shape the district's school culture in addressing instructional improvement (contribute to distributed leadership)
- immerse themselves in community liaison experiences to enhance instructional practice to serve their students (contribute to distributed leadership)

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REFERENCES (findings summary partial)

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