Article Synthesis

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Christian educational leadership is an exciting field to be in. Perhaps no other time in history have we had more opportunities and resources to navigate this complex arena. This makes it both exciting, and sometimes, a bit overwhelming. This article synthesizes several articles on educational leadership. In the first section we observe signs that indicate you might be a teacher leader. The second section compiles a variety of methods for improving professional development within the school, and final section briefly discusses some end results of Christian education.

Do you ever wish you could help others teachers in your school? If so, it might be an indication that you are ready to be a teacher leader (Ratzel, 2014). In her article, *5 Telltale Signs You’re Becoming a Teacher Leader,* Marsha Ratzel encourages teachers to embrace and recognize the signs that they are becoming teacher leaders. Helping other teachers does not have to be formal, it can be as easy as sharing ideas and lesson plans with someone (Harrison and Killion, 2007). On the other hand it might be a more formal professional development workshop or professional learning community (PLC). Do collogues come to you for advice? Do you like looking at big picture solutions? Are you passionate about learning new practices in education? If so, Ratzel suggests you step forward and become a teacher leader that will benefit both your school and community.

Teacher leaders can be instructional specialists, curriculum specialists, or simply a classroom supporter that helps implement new ideas (Harrison & Killion, 2007). Teacher leaders need to be able to do many things, including training other teachers in the school day, leading and discussing student achievement, attendance, and discipline in a way that is non-confrontational and helpful (Brown, 2014). Remember, you don’t always have to go solo. A study done by Klein et al. (2018) found that instead of looking at teacher leadership from the perspective of an individual, it is more helpful and beneficial to view the leadership as a series of interactions and relationships taking place in linked concepts. This is no doubt from the fact that we are created as relational beings. We enjoy and thrive when we have others to connect with.

While some teachers may take the initiative to become a teacher leader, it is much more likely that they will become a teacher leader with a little encouragement from a principal or administrator. In her article *The Case for Teacher-Led Improvement*, Laquanda Brown (2014) argues that principals are the primary leaders in building a school were teachers become leaders. Principals usually have specific training in their area of expertise, and setting up teams of teacher leaders can surface skills and knowledge that one person alone could never do. Brown says that administrators need to develop instructional capacity among staff. The hard part of this job comes in the application, how exactly should principals do this? A study done by Pitre, Price, and Koch-Patterson (2017) suggest that teacher leaders need to be able to translate theoretical ideas into practical applications. Brown suggest that principals should let other staff members offer input and solutions. Principals can obstruct this process by failing to delegate responsibilities or delegate leadership responsibilities without adequate support (Hunzicker, 2017). This obviously suggest that principals should delegate and ensure support to increase program effectiveness.

Another suggestion offered by Brown (2014) is that principals should cultivate and environment were teachers feel comfortable asking questions, offering suggestions, and providing and receiving feedback. Willis and Templeton (2017) state that establishment of PLC’s will be more effective if teachers trust leaders and they provide consistent leadership.

Why PLC’s? We have all been at workshops where the speaker presented lots of great idea. We liked the ideas. We went back to our classrooms. We saw all our work. We forgot all the great ideas. While this may sound a pessimistic, studies show that traditional workshop professional development (PD) is often ineffective (Gulamhussein, 2013). Gulamhussein (2013) goes on to say that learning new approaches is not the most difficult part for teachers, it is the implementation of these ideas. Unsurprisingly then, long term PLCs, are more effective than once-and-done workshops. Darling-Hammond, Hyler, and Gardner (2017) define successful PD as, “structured professional learning that results in changes in teacher practices and improvements in student learning outcomes” (Defining and Studying Effective Professional Development section, para. 1). How then should schools go about implementing PLCs?

Myers and Rafferty (2014) in their article, *Moving up from Mediocre,* describe how their school district implemented professional learning communities (PLCs) as the framework for increasing student achievement. They describe five strategies that were beneficial for implementing district wide PCLs. Strategy one, ambitious aims. In order to launch their educational reforms School District 54 formed a committee, the committee then drew up the specific goals to work toward (Myers & Rafferty, 2014). Smaller schools and especially private school may not have the resources and personnel to form a committee. However, they are not without hope. Willis and Templeton (2017) investigated the role of principals in establishing PLC’s in rural schools. Their findings suggest that principals need to cultivate buy in and mutual trust from faculty members, and must intentionally connect the PLC’s to organizational changes (Willis & Templeton, 2017). These finding support the experiences of School District 54. Myers and Rafferty, in their second strategy, describe how the schools with teacher buy-in had quick and smooth progress. The schools that had skeptical faculty were provided with support personnel and PD meetings that were focused on the value and implementation of effective PLC programs (Myers & Rafferty, 2014). This collaborative endeavor is closely associated with their third strategy, support structures.

Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) found that effective PLC’s incorporate coaching and expert support by sharing expertise and focusing on individual needs. Harris and Rosenman (2017) found that protocol steps and roles help increase the efficiency and effectiveness of these meetings. They recommend that participants take turns rotating roles: the presenter, facilitator, and participant (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). In addition to providing support structure it is also important that follow up occurs. Myers and Rafferty, (2014) call this scheduled dialogue.

Myers and Rafferty (2014) state that to effect changes principals and teacher leaders, who are essential for its success, visited other schools, held collaborative meeting, and provided cross subject dialogues. In addition, Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) state that effective PD should include sustained collaboration. Teachers need adequate time to practice, implement, and reflect about the new strategies and suggestions that they are given (Darling-Hammond et al. 2017). “Effective implementation requires educators to engage in ongoing staff development.” (Myers & Rafferty, 2014, p. 292). This collaboration process gives teachers the time to reflect on the intentions and implications in their teaching (Svendsen, 2017). Although the initiation and implementation may complicated, and context and situationally dependent, it can have a great impact on the success of your school. School principals and teacher leaders, it is time we take the overwhelming, make it exciting, and begin implementing methods that will develop students that are equipped to serve the Lord.

Glenn Schultz in his book, *Kingdom education: God’s plan for educating future generations,* outlines three ways to facilitate this. Shultz (2006) says it is important that our students know Jesus Christ as their savior, are continually transformed into the image of Christ, and are fully equipped to serve Christ in everyday life. To instill these outcomes into our children they need to have a proper worldview. By worldview I mean, “the underlying belief system held by an individual that determines his/her attitude and actions in life” (Kinel, Gibbs, & Berry, eds., 1995). How important is it? Moore (2014) states, “The distinctive key of Christian education is the effective practice of worldview integration” (p. 258).

To best equip our students we need to be aware of the philosophies that shape society around us. Albert Greene (1998) in his book *Reclaiming the Future of Christian Education*, calls us to look at the way the 18th century enlightenment has altered the course of history. In this movement a shift from the word of God to science and economics has occurred, no longer is the word of God the truth but only what we can see and prove through the scientific method (Greene, 2003). Educating the mind *about* worldviews and God is not enough. We want our curriculum to change the heart as well as the mind. It needs to "enhance understandings needed for exercising responsive discipleship." (van Brummelen, 2002, p. 16). James Smith (2009) says humans are primarily lovers and therefor education needs to be focused on cultivating people's loves (their hearts). How do they do this? Primarily through way we view the subjects and our school culture.

How then should principal, teacher leaders, and educators apply these ideas, theories, and practices? Each setting and group of people is different, there is no one answer. However, building a good relationship is an excellent place to begin. Studies show that student learning is directly connected to the strength of teacher-student relation (McMaster, 2103). I don’t believe it is a stretch to apply the statement to principle-teacher relationship as well. Education is both exciting and complex, but with the work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of believers we can continue raising a generation that seeks to give back their lives for the one that gave His.

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