Teacher Leadership

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Exploring the relationship between research universities and schools, Lieberman asks us to think seriously about the real meaning of collaboration and of how real, not just credentialed, teacher leaders can be developed. She points out many things we have already found out about the characteristics and learning experiences that good teacher leaders have and how detached university faculties have been from the schools.

I would like to respond to two central thrusts of the Holmes Group report and the Report of the Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy's Task Force on Teaching as a Profession. Both call for *teacher leadership* as a means of reforming the teaching profession and for some form of closer relations between schools and universities through *collaboration*. Although they are discussed here as separate thrusts, they are intimately linked. Working with school people is not the same as prescribing for them. One suggests participation, working together, and a linking of forces while the other suggests an aloof, all-knowing, imperious stance. Both reports call for the former, but the latter more accurately represents the past and present of the research university and its relationship to schools. Using the concept of teacher leadership as described in the reports, let us explore what additional knowledge and understandings might inform and begin to fill the apparent gap between the university and the schools.

A FAMILIAR ADAGE—THE MORE THINGS CHANGE, THE MORE THEY REMAIN THE SAME

We are beginning to gather some solid evidence that teacher leadership, knowledge, and skills are the result of a great deal of experience (only a small piece of which has to do with formal learning in an academic setting). An assumption of both reports is that there will be teacher leaders and that they will have advanced degrees, licenses, or something of the sort, to set them apart from Professional Teachers. Presumably they will not only be responsible for working with new teachers, but will provide a significant leadership function to experienced teachers as well.

How will these people be selected? How will they learn to be leaders? Who will teach them? What will they need to know or do to become leaders? Will

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there now be a credential in teacher leadership or a doctorate in it? One reading of the Holmes report might suggest that research universities could control who will become Career Professionals by providing the credentialing for such a position. Courses could be mounted, perhaps a "field-oriented" dissertation would be a requirement, so many years of teaching experience, working on a districtwide curriculum committee, and so forth. Maybe an action research project would be included. The university in this case would only need to justify the requirements and convince the states that such a requirement would indeed help "professionalize" teaching. Nothing would change in the university. Most professors would continue to do their own research, hold themselves aloof from what goes on in schools—and their administration would feel satisfied that they were participating in the reform of teacher education.

Similarly, in terms of collaboration, research universities could create "partnerships" with a group of school districts. School districts could justify the collaboration because they would be working with a "prestige university" and the university teams could say that they were working with school districts that represented a laboratory of the entire population of the state.

The university could offer lectures, courses, and workshops and the school people could come to them. Occasional conferences could have both university and school people on the rostrum. But is this any different from what we have had in the past?

THE CREATION OF TEACHER LEADERSHIP ROLES

In practice, teacher leadership roles of various kinds are already being created in urban and suburban schools alike. Opportunities to work with school districts and professional associations helping to create and understand these models are already available, although only a handful of people in the research universities are involved in these activities. What is important to our discussion here is to understand the questions that are already being raised and the knowledge that is already being produced and to ask why more people from research universities are not involved.

THE TEACHER SPECIALIST AS A CASE EXAMPLE

I use one such example to illustrate my point. The New York City Teacher Center Consortium (NYCTCC), under the leadership of Myrna Cooper of the United Federation of Teachers (UFT), has created a model of teacher leadership that is eight years old. It has already accrued an enormous amount of experience concerning teacher leadership in a large urban metropolis. Several interesting principles underlie this teacher leadership model.

The Problem of Selection

Specialists have been chosen for their jobs through nominations by teachers and principals in their own schools. Then they have been put through a screening process that includes interviews and simulations. As part of the process, the selection committee has looked for people who understand the teacher's perspective, a perspective that recognizes that teachers have many different styles and learn in many different ways; most importantly, that teachers are peers, not to be judged but rather involved in defining the kind of help they themselves need. It seems that those who become teacher leaders need not only good technical skills, but legitimacy from within their own ranks as well.

The Problem of Experience

Specialists have had experience working as teachers on several grade levels and as grade-level coordinators. They have had strong backgrounds in developing curriculum content. All have advanced degrees. Many have been active in community and political organizations and have very strong organizational skills. They also have strong human qualities—such as being good listeners, who are lively, positive, and outgoing.[1] Their experience has already differentiated them from those who have had more limited school experience. These people have also sought experiences outside of teaching that give them a broader view of their culture. Differentiated roles then means not just a different degree, or more years of teaching, but a broader view of the classroom, the school, and the society. Unlike medicine, perhaps those who stay in education but who seek and are chosen for other responsibilites develop qualities of leadership that may have nothing to do with a formal degree or a set of courses.

A Well-Developed Ideological Stance

Specialists are members of a cohort organized by the UFT. They have developed a strong ideological stance toward working in a nonjudgmental fashion. This does not mean that they do not take positions about good teaching, but that they take teachers where they are and work with them in a collaborative fashion to expose them to growth opportunities, research, and the best that is known about good teaching practice. They model professionalism by their own continuous inquiry, expanded repertoire, and high standards for what it means to be a teacher.

Strong Interpersonal Skills

Specialists have been studied as part of a larger group of assisters working in urban school improvement programs. Some significant findings include the fact that the key skills of people who play these roles turn out to be in

the areas of social interaction. Effective assisters know how to build trust and rapport, are interpersonally effective, and generally work well with people.[2] Legitimating one's position in a school culture, often characterized by a bureaucratic rather than a professional orientation, turns out to be a key to the successful work of these leaders. They learn to weave their way around the culture, working well with principals while maintaining a strong teacher stance.

Context as a Critical Variable

The issue of context is critical. These people work in a large urban metropolis. Would it be the same in a rural school or a staid suburban setting? The need to adapt to the context and learn sensitivity to the particular culture—especially when one is attempting to change the status quo—makes demands on people that we are just beginning to understand. It appears that these roles cannot be divorced from the context within which they are created. These teacher leaders and their modes of working are as complex as the study of teaching itself. They learn through formal learning experiences, but their value orientation, their on-the-job experiences, their continued development encouraged by a growing sense of professionalism and success in helping their fellow colleagues, are critical. It follows then that if university people are to participate in this wave of reform, they must be involved in these contexts. Collaborative research, new ways of understanding professional practice, sustained involvement in cooperative working relations, experimentation—all need to be supported.

But are research universities really willing to examine their connection to professional practice? When Harry Judge wrote his book critiquing the research universities for their distance from "the field" four years ago, the response was to review it in the journals. Did anything really change?[3]

OTHER EXAMPLES

Successful models of teacher leadership are already being practiced in many places around the country. Early findings appear to show that these models are being created in school contexts, that they are heavily dominated by a "helping" stance, are part of helping to build a more professional climate in schools, are accepted by teachers, can be institutionalized, and can be collaboratively mounted by professional associations working with state and local school authorities. There are both full- and part-time models as well as teacher leaders in special education.[4] Where these differentiations of teacher role have failed, the reforms have blatantly ignored the importance of real, not symbolic, teacher involvement in the creation of policy, and in selection and implementation of models. Where the reform has led to competition rather than collaboration, it has engendered frustration and eventual failure.[5]

THE ROLE OF THE RESEARCH UNIVERSITY

What is the role of the research university in the study, understanding, or conceptualization of these roles? So far work done on either legitimating or creating ways to study professional practice has been slow in coming.

It is the rare research university that encourages its professors to spend their time describing professional practice and, even more rare, rewards them for such efforts. Being connected to professional practice, like teaching as an occupation, appears to be held in low esteem. Will research universities reward professors for spending their time "in the field" trying to understand these new roles? Will research universities encourage and be open to the growth of new methodologies that will encourage school people to become their own data collectors? Will research universities continue to define the researcher's problems as the only ones suitable for inquiry? (I once introduced a doctoral student to AERA as a means of expanding her horizons. After four days of sessions she remarked to me, "I believe that if all the schools in America sank in the Pacific Ocean, AERA members wouldn't even blink.") Will an article in *Educational Leadership* read by thousands of school people and teacher educators mean as much as an article in the *American Educational Research Journal*?

Collaborative study was once a part of at least one well-known research university. The Horace Mann–Lincoln Institute for School Experimentation at Teachers College was set up by Hollis Caswell to do collaborative research and experimentation for the improvement of elementary and secondary education. A group of professors worked with schools, developed curiculum, and organized teams of school people to work on *their definitions* of *their problems*. A wealth of literature emanated from this group.[6] We have at least one model that was very successful, in terms of both school improvements and the respected work of the researchers.

Can it be legitimated again? Will these reports give legitimacy and courage to the leadership of research universities to work differently with schools? Will at least some of the research community be encouraged to work with schools in real cooperative ventures? These questions can be answered only by bold initiatives that start at the top where the leadership encourages, rewards, and models a different kind of participation with public schools and where teacher educators are willing to participate, learn, and become sensitive to another culture quite different from their own.

If research universities continue to tell school people what to do without examining and improving their own institutions, the Holmes report will rightfully be critiqued for being "elitist." It will be seen as a rationalization for the university to "capture" future teacher education programs and new credentials for teacher leaders.

But it can also be viewed as a rare opportunity to reshape teacher education, to work on creating new roles, new structures, new methods of inquiry

—for both the schools and the university. My fear is that these reports may seem to many in the university a rationale for "doing business as usual." My hope is that they will stimulate new support for experimentation and leadership in the creation of real collaborative work between research universities and schools.

Notes

1 Lin A. Goodwin and Ann Lieberman, "Effective Assister Behavior: What They Brought and What They Learned" (paper delivered at the American Educational Research Association in Chicago, April 1984).

2 Matthew B. Miles, Ellen Saxl, and Ann Lieberman, "Key Skills of Educational 'Change Agents': An Empirical View" (submitted to *Curriculum Inquiry*, 1986).

3 Harry Judge, "American Graduate Schools of Education: A View from Abroad" (a monograph for Ford Foundation, New York, 1982).

4 A. Harry Passow and Ann Lieberman, *Special Educator Support Program Evaluation Report 1985–86* (New York: Teachers College, Columbia University, June 1986); and Judith Warren Little, Priscilla Galagaran, and Rudelle O'Neal, *Professional Development Roles and Relationships: Principles and Skills of "Advising"* (San Francisco: Far West Laboratory, November 1984).

5 Susan J. Rosenholtz, "Political Myths about Educational Reform," *Phi Delta Kappan* 66, no. 5 (January 1985): 349–55.

6 See, for example, Alice Miel, *Cooperative Procedures in Learning* (New York: Bureau of Publications, Teachers College, Columbia University, 1952); Stephen Corey, *Action Research to Improve School Practices* (New York: Teachers College, Columbia University, 1953); A. Harry Passow et al. *Training Curriculum Leaders for Cooperative Research* (New York: Bureau of Publications, Teachers College, 1955); Florence B. Stratemeyer, Hamden Forkner, and Margaret G. McKim, *Developing a Curriculum for Modern Living* (New York: Bureau of Publications, Teachers College, Columbia University, 1947); and Arthur T. Jersild, *Child Development and the Curriculum* (New York: Bureau of Publications, Teachers College, Columbia University, 1946).