

Teachers' Voices in Constructing Leadership to Enhance Student Success

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Introduction

As teachers assume greater responsibility for students' academic performance, expectations about their professional participation also expand. Prior research suggests that teachers perform additional non-teaching roles such as team leader, mentor, facilitator, and the like (Ovando, 1996; Schmidt, 1996; Schmoker & Wilson, 1994). However, there is a need for further research that focuses on teachers' voices when teachers want and need to become involved in leadership decisions about how and what to teach in order to enhance student academic success. Understanding teachers' voices as they actively participate in school reform is critical. School reform decisions must involve not only central office personnel but also campus leadership including teachers.

Teacher involvement in campus leadership has been documented to some extent. On one hand, research indicates that teacher leadership has the potential to significantly contribute to school restructuring (Boles, 1992), to empower teachers to influence decisions (Couchenour & Dimono, 1999), and to provide teachers with opportunities and challenges as they attempt to perform dual roles teacher and leader (Ovando, 1996). Others, on the other hand, report that when they are assigned teacher-leader duties, teachers may encounter obstacles, and loss of collegiality (Yoder, 1994). While some suggest that teachers may not be prepared for the demands associated with leadership (Teitel, 1996). Others affirm that teacher leadership, when used properly, may serve as a catalyst for school reform (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 1996). Although a few studies have addressed school reform from a principal perspective, few efforts have enlisted teachers to lead school reform efforts despite the expectation that teachers must embrace change (Lieberman & Miller, 1999). Similarly, studies that focus on teachers who desire and later become involved in decisions leading to a faculty-led reform are limited. This

paper presents the results of a study focusing on teachers' efforts to undertake a school reform endeavor in a single elementary school. This study only sought to determine how and when teachers engage in leadership and what teacher-led strategies led to effective school-based reform. It was conducted as part of a major school-based reform project undertaken by a collaborative inquiry effort between the school and a team of researchers from a major university.

Background of the Study

Two bodies of literature serve as the foundational background for this study, that of teacher leadership and that of school reform, which supports the role of the teachers as instrumental in achieving effective school-based reform.

Teacher Leadership

Teacher involvement in campus leadership is not a new phenomenon. Teacher leadership requires that teachers perform both teaching and leading duties. Teachers have played traditional teacher leadership roles such as department heads, grade level chairs and the like. Most recently, teachers have engaged in additional leading roles such as team leader, committee chair, and mentor.

Prior studies suggest that there are several benefits associated with teacher leadership. For instance Weiss affirms that "increased teacher participation in school leadership generates a sense of ownership, advances professionalism, and allows for greater control over the decision process" (See Ovando, 1996). Further, when teachers engage in site-based decisions, they become committed to shared values, ideals and develop a sense of ownership and they begin to think in terms of "my school" rather than "my classroom" (Ovando, 1996).

According to Miller & O'Shea "when teachers take leadership in matters of instruction and school organization, authentic change happens (1992, p. 197). Similarly, when teachers participate in the selection of new teachers, teachers make sure that the candidates' belief system is congruent with the school's vision, and as a result teachers are in better position to convey the school philosophy to the new teachers (Couchenour & Dimono, 1999).

Other benefits resulting from teacher participation in campus decision making have been highlighted by prior research. For instance, Meier found that an increased motivation to change, increased self-esteem, creative problem-solving, increased assertiveness, enhanced commitment to the students and the school, a better understanding of children's needs, and a higher regard for professional development emerge as a result of teacher involvement (1995).

It has also been reported that teachers in a school need to work in teams in order to eliminate the "isolating nature of classroom teaching" (Boles, 1992, p. 174). Further, it is suggested that when a change is conceived, designed, and developed from within, through a team effort, such a change may have a higher rate of success (Boles, 1992).

On the other hand, few studies have documented that teacher-leaders encounter a number of obstacles that often times preclude them from fully engaging in school endeavors that call for teacher leadership in school reform. According to Teitel (1996) teacher-leaders may face the need to redefine their relationship with those in position of authority, to understand their own attitudes towards those who resist change, to develop leadership skills, to cope with isolation and to find the courage to persist. As teacher-leaders may play an important role in school reform, they also have specific development needs that must be met in order for them to fully contribute to school success. Most recently, it was found that teacher-leaders need support for the development of organization, time management, and communication skills (Mack, 2002).

Moreover, others argue that a conflict that may prevent teacher-leaders from playing a more active role in school reform efforts is that of lack of trust and support from the school principal (Lieberman, 1988). Similarly, Weiss, Cambone & Wyeth (1992) report that teachers face conflicts in shared decision-making and their relationship with their principal may deteriorate. More recently, however, a leadership paradigm has emerged, that of shared leadership. New models of shared leadership and teacher empowerment have expanded leadership responsibilities for teachers and have created new roles for school principals (Portin & Williams, 1996). As a result, there has been an attempt to change the organizational culture of school from one that promotes adversarial relationships between and among teachers and principals to one that encourages collaboration, collegiality, and commitment (Lieberman, Saxl & Miles (1996).

Consequently, it seems that principals alone will not be able to achieve success for all students. Researchers affirm that shared leadership has emerged due to the fact today's schools face more complex challenges and issues (Katzmeyer & Moller, 1996; Sergiovanni, 1995). No single individual in schools has all the knowledge and capacity to lead changes and school reform that may truly enhance teaching and learning in a way that all students can be successful. Therefore, principals must set the standard for continuous learning and professionalism (Ash & Persall, 2000), and encourage teachers to enhance their capacity so that they may play a key leadership role in decision-making and school reform.

School reform

School reform has taken several forms in the last decade, rendering unfruitful results. For instance, efforts to decentralize schools have called for teacher and other campus personnel to take an active role to introduce changes and to make decisions that may lead to better student

achievement. However, few change efforts have been successful and several myths associated with change continue to exist. According to Fullan & Miles (1992) there are seven reasons why reforms are not successful. These include: faulty maps of change, complex problems, symbols over substance, impatient and superficial solutions, misunderstanding resistance, attrition of pockets of success, and misuse of knowledge about the change process. (Fullan & Miles, 1992, p. 745-748).

Furthermore, school reforms also tend to fail because of the top-down approaches that most have embraced. When top-down directives dictate change and faculty do not support the effort, studies have shown a high incidence of failure (Pettigrew, 1973). Such reforms efforts usually lack the commitment and support from school-based personnel including teachers. As Fullan affirms, "neither top-down nor bottom-up strategies for educational reform work. What is needed is a more sophisticated blend of the two." (1994, p. 1). Top-down reform efforts also tend to ignore campus level realities and demands, which should be addressed in order to meet the various specific needs of students. Furthermore, mandatory solutions tend to cause reactions at the local level that may resist the implementation of such solutions, thus creating conflict rather than commitment from campus leadership, including principals and teachers. Resistance to change may also be created by ignoring the voices of those who will actually be in charge of change implementation, namely teachers. As Maurer notes:

Often those who resist have something important to tell us. People resist for what they view as good reasons. They may see alternatives we never dreamed of. They may understand problems about the minutiae of implementation that we never see from our lofty perch atop Mountain Olympus (1996, p. 49).

While, principal leadership for school reform is a key component, we must acknowledge the fact that reform is a complex endeavor, which requires a different kind of school leadership.

A school leadership that calls for leaders for change who:

“...Get involved as learners in real reform situations. They craft their own theories of change, consistently testing them against new situations. They become critical consumers of management theories, able to sort out promising ideas from empty ones. They become less vulnerable and less dependent on external answers. They stop looking for solutions in the wrong places” (Fullan, 1998, 8).

Given the current accountability pressures, school leaders and teachers must also pay attention to student achievement results. As experts in the field affirm,

Educational leaders must directly address state policy that results in student performance data being generated and published. The way to deal with potential misuses of student performance data is to become assessment-literate.

Schools put themselves in the driver's seat when they invest in professional development and collaborative cultures that focus on student learning and associate improvements in instructional practices (Fullan, 1998, p. 9).

Consequently, school principals should stop looking at external school reform solutions that aim at student achievement success. They should consider research that suggests that student achievement increases substantially in schools with collaborative school culture that promotes a professional learning community among teachers and others and focus continuously on improving instructional practice in light of student performance data (Wehlage, 1995). Similarly, principals must embrace an inclusive leadership stand and avoid high dependence on campus

leadership teams only. As Elmore, observes “small groups of selected reformers apparently seldom influence their peers” (1995, p. 20).

A true challenge for school reformers and for school principals “is not to arrive at early consensus, but to create opportunities for learning from dissonance.” (Fullan, 1996, p. 8). Thus, enlisting school personnel and teachers to focus on campus-specific difficult problems becomes an imperative of school reform. “Instead of looking for saviors we should be calling for leadership that will challenge us to face problems for which there are no simple painless solutions--problems that require us to learn in new ways” (Heifitz, 1993, p. 2).

The literature suggests that successful school reform efforts tend to mobilize teachers as key players, sharing the leadership responsibility and tasks associated with the introduction, implementation and evaluation of changes to enhance teaching and learning. According to Fullan and Miles, one of the essential ingredients for successful change is the management of change. They assert that:

“The management of change goes best when it is carried out by a cross-role group (say, teachers, department heads, administrators, and often –students and parents). In such a group, different worlds collide, more learning occurs, and change is realistically managed. There is much evidence that steering a change effort in this way results in substantially increased teacher commitment.” Fullan & Miles, 1992, p. 751).

While teacher participation, commitment, and leadership are considered to be key elements of school reform, researchers affirm that few efforts have empowered teachers to lead school reform despite the expectation that teachers must embrace all changes (Lieberman & Miller, 1999). Similarly, prior studies have documented the benefits associated with teachers contributions and leadership to school-based management (Mack, 2000; Ovando, 1996; Teitel,

1996). However, few have focused on how empowered teachers work to collaborate outside of their classroom and to create and achieve whole-school academic achievement. Furthermore, studies that look at teachers voices, at what strategies teachers use to create change within the school setting and how teachers influence their peers and others in a faculty led reform effort are limited.

Methodology

This study focused on how and when teachers engage in campus leadership to enhance student success as measured by The Texas Assessment of Academic Skills, and what teacher-led strategies make school-based reform effective in a single urban school. A faculty-led school reform was defined as a change process in which the faculty assumed a leadership role in directing a reform effort within their school. This study employed an action research (Argyris, Putnam & McLain Smith, 1985) approach with a single case design (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Further, this single case study was assumed to be an information-rich case. "Information-rich case studies are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research..." (Patton, 1990, p. 169). Many factors influenced this study design. These included the continued demand for accountability, the lessons learned from the literature regarding effective school reform and the expressed desires of the teachers in building a faculty-led reform. The intent was to understand the social, cultural, and organizational settings as well as how change influences how teachers and administrators interact (Lincoln, & Guba, 1985).

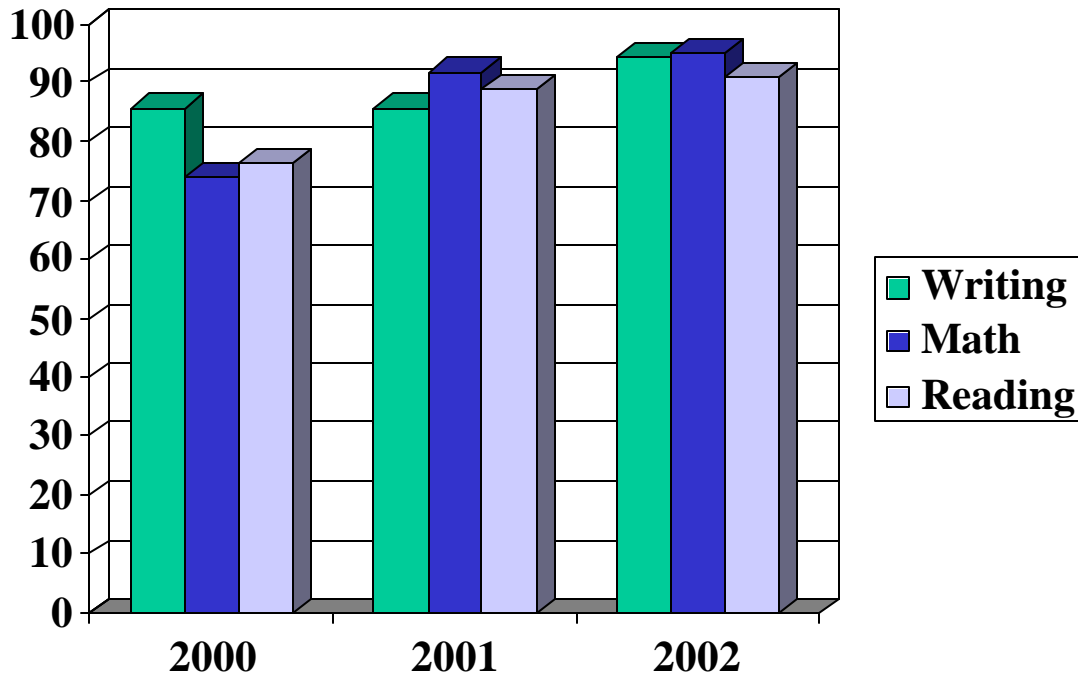
Participants of the study included 30 full-time teachers, whose teaching experience ranged from new teachers (less than 3 years) to more experienced teachers (20 years and above) and included the two administrators of an urban elementary school located in central Texas with a student population of about 400 students. The student population is predominantly minority,

95% or more Hispanic. More than 85% of the students come from low-income families. The school serves students in pre-kindergarten through grade six.

Between the fall of 1993 and spring of 2000, the student achievement scores remained low as reflected in its Texas accountability system's rating of "Acceptable" for seven consecutive years. In Texas, there are four distinct ratings: Unacceptable (below 55%), Acceptable (55% or better), Recognized (80% or better), and Exemplary (90% or better). In response to the call for excellence in schools and the accountability movement of recent years, the district also acknowledged the school's development need and therefore bestowed extra teacher development days. The principal seized the moment and set one very challenging goal for the school: *to become a top-performing, "Exemplary" school by the spring of 2003*. This goal was quickly achieved in the year 2002 and the school gained exemplary status. This achievement can be observed in Table 1.

Achievement scores by school year

Table # 1



The school had an established relationship with the Educational Productivity Council (EPC) within a major university. Every year under a Texas Education Agency (TEA) grant, the EPC analyzes the TAAS data from approximately sixty participating school districts and produces reports containing easily understood tables, bar graphs, and charts. The schools find the data analysis useful because it illustrates change over time by school, by classroom, by student, and by TAAS objective.

Every year, the EPC conducts workshops for teachers and administrators on how to interpret their tables, graphs, and charts. By studying the test results, teachers are able to identify their school's cumulative areas of strength and weakness. The data is confidential, and teachers

can see how their scores compare to other Texas schools. The teachers and administrators tend to be particularly interested in data from schools with similar demographics.

Individually, teachers are presented the confidential data, which pertains to their classroom. When teachers analyze the results by objective, they can identify where to focus attention to increase their classroom scores as a whole and also where to devise a plan to meet individual student needs.

Principals can use the data to recognize the effectiveness of teachers, to identify master teachers and build a plan to capitalize upon their strengths. These “master” teachers can become resources to help other teachers offering teaching tips in a workshop setting or by co-teaching in the classroom. Shared teaching can offer another viable solution to maximize the use of teachers' capabilities. Teachers can trade classroom responsibilities and share their strengths.

Taking that relationship into consideration, and knowing that the district and the teachers wanted to improve instruction for their students, the principal invited a research team to help create a strategy to improve student achievement scores so that the school could achieve Exemplary status within the next three years. To reach this goal, the school had to increase its performance rating from Acceptable, through Recognized, to Exemplary status.

Data collection instrumentation included focus groups and interviews with teachers and principals, participant observations and field notes. These were completed through four phases, 1) Goal setting (First Round), 2) reform planning and implementation, 3) Goal setting (Second Round) and 4) Evaluation.

Data analysis was completed following qualitative guidelines. The most useful method to organize and sort non-numerical data is coding. Coding was conducted using the Interactive Qualitative Analysis (IQA) conceptualized by Northcutt, Miles, Robins & Ellis (1999). The IQA

provides a systems approach to qualitative research through three types of coding, inductive coding, deductive coding and theoretical coding. This method has evolved from both phenomenology which refers to “how the people experience and perceive the experience of the phenomenon under study (Glesne, 1997, p. 7), and post modernism which contends that reality is socially constructed (Scheurich, 1997). According to Northcutt, et al. (1999), the IQA uses a systems approach to capture the “lived reality of people and involve the participants in the study of the meaning of their stories, the identification of constructs and relationships, and the development of theory.”

Entry to the school was opposed at the beginning. When the research team and the principal met the faculty in a staff meeting to inform them of the proposed idea to help the teachers increase student achievement, many of the teachers reacted negatively. From prior experience, they were “fed up” with failed academic programs. They thought that the research team was offering another “project-of-the-month” upset them. The teachers’ reactions included negative remarks about “stealing” their time, and “why bother, nothing ever changes,” and pointed to other programs where a lack of commitment led to failed efforts and were ultimately considered a waste of time. One teacher summed up their thoughts, which was the defining crux of this project, when she stated, “I don’t mean to offend you, but we [the teachers] didn’t invite you to help us. The principal invited you.”

The principal and the research team were surprised by the teachers’ reactions. An assumption had been made that the teachers would welcome an opportunity to improve the achievement scores. The research team recognized that the teachers needed to come to terms with this new idea and responded by first acknowledging the teachers’ concerns. After an initial agreement was reached, the teachers wanted the option to say “yes” or “no” to work that directly

affected them. The teachers wanted to be involved in all decision-making processes that led to changes affecting their school and their students. It became evident that to create effective and lasting change at this school, a new approach was necessary. As a result, teachers expressed their voices to build a new reform process specific to the needs of the school and a faculty-led reform had begun.

Findings

The following description of findings is organized in two major sections. The first section presents the findings according to the phases of the study (goals setting (1), reform planning and implementation, goal setting (2), and evaluation. These phases make up the process of the faculty-led school reform. The second one offers a summarized account of the findings relative to the two areas of the study: how and when teachers engage in campus leadership and what teacher-led strategies make school-based reform effective.

Faculty-led school reform

At the goal setting phase, the principal was not invited to attend so that the teachers could express themselves freely. Teachers were asked to write their answers to the following questions: *“When you think about the challenge you’ve been given to achieve exemplary status, what comes to mind in terms of what will it take to accomplish this goal? What tools will be needed, what barriers will be faced?”*

Teachers described several barriers to reform. They started by naming and blaming the administration for the majority of the school’s problems. They complained that they were not being treated professionally, and that they were left out of important planning decisions. They explained that they wanted decision-making power and to be included in the management team. As the discussion unfolded, teachers stated that change was never going to be possible in this

school with this principal. As one teacher put it, “he would just revert back to his old ways in a few days anyway.” Most teachers felt that the administrator had to be changed for the school to improve. Realizing that that was not a viable option, the teachers, after long discussions, decided to work together to improve their school academic achievement.

During this phase a total of 12 factors believed to have potential to facilitate or to block change, emerged. These included knowledgeable and effective leadership, administrative support, teamwork, curriculum alignment, parental involvement, high expectations, student challenges, time, realistic goals, teacher challenges, resources and holistic learning. Once these factors were identified, the focus group described the relationships between factors using if/then statements, this is a form of theoretical coding (Northcutt et al. 1998). This exercise helps determine whether each factor influences other factors or is impacted by other factors and as a result, the primary and intermediary drivers, the intermediary factors, and the primary outcomes can be established in the System Influence Diagram (SID Model). (See **Figure 1**).

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are needed to see this picture.

In the reform planning and implementation phase, the teachers were pleased with the completed SID model. Using this mind-map as a guide the teachers devised an action plan. The teachers used the SID model to determine which factors needed to be addressed toward achieving their goal to increase student achievement. However, the teachers agreed that, first, there was a need for teambuilding. The benefits of teamwork were noted by teachers as follows:

I just felt like all of a sudden, the faculty eye's were opened and we finally thought, oh my gosh, there are possibilities here. When before people were just content and just sat back because that's what we thought that was the way it was supposed to be.

Now, I talk to Kindergarten teachers I never would have talked to. I really gained a lot of respect for the faculty the day of the cards. I thought, 'what in the world are you fools doing here for all these years?' And now, I know; they love the kids and they love their

job, and they're willing to put up with what ever else there is, to do what they love to do. And so, in that respect, I gained a whole lot of respect for them.

... It was only after I had thought about the whole thing for a while that I realized we [faculty] can make the changes ourselves... It goes back to what you said once about people thinking that team work is the most is the most important driver for implementing change. I didn't see how that could possibly be true when you said it. But I sure do now.

Following the team-building effort, the teachers participated in a communication workshop to develop listening skills and respect for one another. After teachers expressed their concern over the difficulty of communicating across the school. As a result, a steering committee was created to serve as the communication vehicle for keeping the reform project on task. A team was created, paying close attention to membership equity and access regarding full representation of grade levels, disciplines, and other demographics. From this point on, ideas would be brought up at either the faculty or the steering committee meetings, but they would not be approved for implementation until the whole faculty voted and consensus was achieved.

Next, teachers engaged in graduate student/teacher research teams to gain more knowledge about literature related to school reform. These teams were organized by categories of factors listed by teachers. These included restructuring and organizing for high student performance, parental involvement and collaboration, student discipline and behavior, leadership and governance, and culturally relevant curriculum.

The next step in this phase was to develop a campus improvement plan (CIP). The principal offered the task to the faculty as he regarded the faculty-led plan seriously. For the first

time, the CIP made sense to the teachers and they took on the assignment with vigor. The plan involved writing goals and objectives for each grade. The teams worked together and developed a plan that all teachers could support. The teachers knew the academic direction they needed to focus on for the next year. They wrote the plan, debated it, and re-wrote it until they had a plan with which the group concurred. The CIP for the school year beginning in 2001 was for the first time, the faculty's plan. However, this plan got lost over the summer break when the assistant principal left the school.

As the deadline to submit the CIP to the district was approaching, the principal presented a new CIP (drafted by the new assistant principal who did not know that the teachers had developed a CIP). The teachers became angry and stated, "these are not our plans." When the teachers found out that the plans they put so much work into were missing, they were adamant about getting them back.

Instead of returning to their old callous attitudes toward the CIP, the teachers felt responsible for recouping the missing plans. The teachers took a shared leadership role, and for the second time reconstructed the CIP plans and forwarded it to the district office in time for the deadline.

Also at the beginning of the same year, the principal announced the addition of a technology teacher, which the teachers opposed because it was not in "their faculty plan." They felt to achieve their school's vision; they needed to add another 5th grade teacher. After some debate, the principal made the change in plans to accommodate the teachers' wishes. Thus, the teachers took the responsibility for their school, their curriculum, and their teaching. They had gained power and knew when to use it.

The second goal setting phase took place the following year. Teachers came together, in a second focus group, to continue their activities related to the reform. The success of the reform relied on the willingness of the teachers to continue to support the effort. This allowed for a pre and post comparison of teachers' attitudes and reactions relative to the reform effort. Teachers were again asked: *“When you think about the challenge you’ve been given to achieve exemplary status, what comes to mind in terms of what will it take to accomplish this goal? What tools will be needed, what barriers will be faced?”*

Since there had been little turnover and change in personnel, most of the teachers provided their responses. Those who could not attend, yet wanted to, were able to write their responses ahead of time and be included in the final analysis. As soon as the analysis of cards was begun, teachers noted differences in the tone of their responses. For instance one teacher noted,

“My first year in the building, I would leave shaking from the faculty meetings because we would be screamed at and [now, there’s no screaming] that’s probably the biggest change I have ever seen and I have never been screamed at before in a faculty meeting.”

During this second focus group session, the teachers also noticed that their needs were expressed in terms of what they could change. The change went from an atmosphere of “you need to” to “we need to.” Teachers comments ranged from “look at this; this is so different!” to “we have come a long way” to “wow, there is no more blaming the principal; now it is about shared leadership.” The participants proceeded through the regrouping process until they reduced the number of emerging categories to the following seven: collaborative leadership,

shared vision, commitment to change, best practices, resource management, time, and parental issues.

The card scoring reached consensus quickly and it was clear the process could be finished immediately. Some teachers, reluctantly, had to leave before the session was ended, however, they were confident that the remaining teachers would complete the process and allowed the process to continue without them. This was evidence of the high level of trust and confidence they had reached as a team. Next, all the if/then statements were written to create the second SID model. The teachers were delighted with the progress. **Figure 2** illustrates the relationship amongst these seven factors.

The fourth phase, that of evaluation, required interviewing teachers at the end of the whole process. The purpose was to determine teachers' perceptions regarding the reform effort and its effect on teachers. Thirteen, randomly selected teachers agreed to be interviewed. All transcriptions and notes were member-checked for verification by the teachers. Teacher interviews yields six categories of factors. These were communications, esprit de corps, support for reform, collaborative leadership, assertiveness, and empowerment.

Participating teachers were, again, asked to write if/then statements to determine if any of the factors influenced other factors or were impacted by any other factors. This relationship is depicted in **Figure 3**.

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are needed to see this picture.

Teacher involvement in campus leadership

Findings indicate that teachers engage in campus leadership when they are faced with the challenge to improve student achievement and they know their voices will be heard. As a teacher observed,

I'm a new teacher. A lot of teachers have been in the school for a really long time and sometimes, I feel like they don't really listen to me. I sometimes get apprehensive to say anything because I think they have more experience and know more, but I do feel like my voice was heard especially in the card activity. I think that is a wonderful way to get everyone's voice heard.

Teachers also engage in campus leadership when they realize that they can work together, in shared leadership mode, to address campus-specific issues. One teacher explained, "If we can

lead ourselves and work together and use... effective leadership, shared leadership, then we can address... time and time problems.”

Findings indicate that teachers also engage in leadership when they know they can have control over changes. Another teacher commented:

We have almost come a full 180 degrees saying, wait a minute, we are the ones who can make the changes and the differences here. That is real huge and I think it is a real positive change to know that finger pointing isn't going to do a thing. You can only change what you can control and that happens to be yourself and the curriculum.

Teachers also engage in leadership when they can claim ownership of their actions, as it was the case with the campus improvement plan. When their “faculty plan” was missing they expressed their anger and stated, “this is not our plans!” As a result the teachers took a leadership role to reconstruct the CIP so that it would reflect their previous work.

Teacher-led strategies for school reform

Findings indicate that teachers may generate strategies that can lead to successful school reform. The data revealed at least 7 teacher-led strategies. These included, collaborative leadership, shared vision, commitment to change, consistency in best practices, time management, and parent information.

Collaborative leadership was reflected in the teachers' willingness and commitment to more teamwork, vertical meetings, better communications, and listening. The teachers accepted the responsibility to lead in order to enhance student learning.

Shared vision emerged as a new concept for the teachers in this reform effort. When the purpose of the reform was fully understood, they all embraced it. The newly developed shared

vision stated: "The school maintains a positive supportive school climate where students, parents and teachers know what is to be learned, value learning, and share responsibility for learning in order to achieve success for all." The teachers agreed that the new shared vision would become their lens to determine whether plans fit the school's reform. They now believe that everyone must be accountable for academic achievement and, in addition, students must be motivated to work towards excellence.

Commitment to change, as expressed by teachers, indicates a change in attitude that evolved as teachers gained confidence once they experienced success in the reform process. Teachers believed more strongly than ever that they were the ones responsible for student success.

Consistency in best practices emerged as another faculty-led strategy. This was evident in the teachers' request for current research information on the topics that were related to school reform. Teachers indicated that consistency in the use of best practices is necessary for students at all levels. Best practices were discussed every time teachers came together to make decisions about the reform.

Time management emerged as a strategy that teachers could actually manage themselves. At a time management workshop, teachers learned to work together even better and discovered new ways to plan for meeting times. Teachers wanted to control their time better, as a teacher asked, "How can we best use our time?" As a result, they came up with five options for future times; 1) Parent Volunteer Plan (one and one half hour to two-hour time blocks, one per month), 2) Special Areas/Librarian Plan (2.25- to 3 hours once a month), 3) Team "In-House-Subs" Plan (all-day team planning, one a day a semester), 4) Start Faculty Meetings at 2:55 (Meetings would begin 10-15 minutes earlier and could end by 3:45, or even 3:30), 5) Lunch meetings (Teachers

decided 20-30 minutes was all that was needed for grade level business meeting. This would occur on as needed-basis, or once every two weeks; the team would decide).

Keeping parents informed was another strategy that emerged from the data. Teachers realized that parents should be educated about local and state expectations for students entering the school. A teacher suggested conducting an "increased number of visits." It was evident that teachers were aware of the importance of parent information. As a Department of Education study reported reading and math scores of low-achieving students rose 40 percent when teachers reached out to families throughout the school year--not just when the child was in trouble (Chase, 2002).

Conclusion

The case study described here offers a picture of a successful reform effort of one urban school located in a central state. Although a prior research has addressed school reform from a principal perspective, few efforts have concentrated on teachers as they led a school reform despite the expectation that teachers must support change (Lieberman & Miller, 1999). Thus, the intent was to document the efforts of teachers who desire and later become involved in decisions leading to a faculty-led reform. This study only sought to determine how and when teachers engage in leadership and what teacher-led strategies have potential for effective school-based reform.

A limitation of the study may result from the use of large group consensus. The decisions made in the large groups may result in groupthink (Johns, 1996). Groupthink happens when group pressure damages the mental clarity people have when others in the group present opposing ideas. Others may disagree but are not willing to debate the group. Although each person has multiple opportunities to bring forward their ideas, they may hesitate to do so in the

large group. When using the IQA, an effort to minimize groupthink was employed by the use of the silent nominal group technique (NGT), a brainstorming tool that encourages individual and group participation.

Other staff developmental programs implemented at the school, as part of the school district's initiatives, may have also partly contributed to the behaviors of the teachers. This study took place in a living and vibrant single school and unknown factors may have influenced the behaviors of the teachers.

The principal's actions might have also influenced the study. Although the reform design was faculty-led, the principal might still have used authoritative power to maneuver behind the scenes to influence the teachers' positions. Superior and/or subordinate perceptions can be manipulated by a number of factors: self-concept, disposition, attitudes, and personality (Moorehead and Griffin, 1992). The principal and the teachers could have used these tactics and not revealed them. Therefore, it was important to verify responses from several data sources. The structure of this study verified the data by using multiple methods of triangulation.

This study moved forward on the basis that the school needed and wanted whole school improvement. The plans for improvement were taken directly from the faculty's focus group. There was no guarantee that their ideas to improve the school would be successful but the majority of the teachers thought their plans could be effective. The teachers chose the programs for improvement because they believed the school would benefit. The study was limited to one school, one case study, and a faculty group of 30 full-time teachers.

This study findings suggest that teachers are willing to be part of a faculty-led reform when they believe that their voices will be truly heard as they engage in a school reform, when they realize that they can work together and adopt a "we" mentality rather than a "you"

mentality. As Harris and Ovando (report, there is no I or you in 'we' (1992). Further, teachers engage in leadership when they can claim ownership of the reform. As research has determined, teachers must have a legitimate role in the school reform if it is to be successful (Lieberman and Miller, 1999; Meier, 1995). In this study, the teachers' opinions were observed for their impact on the outcome of the reform. The inclusion of teachers in the improvement planning process provided better designed, developed, and implemented strategies promoting a more effective means for change. As teachers clearly saw the benefits of change, they became more apt to commit time and effort to the reform (Lieberman and Miller, 1999). Teachers' involvement in the school reform confirmed that, "when teachers work together to transform themselves and their schools, they rediscover why they came into teaching in the first place and why they have persisted. They demonstrate that with adequate resources, both human and material, realities do change" (Lieberman and Miller 1999, p. 90).

Findings of this study also suggest that certain teacher-led strategies have potential to achieve successful school reform. These are collaborative leadership, shared vision, commitment to change, consistency in best practices, time management and keeping parents informed. While these strategies were found to be effective in this faculty-led reform, administrators and teachers must approach a school reform by first acknowledging that schools do have different cultures and behaviors. Administrators and teachers must consider customizing reform strategies to fit their particular school. School leadership must commit time and energy to blend the reform with their school culture.

Given the nature of this single case study, the following propositions are offered to be tested by future investigations.

* Involving teachers in the initial stages of a school reform helps create an environment for success by diminishing negativity.

* Teacher participation in the reform process increases motivation to engage in leadership while it defuses the 'not-invented-here' syndrome.

*Adaptation of change processes and/or to the school's individual culture increases the success of a school reform.

*Problems associated with low-SES can be overcome with shared leadership that is inclusive of administrators and teachers.

* When teachers are involved in the reform process and are asked to share their vast expertise and knowledge of the school experience, teacher commitment increases.

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