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## *Teachers as Leaders*

### *Emergence of a New Paradigm*

*Within every school there is a sleeping giant of teacher leadership, which can be a strong catalyst for making change. By using the energy of teacher leaders as agents of school change, the reform of public education will stand a better chance of building momentum.*

—Marilyn Katzenmeyer &  
Gayle Moller (2001, p. 2)

### **NEEDED: A NEW PARADIGM OF THE TEACHING PROFESSION**

Even a cursory reading of the educational literature leads to the conclusion that the way the teaching profession is currently viewed is ill-founded and out of date—in a word, wrong.

A review of policy developments throughout most of the Western world reveals that the pressures and demands on teachers are greater than in living memory. This is evidenced in heightened parental expectations for individualized programs for their children; the implications of new neurological, genetic, and psychological research for learning and

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child development; duty of care legislation; performance-based pay schemes; and national and international assessment programs; not to mention the challenges associated with the distinctive characteristics of Generation Y. Indeed, a major weekend newspaper has recently devoted its editorial to the challenges confronting teachers as they prepare for a new school term:

Almost 700,000 (students) will answer the rolls . . . this week. . . . Also shining their school shoes will be more than 37,000 teachers, who will shoulder a burden of responsibility second to none. And rarely have they faced so many challenges. Changing community expectations and social patterns have swept away the professional certainties of yesterday . . . teachers are increasingly expected to step into the mentoring void created by inadequate parenting. Classroom relationships and dynamics are changing at a startling pace, and this year will represent a steep learning curve for teachers, children and the community as a whole. (*The Sunday Mail*, January 27, 2008, p. 60)

But, regardless of the ever-increasing complexity of teachers' work and in spite of their increasing credentials and professional maturity, the responsibility and authority accorded the profession have not grown or changed significantly in decades.

Thus, a new paradigm of the teaching profession is needed, one that recognizes both the capacity of the profession to provide desperately needed school revitalization and the striking potential of teachers to provide new forms of leadership in schools and communities. The Teachers as Leaders Framework (Table 1.1) that represents the core of this chapter—and, indeed of this book—substantiates the assertion that teacher leadership is an idea whose time has come. This assertion was advanced by Katzenmeyer and Moller (1996) in the first edition of their landmark publication, *Awakening the Sleeping Giant: Leadership Development for Teachers*. They claimed that teachers have the potential to exercise new and dynamic leadership in schools, thereby enhancing the possibility of social reform. They introduced the metaphor of a sleeping giant to illustrate not just the dormant status of teacher leadership at that time but also the power it might exert if aroused.

In the twelve years since publication of *Awakening the Sleeping Giant*, teacher leadership has drawn considerable attention worldwide and has acquired a degree of legitimacy in the educational literature and also in educational practice. But what does teacher leadership mean? Following an exhaustive review of international literature, Joseph Murphy reached the conclusion that in 2005 teacher leadership remained basically “a theory

**Table 1.1** The Teachers as Leaders Framework

<p><b>Teacher leaders . . .</b></p> <p><i>Convey convictions about a better world by</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• articulating a positive future for all students</li> <li>• contributing to an image of teaching as a profession that makes a difference</li> </ul> <p><i>Facilitate communities of learning by</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• encouraging a shared, schoolwide approach to core pedagogical processes</li> <li>• approaching professional learning as consciousness-raising about complex issues</li> <li>• synthesizing new ideas out of colleagues' professional discourse and reflective activities</li> </ul> <p><i>Strive for pedagogical excellence by</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• showing genuine interest in students' needs and well-being</li> <li>• continuously developing and refining personal teaching gifts and talents</li> <li>• seeking deep understanding of significant pedagogical practices</li> </ul> <p><i>Confront barriers in the school's culture and structures by</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• standing up for children, especially disadvantaged and marginalized individuals and groups</li> <li>• working with administrators to find solutions to issues of equity, fairness, and justice</li> <li>• encouraging student "voice" in ways that are sensitive to students' developmental stages and circumstances</li> </ul> <p><i>Translate ideas into sustainable systems of action by</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• working with the principal, administrators, and other teachers to manage projects that heighten alignment between the school's vision, values, pedagogical practices, and professional learning activities</li> <li>• building alliances and nurturing external networks of support</li> </ul> <p><i>Nurture a culture of success by</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• acting on opportunities to emphasize accomplishments and high expectations</li> <li>• encouraging collective responsibility in addressing schoolwide challenges</li> <li>• encouraging self-respect and confidence in students' communities</li> </ul>
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in action" (Murphy, 2005, p. 46). But, he also noted that a number of significant understandings are now in place, including three that we regard as particularly significant:

- Barth's contention (2001) that community development via teacher leadership nurtures democracy (as cited in Murphy, p. 56).
- Katzenmeyer and Moller's assertion (2001) that, as teachers begin to believe in their leadership capabilities, they take on increased

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schoolwide responsibilities and in so doing affect teaching and learning throughout the school (as cited in Murphy, p. 53).

- Smyllie et al.'s claim (2002) that teacher leadership may make both independent and, with leadership from other sources, additive or multiplicative contributions to school improvement and outcomes for students (as cited in Murphy, p. 50).

To these powerful insights we add three provocative assertions that have emerged from international research since the first edition of *Developing Teacher Leaders* in 2002:

- Muijs and Harris' conclusion (2002) from British research that the impact of principals' leadership on student outcomes is mediated through the exercise of teacher leadership (as cited in Harris, 2004, p. 1).
- Durrant's conclusion (2004) from British research that holistic school reform without recognition of teacher leadership through agency, authority, and action is conceptually incomplete and unlikely to result in enhanced "capacity" (p. 27).
- Katyal and Evers' conclusion (2004) from their Hong Kong research that teacher leaders have sophisticated capabilities of both a pedagogical and a social nature. In combination, these capabilities enable them to influence student engagement beyond the classroom (p. 51).

The refined Framework for Teacher Leadership that we present in Table 1.1 emanates from our own research and developmental work over the past half decade, but it is noticeably consistent in intent with the outcomes of the research of these six authorities. It is therefore idealistic in its purposes, practical in its origins, and authoritative in its conceptualization.

Compared to many other conceptions of teacher leadership that have emerged over the past decade or more, the Framework also has characteristics of a role-based model (Getzels & Guba, 1957, as cited in Owens & Valesky, 2007, p. 136). That is, the Framework is grounded in a worldview that schools are social systems that (a) have clearly defined roles and expectations and (b) are managed and worked by individuals with personalities and needs-dispositions. Thus, the teacher leaders whom we describe in our case study snapshots perform highly complex formal educational functions in conjunction with, and on behalf of, their colleagues and their principals. They are also individually characterized by marked dispositions, styles, and ideals. In essence, our Teachers as Leaders Framework is therefore intended as more than a generic example of "distributed" leadership. Rather, it is intended to enable schools to achieve specified goals at the same time as its bonafide representatives achieve heightened personal reward and actualization.

To begin, we profile two schools where teacher leaders have exercised distinctive forms of leadership to shape meaning for their students and communities. The practical differences between the two forms are very considerable, but they each reflect the six key elements of the Teachers as Leaders Framework.

The snapshot that follows was prepared for the 2002 edition of *Developing Teacher Leaders*. It remains unchanged in this edition, but the epilogue that follows is new.

## SNAPSHOT ONE: GREENHILLS STATE HIGH SCHOOL

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Greenhills has 600 students and is situated in a small, economically depressed rural town. Because it is attractive in many ways, the casual visitor to Greenhills could be forgiven for not discerning that the surrounding community has endured a long-term slump in its primary industrial base, that it has one of the highest levels of economic disadvantage in the nation, and that as many as three generations of some families have experienced persistent unemployment.

According to a veteran teacher at the school, students used to “come to school with their shoulders dropped.” It was in this context of limited opportunity and low levels of motivation that teacher leaders undertook to provide the material out of which success stories are made.

Where it all began is still not entirely clear. Perhaps it was the Student Aspirations Program, through which a small group of teachers built a system for student mentoring and peer support. This involved identifying students’ interests or talents as a starting point for building self-esteem and proficiency and, ultimately, for broadening their horizons for future endeavors. Over the years, the Student Aspirations Program became part of the fabric of the school, changing regularly as new teachers, with new interests and capacities, joined the community. Conceivably, it was only when the school motto—*Success Breeds Success*—began to infiltrate the thinking of the whole school community that students’ expectations and self-belief started to change.

A second possibility is that credit for initiating the turnaround should be assigned to the current principal. Among his considerable talents is his ability to convince students that personal demeanor—dress, speech, manners—is very important to their achieving enhanced levels of academic and postschool success. He also insisted that every achievement, no matter how small, or in what field, was worthy of celebration. Thus, he had no difficulty convincing Nancy and Lisa, two young teachers, of the impact of their public speaking initiatives and organized sports competitions on student motivation, self-expectation, and school pride. Nor did he have difficulty accommodating the school resources committee’s recommendation that finances be made available to facilitate access to online career information for students and the community to improve career opportunities for all.

The positive effects of synergistic leadership at Greenhills State High are numerous. First, the school has achieved marked recognition for its academic, cultural, and sporting successes, having been honored in a statewide showcasing competition. Second, it has undertaken significant educational innovations in which teachers have challenged themselves to improve their teaching practices. Third, community surveys indicated that it has become regarded as the center of local community life to an extent seldom achieved by a high school.

The teacher leaders we observed at Greenhills were able to articulate clearly their goals and strategies. They spoke convincingly of the “we can do anything” mindset of the student body, the inseparability of school and community, the sense of reward that goes with overcoming immense odds, and the teamwork of the teachers—heightened

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further as it is matched by the facilitative support of the principal. They regarded their school as unique, and they treasured that uniqueness, despite, or maybe because of, the human disadvantage, and even despair, out of which it had emerged.

The question we asked ourselves as we left Greenhills was, "Could this dynamic leadership come from elsewhere in the community or does it point to something distinctive about the teaching profession?" Certainly, our analysis of the leadership processes in place at Greenhills, supported by the views of teachers and school administrators, is that the magic of Greenhills resides substantially in the power of teachers through their pedagogical and community-building practices—to transform their schools and enrich their communities.

### **Epilogue, November 2007**

Readers may well ask, "What has happened at Greenhills since 2001? Has teacher leadership continued to thrive? If so, what forms does it take?"

We had heard about the pioneering work of one longstanding teacher leader, Andrew Fisher, in exploring pedagogical processes with cohorts of students. We asked him to provide a description of the work that had resulted in his receiving an international travel award in 2006:

As a long-serving teacher at Greenhills, I had observed dramatic changes take place in students' perceptions of themselves, their school and the outside world under the influence of dynamic teacher leaders and programs such as the Student Aspirations Program. What, I wondered, were the implications for everyday classroom pedagogy? I thought I had particular expertise in relation to this question and determined to find out.

As one member of the school management team for the implementation of a long-term process of school renewal, I saw the valuable input that students had in developing the school vision and an agreed set of principles of good teaching practices for the school. I also observed the enthusiasm and freshness of ideas that the students brought to the task. This confirmed my long-held belief that there is much that teachers and school communities can learn from listening respectfully to students. I determined to build on the students' enthusiasm by establishing a team of volunteer students who met every couple of weeks to explore further issues associated with the school. This enabled students to have the time and space to articulate their views on teaching and learning and schooling in general in a forum where their ideas were valued, discussed, challenged, and acted on in some way.

Over time the group has had some remarkable successes—designing and painting a mural to depict the school vision, initiating workshops on learning styles, conducting workshops and presentations on teaching and learning to staff of the school and other schools, writing papers for and participating in a worldwide student conference via the internet, and developing a dialogue with their teachers on pedagogy. Along with a small number of other teachers I have facilitated the meetings, but the agendas have always been set by the students.

At the same time, I initiated a quite unusual experiment with a year nine class (9D) that was becoming almost unmanageable. Having tried all in my teaching repertoire, but failing to change the class's behavior, I decided to listen to what the

students had to say. Together they developed a “9D Statement of Good Teaching and Learning” based on the students’ ideas of what made a good lesson. This statement became the core of classroom learning experiences from then on. Further, the students went on to plan curriculum and lessons with me over the ensuing eighteen months, as well as coevaluating lessons. The student-generated statement is as follows:

*Good teaching and learning involves a variety of new and exciting ideas for classroom activities. Where possible, activities should be hands-on, creative and set in different environments. At the beginning of a unit, students should set goals to be accomplished by the end of that unit. Where possible, students should be given choices because everyone has different interests and learning abilities. Students need to be respected and treated as individuals.*

The changes in the class were extraordinary—within a few weeks, behavior had totally turned around, previously disaffected students were now engaged with their learning, they developed ownership of their learning and an understanding of both the teaching and learning process and how they learned. Lessons were so much more productive—and fun—for all, a very supportive class culture developed and academic results improved.

I have continued the process with subsequent classes with similar success, and other teachers have adopted elements of the process in their classes. Problems have arisen, however, particularly with colleagues who are more wary or skeptical of the power of student voice. This has required me to reflect on my personal leadership style and also on my relationships with both colleagues and the principal. This can be both confronting and complex, but seems to me to be part and parcel of the process of mature school leadership, including teacher leadership.

As I reflect on my thirty years of teaching I see myself now as both a specialist teacher and also a teacher leader, continuously honing my skills and building on the foundations of co-teacher leaders who preceded me.

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## **SNAPSHOT TWO: WHISTLEROCK ELEMENTARY SCHOOL**

Whistlerock Elementary School is a school of 650 students in the western suburbs of a large modern metropolis. When the longstanding principal and a number of experienced teachers left about five years ago, external reviews indicated that it declined into a serious stalemate, characterized by lack of direction, loss of community support, and seriously diminished staff morale.

This regression was substantially overcome, however, over the next three years, through implementation of an approach to school leadership that involved the principal, deputy principal, and teacher leaders working in unison but with individual roles and functions. In the space of three

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years, a revitalized school vision was created—*Individual Paths, United Journey*—and a coherent pedagogical framework was developed by the teachers. Through a dominantly teacher-led development over a period of almost a year, a Whistlerock Literacy Strategy was created out of the pedagogical framework. The Strategy was distinguished by six principles, each of which has been expanded into classroom resources and techniques. The six principles are as follows:

- Every Whistlerock teacher is a teacher of literacy.
- Whistlerock literacy pedagogy is multifaceted, in recognition of the numerous ways that individual students acquire language and communication skills.
- Teachers of literacy must be highly knowledgeable about literacy, literacy development, and literacy teaching.
- Teaching literacy should be characterized by regular diagnosis of students' individual needs, progress, difficulties, and accomplishments.
- Early intervention, with expert advice and support, is critical at all stages of students' literacy development.
- Student achievement data from standardized tests should be used thoughtfully and judiciously to ensure that students and their community are represented with dignity.

We asked the deputy principal, Simon, to explain Whistlerock's transformation, and to reflect on the nature of Whistlerock leadership.

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The principal set the stage by taking a strong stance and insisting that we had to lift ourselves out of a rut. He challenged us to undertake a formal process of school revitalization with a well-known university consulting group and he took personal responsibility for coordinating the development of a new school vision. He also challenged us to think beyond traditional leadership models and to encompass both teachers and community members.

My role concentrated on moving the revitalization process along, coordinating timeframes and resources (both financial and human) and articulating an understanding of how we could make changes work, engage the community, and provide stability throughout the change process.

Particular aspects of the revitalization process were driven by Cathy. She is a very well respected teacher with credibility in relation to innovative and proven pedagogy, as opposed to formal management. This difference proved to be pivotal—Cathy's combination of enthusiastic and energetic personality, sophisticated pedagogical capabilities, and well-known task orientation extended the skill set of the school administration in ways that proved to be very important. But she also possesses leadership skills that became apparent only as the Literacy Project unfolded—the ability to draw from a range of people-management skills at varying times, depending on the requirements



of the situation; the capacity to draw together the various threads, concepts, ideas, and opinions of staff and synthesize them into creative new ideas; the capacity to see through rhetoric and jargon to find authentic meaning to then share with colleagues; and a talent for encouraging colleagues to reflect on the school's vision and values in the context of their everyday work. It was these capabilities that enabled our teachers to not only create something new and powerful in the form of a Literacy Strategy but also to see for themselves how it was being done.

As a result, the notion of all staff being potential leaders in their own right is now acknowledged, actively encouraged, and celebrated at Whistlerock. While Cathy remains the key teacher leader at our school, all staff now contribute to areas of school operations traditionally the domain of "management"—including provisioning, staffing, and curriculum formulation.

Our Model of Literacy Leadership at Whistlerock is captured in the analogy of a water mill. The waterwheel is constituted of our pedagogical principles (the frame) and our vision and values (the spokes in the water wheel). The leadership capabilities of our professional staff—administrators and teachers—drive the waterwheel and can be likened to a constantly recycling flow of water. We all feel very happy with this analogy as an explanation of how we go about our leadership work.

In hindsight, I would say that Larry, our principal, has been primarily responsible for the development of our shared and collectively owned school vision. As Deputy Principal, I have perhaps done most to manage the school revitalization process. I continue to be the coordinator of resource allocation processes, community links, classroom support systems, curriculum cohesion, and professional learning activities. Cathy's role is one that neither Larry nor I could do justice to—enabling teachers to uncover their personal pedagogy, continuously refining the Whistlerock Pedagogy and Literacy Strategy, and linking our work as a school to credible international educational theory and practice. Pedagogical implementation at Whistlerock is now consistent and collectively owned. The results are apparent when the outcomes of our system survey results from 2003 are compared with those of 2007. Staff morale has improved greatly; community perceptions of the school have become far more positive; and students' attitudes toward school, and engagement with school activities, have also shown marked improvement. Also, gains have been made at both ends of the learning spectrum in several areas of student achievement. For the period ahead, student achievement for the full spectrum of students will be our main focus, with Cathy's pedagogical leadership a fundamental cog in our leadership waterwheel.

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## **PROBING THE WORK OF TEACHER LEADERS: AN EXHILARATING ENDEAVOR**

Our work since 2002 in several hundred schools has confirmed for us the ongoing appropriateness of the basic definition of teacher leadership that emerged from our first research efforts over a decade ago (Crowther &

Olsen, 1997, p. 12). The definition that we now work with, and which follows, represents a minor variation of our original statement:

Teacher leadership is essentially an ethical stance that is based on views of both a better world and the power of teachers to shape meaning systems. It manifests in new forms of understanding and practice that contribute to school success and to the quality of life of the community in the long term.

But our recent research and school-based consultancy initiatives, combined with insights from authoritative researchers such as Murphy, Katzenmeyer and Moller, Smyllie, Barth, Durrant, Katyal and Evers, and Mujis and Harris, have produced a depth in understanding regarding the dynamics of teacher leadership that we did not have a half decade ago.

Thus, in reviewing the six snapshots that are included in this edition of *Developing Teacher Leaders*, we encourage you to look for evidence of the recent claims of the theorists and researchers to whom we have referred. You will find, for example, that Barth's claims about democracy in action and Durrant's assertions regarding the vital role of teacher leaders in successful schoolwide revitalization are indeed apparent in the case study snapshots.

The two snapshots that are included in this chapter illustrate the key features of our definition of teacher leadership. The featured teacher leaders involved their professional communities in the construction of significant new educational knowledge that inspired confidence in teachers, students, and parents, and laid the foundations for heightened aspirations and enhanced levels of student achievement. In effect, the sketches offer what we regard as a glimpse of the futuristic social transformation advocated by reformists like Drucker (1994), Beare (2001), and Hargreaves (2003).

Many teachers, of course, do not meet all of the formidable requirements of either our definition or our Teachers as Leaders Framework. There are good reasons why some teachers may not seek to link their work to the dynamics of leadership. For example, they may choose to pursue subject matter specialization, research, or a range of other challenging occupational avenues that do not necessarily lead to teacher leadership as we define it. Moreover, some teachers who exert leadership at a certain juncture in their careers, or in a particular educational context, may not choose to do so at another time or in another context.

As Table 1.1 indicates, the capabilities required to exercise influence on professional processes of learning, on pedagogical enhancement, and on community agencies are very complex. It is unrealistic to assume that all teachers have the energy, confidence, or experience to engage influentially at all points in their work lives. Finally, our research suggests that teacher leadership occurs most readily in supportive organizational environments. But environments that support and nurture teacher leadership are not endemic to many schools. Regrettably, teacher leadership development programs such as the CLASS Plan in Chapter 6 have historically not been readily available to most practicing and prospective teacher leaders.

Despite these drawbacks, there are far more classroom teachers who meet the demanding requirements of our definition and framework than is generally assumed. These individuals and collegial groups have, for the most part, been overlooked in the development of leadership theory in recent decades, and have been largely bypassed in the development of educational policy for schools. These oversights have cost us all dearly. They have inhibited educational reform and helped to marginalize the teaching profession. Fortunately, we now know that teacher leadership exists in its own right, and that the “sleeping giant” that Katzenmeyer and Moller observed to be rousing in 1996 has now awakened. Its image is discernible, its movement palpable. These developments we regard with enthusiasm because we believe they will dramatically reshape the school workplace, the status of the teaching profession, and the place of schools within communities. We confidently predict that the “I’m just a teacher” syndrome that came to characterize self-concept in the teaching profession worldwide in recent decades is now well on the way to becoming a historical anachronism.

## THE FRAMEWORK IN ACTION

Thus, in analyzing the six elements of the framework, keep in mind that it presents an idealized image of how teacher leaders exercise influence in their school communities. In a sense, the framework is a hypothetical portrait, because no one teacher leader whom we observed fulfills the entirety of the sixteen descriptors that are associated with it. Yet all the teacher leaders whom we studied exhibited each of the six elements in some way, at some time, in their work. In this regard, the observation of Daniel Goleman and his associates regarding the presence of nineteen emotional intelligence (EI) “competencies”/“capabilities” in highly effective leaders is illuminating:

Interestingly, no leader we’ve encountered, no matter how outstanding, has strengths across the board in every one of the EI competencies. Highly effective leaders typically exhibit a critical mass of strength in a half dozen or so EI competencies. (Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee, 2002, p. 38)

### **Element One: Teacher Leaders Convey Conviction About a Better World**

Cambridge (UK) University scholar David Frost and his “leadership for learning” research team have contributed what we regard as a very helpful dimension to the educational literature with their assertion that school renewal and revitalization should be inspired by a moral purpose that is underpinned by democratic values (Frost, 2006, p. 19). Frost’s stance is reminiscent of the position of classical educational leadership theorist William Foster to the effect that responsible educational leadership should encompass “a striving for the ideal in schooling. As such, idealism offers hope and optimism” (as cited in Lindle, 2004, p. 170).