**ECI 508 Leadership Final Essay**

**Dr. Robinson**

**Jie Ling**

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**Introduction**

 This essay focuses on teachers as leaders and the importance of teacher leadership to improve outcomes in schools. Starting with the definitions of teacher leadership, I elaborate not only on rationale and belief why teachers should and can lead, but also on characteristics and a series of effective teacher leadership, including leading with metacognition, practical optimism, communication skills, advocacy, as well as reflection and refraction that can be applied in and out of classrooms. Finally, I reflect on envision a through action plan to guide myself on the future leadership journey to not only expand my own teaching career spectrum but also bring more positive influence and changes to students, colleagues, school, family and community. This is a reflection and indication of my personal growth in the course of teacher leadership.

**Definition of Teacher Leadership**

 I really appreciate that ECI 508 is a required course for me to take. Before taking this course, I think I’m even not a current teacher , then how can I be a teacher leader? Generally, a teacher leader must be the person who is working in the formal leading position such as principals and directors. However, after reading the books, discussing with the teacher and classmates, I realize that every teacher has the potential to be a teacher leader and teacher leadership doesn’t mean that we must be on a formal position at school. In the 21st century, the expectations of teachers have shifted a lot. Teachers now are not only expected to be competent professionals but also leaders in their classrooms, schools and the global educational community. From my point of view, many teachers have already done the things about leadership, but they did not realize it. So, what is teacher leadership after all? There are abundant definitions. York-Barr and Duke in the article “What do we know about teacher leadership? Findings from two decades of scholarship” concluded “teacher leadership is the process by which teachers, individually or collectively, influence their colleagues, principals, and other members of school communities to improve teaching and learning practices with the aim of increased students learning and achievement (2004, p. 287-288).” However, I believe that “formally” or “informally” should be added into this definition, because positional teacher leadership usually starts from informal and behind-scene influence and interaction with students and colleagues. It is believed in the book *13 Steps to Teacher Empowerment* that “formal leadership requires the same kinds of skills and strategies as the informal kind” (Zemelman & Ross, 2009, p.6). Mature teacher leadership school culture should reward those non-positional teacher leaders to be positional leaders or offer salary compensations to retain and stimulate those teacher leaders. Both positional and non-positional teacher leadership should be recognized and celebrated. While Katzenmeyer and Moller in the book *Awakening the Sleeping Giant: Helping Teachers Develop as Leaders* defined teacher leadership as “teacher leaders lead within and beyond the classroom; identify with and contribute to a community of teacher learners and leaders; influence others toward improved educational practice; and accept responsibility for achieving the outcomes of their leadership” (2009, p.5). In this definition, it distinctively highlights that leadership assumes accountability for results, which we tend to overlook because some teacher leaders might raise a lot of new ideas at the beginning but turn them to whims finally, which is harmful for sustainability and trust building. My definition of teacher leadership is that teacher leaders formally or informally lead within and beyond the classroom, are willing to share and collaborate with others, influencing others to improve professional growth, students’ learning and school’s development. In whatever definitions, there is no disagreement that teacher leadership work involves three dimensions: individual development, collaboration or team development, and organizational development.

**Rationale for Teacher Leadership**

 Why should we value teacher leadership? First of all, the benefits of active teacher participation at every level are quite evident, such as teacher efficacy, personal growth, positive peer influence, career enhancement, sustainability of change, accountability for results, and retention of excellent teachers (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2009). Second, they can facilitate expertise about teaching and learning. For example, at least five goals can be achieved by teacher leaders according to the article “Five goals for teacher leadership”: 1) Fuel student achievements; 2) improve the access of high-need students; 3) extend the careers of teachers looking for growth opportunities; 4) expand the influence of effective teachers on their peer; 5) ensure a role for teachers as leaders in policy decisions affecting their practice (Coggins & Kappan, 2014). Third, they bring benefits to students in terms of their vision and leadership cultivation. As teacher leaders model good leading skills in the class where students observe and experience teachers’ modeling and better management unconsciously every day and they are direct beneficiaries of higher teacher morale and better leadership skills, they will be influenced to be more responsible, sharing and active learners. When teachers and students both improve their performance and morale, the school will be the the beneficiary as well. It’s worth emphasizing that “the rationale for teacher leadership rests on the foundations of building organizational capacity, modeling democratic communities, empowering teachers, and enhancing teacher professionalism” (Coggins & Kappan, 2014, p.39). The ideal power of teacher leadership is far-reaching and multi-dimensional. They are momentum of an express train with unlimited power to overcome any obstacles on the way. Top-performing nations invest in teacher leaders to improve education. School system leaders and especially teacher leaders should form a new level of commitment to promote teacher leadership.

 Why do we have firm belief that teachers can lead? A teacher in the classroom is already a leader who leads a group of students and influences them on a daily basis. Theoretically, every teacher has potential to be a leader. Also, according to neuroscience, adult learning theories and research, each person has mental possibility of learning something new no matter at what age (Conyers & Wilson, 2015). Leadership skills can be learned and practiced rather than inborn abilities. Therefore, teachers should be to take on new learning challenges to be effective leaders.

**Characteristics of effective leaders**

1. A professional teacher

 Professional competence alone can’t make a leader, but it can undo one. Instructional proficiency is necessary to lead effectively with students in the classroom and to establish credibility with peers and administrators (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2009, p.68). The ability of professional competence reflects the level of one’s skill development. Teacher leaders should poss and use professional knowledge and skills to provide the most effective learning opportunities for both students and other colleagues. If teachers are confident in their expertise, they are willing to explore new strategies and expose their weakness about their teaching practice. If a teacher is not proficient in his/her teaching skills, then the classroom is on a survival level and the teacher may not receive enough respect and approval. Therefore, teachers need to develop professional competence before leading inside and beyond the classrooms.

2. An Assessor

 Instead of assessing students’ learning, I prepare to illustrate my perspectives on a teacher leader’s self-assessment and collaborative assessment. That a teacher plays a role of an assessor is an inevitable step before influencing and leading other school members. An old Chinese saying goes that knowing the enemy and yourself you can fight a hundred battles and win them all. To be specific, I will compare the enemy to our own weakness and compare yourself to our strengths in order to demonstrate that understanding ourselves is a crucial part to thrive as an effective teacher leader. One of the well acknowledged theories is that self-assessment is like a beacon lightening up a teacher leader’s way forward since it’s a powerful technique for improving ourselves, facilitating professional growth, and setting future goals. Additionally, as our perspectives on our own may be one-sided, collaborative assessment is a valuable way to gain multiple perspectives on our teaching and learning. Furthemore, collaborative assessment also can be seen as a strategy to contribute to effective collaboration and implementation. On the other hand, collaborative assessment also provides a wonderful opportunity to recognize different values, educational philosophy, ideas, behaviors, and work perspectives from different teacher colleagues.

3. A listener and communicator

 A great number of people suppose that one of the roles a teacher should play daily is a speaker, who has to keep instructing students; however, playing the role of a listener is as important as a speaker through the process of developing teacher leadership. It is a truth that teachers develop their leadership not only limited in the classroom, but also beyond the classroom. Specifically, students’ questions, school’s missions, teacher colleagues’ opinions and suggestions, and parents’ requirements are the main content for a listener to listen carefully. Take a further step, listening carefully is beneficial to find problems or conflicts, learn different people’s needs, and observe others’ feeling in time. And then applying methods according to indications can efficiently accelerate the pace of dealing with problems and conflicts. Moreover, the reason why a teacher leader should listen different voices carefully and actively is for becoming an effective communicator. Although teacher leaders need to thrive as active listeners, the key part of developing teacher-leadership is communication. A proficient communicator is skilled in building ideal teacher-student relationship, school-family relationship, principal-teacher partnership and teacher-teacher partnership, which is helpful to create a united and harmonious school environment. It is believed that matching careful listening to excellent communication skills can optimize approaches to solving various problems and conflicts.

4. A partner

 According to Zemelman and Ross (2009), a crucial step in developing teacher power and advancing a teacher’s career is to connect with other teachers. I am aware of the significance of this saying after reading Jill’s story and Sybil’s story showing at the beginning of *13 Steps to Teacher Empowerment*. In addition to the different attitude, I suppose that Jill’s failure is resulted from her isolation, while Sybil is positive to build connections with her colleagues. As a truth goes: two heads are better than one Collaborative working can often lead to innovation, encourage different ideas, and maximize the efficiency. Different teachers have different understanding, expertise, strategies and opinions about teaching and learning, and the process of planning collaboratively is also the process of thinking, rethinking, learning, and changing. Thus, a teacher leader also need to play the role of a qualified partner. In this case, I have viewed numerous examples indicate that productive achievements, creative ideas and approaches, or valuable contributions can be resulted from collaborative planning, working and implementing. In my opinion, collaboration is an advanced way to build trust between teacher colleagues and create an effective and harmonious working environment. Currently, in China, although the sense of competition may make it hard to unit teachers to work as a team, based on the same goal of increasing students’ learning achievements and developing the school, I firmly believe that the competition will be transferred to collaboration as soon as possible.

5. A Creator

 There is no doubt teachers and students are the main strength to create a school’s environment and culture. Besides, another fact is that students are often instructed and guided by teachers. Thus, teacher leaders are obligated to be creators. To be an excellent creator, a teacher leader will be asked to create an appropriate classroom environment, create unique and effective teaching approaches, create a flexible and comfortable working environment, create collaborative working fellowship, and create a communicative relationship with parents or principals. It is a long way full of difficulties and challenges to be an effective teacher leader.

 However, every French soldier carries a marshal’s baton in his knapsack. I firmly believe that it is worth making efforts to be a teacher leader to achieve self-realization and make contributions to education. Although what I have learnt from this course is more than what I mentioned above, for me, perfectly each role of a teacher leader is the task of top priority.

**Strategies for effective teacher leadership**

1. Metacognition

 Metacognition can be defined as “thinking about thinking” and “knowing about knowing” (Conyers & Wilson, 2016, p. 64). It is awareness and control of one’s own cognitive process. It can be used in any field. “By using a metacognitive process, teacher leaders can optimistically and intentionally plan, monitor, and evaluate their teaching practice and enhance their collaborative interactions in professional communities” (Conyers & Wilson, 2016, p. 64). There are some strategies to increase metacognition. First, increase awareness by thinking aloud or keeping working journals. Second, challenge current approach by self-questioning. Third, measure current teaching and learning through mind-mapping (Roy, 2016). There are five cognitives assets for teacher leaders----clear intent, systematic planning, monitoring, evaluation, learning from experience, and practical optimism (Conyers & Wilson, 2016, p.68-78). Establishing clear intent helps a teacher leader stay focused on what really matters. Taking classroom teaching for example, the ultimate goal of activities and planning is students’ outcome. “What key knowledge do we want our students to have? Do they understand? How can we best ensure that happen?” (Conyers & Wilson, 2016, p.70). These are questions to help us figure out our learning goals and objectives. Group planning and collaboration help stay focused on teaching goals and objectives with diverse perspectives and strengths.

2. Practical optimism

 Practical optimism as an asset of metacognition is listed out separately as it is essential to positive influence, effective teaching and successful learning, as a key leadership trait. “Developing practical optimism and modeling this approach for colleagues, administrators, parents, and others can have a positive impact on both school climate and student learning” (Conyers & Wilson, 2016, p.85). As in the school setting, having classes, grading, attending various meetings, and dealing with students’ issues usually stress teachers out during the day. Any teacher who is pessimistic and complaining will contaminate the working environment, harm the morale and exert negative influence on students, Teacher leaders’ practical optimism plays a pivotal role in definitely changing the atmosphere and increasing efficiency and morale. Also, practical optimism helps to focus on problem solving instead of wasting time on fear, doubt, and anxieties. There are some ways to present practical optimism: belief that we can overcome difficulties and we can help students through our constant efforts: calm down, be confident and celebrate our colleagues’ success; recognize our uniqueness and talents; try different ways to boost mood (Conyers & Wilson, 2016).

3. Communication

 In China, there is an idiom called “conflicts come from mouth”. How we phrase our words and what manners we display while communicating all contribute to the outcomes. Effective leaders are eloquent but not dominant; they are polite and respectful but not bossy and arrogant. They are honest but not hypocritical. All of these favorable and unfavorable traits can be realized by communication. To improve communication with students and colleagues, a strategy what I learned in another course called PQS can be applied. P is praising other’s strength first. Then ask questions to clarify what we wonder and puzzle about. S is giving suggestions when we disagree with. This strategy can help us to be assertive and polite, encouraging and inspiring. Good teacher leaders point out problems and inspire to solve problems constructively but not directly criticize and blame.

4. Advocacy

 Teacher leaders have to speak up for different purposes on different occasions, including talking to higher authorities to participate decision making. Usually, it is enough to just be honest and state our opinions in the faculty meeting and elaborate on it. However, sometimes we have to decide “whether speaking-out at a meeting is the best strategy, especially if the issue is sensitive. One strategy can be used to address sensitive and complex issues is to make personal conferences or writing advocacy letters, which is a constructive way to make our voice heard. Being honest and sincere is always the key to advocacy. We also need to take different writing and speaking styles into account based on different target recipients while doing advocacy.

5. Reflection and refraction

 Reflection and refraction is a strategy to effectively solve problems in and out of class. It leads to constructive problem solving and objective reflection. Reflection is like holding a mirror just reflecting the mirror holder from one angle and one perspective. While refraction is turning the mirror and adding more angles into the mirror as an extension of reflection (Pope, 1999). In the reflection process, we tend to be blinded by our anger, frustration, assumptions, previous impressions, defensiveness and sense of insecurity and end up in a disappointed, daunted, stressful or unproductive state of mind. However, refraction brings more objectivity and willingness to put on others’ shoes to reframe information and come up with effective solutions. Refraction is a critical strategy to produce correct and positive prescription. Teacher leaders should apply this strategy and model this thinking process to students and more colleagues.

**Action Plan**

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| TABLE1: RESEARCH QUESTION AND RATIONALE:Research question: In PBI project unit, is game-based learning worth to develop students global competencies?Unsurprisingly, 21st-century college students are somewhat different from those of the preceding decades, even as those differed from earlier students. Games will help us work with them. In particular, 21st-century students have grown up using different technology from that which their professors grew up with. Using games, not necessarily video games, for teaching is one way to shift to a more appropriate learning format for the Digital Generation.Being an effective teacher means knowing how and when to use technology in the classroom. We must come prepared with technological knowledge in order to guide our students in their own discoveries. Koehler and Mishra (2009) write, “There is no ‘one best way’ to integrate technology into curriculum. Rather, integration efforts should be creatively designed or structured for particular subject matter ideas in specific classroom contexts” (p.62). By using the TPACK model, I will be able to align our pedagogy, content and technology. If I can implement games in classroom when I become a teacher, I’ll choose the online platform Metaverse to help teach my students the concepts of narrative writing. These sites may help motivate my students to understand the content of narrative writing, and make my pedagogical decisions revolve around motivating students through gaming.  |
| TABLE2: THOUGHTS ABOUT LOGISTICS:In the lesson, the objective will be for students to use gaming as a writing tool, and students will engage in a cause-and-effect game to explore the concept of writing. Students will be using the online platform Metaverse to create augmented reality experiences inspired by their assigned readings. But in China, implementing games in class-hours isn’t allowed by school policy and wouldn’t be accepted by parents. They would think it’s a waste of time, and class should be filled with lectures and practices. Besides, students may feel it’s a little bit hard to learn with Metaverse because they may think what they need is to study a new tool rather than regarding it as a fun way to learning. |
| TABLE3: DATA COLLECTION DESCRIPTION:To do this, I plan on using PBI project through the course of the semester. Implementing gaming or animation in the classroom would connect our visual, auditory and tactile learners to one another without sacrificing their individual learning needs. |
| TABLE4: METHOD OF ANALYZING DATA:In an Educational Leadership article entitled, "Developing Data Mentors," authors Beverly Nichols and Kevin Singer describe how box and whiskers plots could be used to report data collected over time, such as pre and post tests or parallel practice activities. " Thus, I’d like to use popular graphs which include bar graphs, line graphs, and pie graphs to analyze students’ learning process. |
| TABLE5: DISSEMINATION PLAN:I still can remember how boring I felt when I reading anything in my English class as a school year student. That's why I do understand why children have no interest in reading any English material, no matter what it is (textbooks, stories, novels...). The very compelling reason is that English is not their native language that they cannot get deep involved in the words and letters. Besides, students who are not interested in are those that find reading is difficult. I want all my students in the future will like reading and be successful to master it. This research will help me examine how I can implement PBI in my class more effectively.  |

**Conclusion**

 To look into the future, I believe that if teacher leadership can become school-wide and organizational expectations and teacher leaders are challenged and motivated to act as changes agents, they will accept empowerment to push up school reform and benefit themselves, students and school at large. If schools can provide teachers with a wide range of choices to expand career and increase salary by taking additional roles, teachers will be better motivated to improve professional work and leadership work (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2009). However, the future of teacher leadership is also influenced by us who are taking and will take leadership roles and commit to it in our immediate work environment to influence more teachers to be teacher leaders. With the clear leadership plan of action, I will play my role as a teacher leader with confidence and enjoyment.

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