

# PART I

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## *Looking at Teacher Leadership*

“Each of us has a different conception of just what is meant by teacher leadership,” Roland Barth observed in his groundbreaking and user-friendly monograph, included here, “The Teacher Leader.” Each of us, it would seem, *still* does. The selections in Part I are not intended to offer the “one-best” definition of teacher leadership. However, in a distinctive but complementary way, each of these pieces provides a view of teacher leadership that represents some of the best thinking on the subject that has emerged over the past ten years.

To open this section, Elizabeth Wiley’s “Surprising Outcomes or Why Do They Read *Macbeth*?” (from Donaldson and Marnik’s *As Leaders Learn*) turns the question of what *is* teacher leadership into perhaps a better question all teacher leaders—past, present, and future—must ask: Can I make a difference?

Ann Lieberman and Lynne Miller’s work represents the voices of teacher leadership advocacy. We have chosen to excerpt their chapter “What Research Says About Teacher Leadership” from their book, *Teacher Leadership*, because the chapter selectively reviews empirical studies as well as theoretical and interpretive work, which adds to the knowledge base and provides a “foundation for understanding the power, promise, and perplexities of teacher leadership” (p. 31).

“Teachers as Leaders: Emergence of a New Paradigm” is taken from a resourceful book by Frank Crowther, Stephen S. Kaagan, Margaret Ferguson, and Leonne Hann and presents an operational definition of teacher leadership that has stood up over time. The framework for teacher leadership they present derives from research in diverse school settings. As such, this selection provides, as the authors contend, compelling and thoughtful “confirmation of a capacity for professional leadership that has been obscured in the literature on educational leadership.”

## 2 Uncovering Teacher Leadership

Marilyn Katzenmeyer and Gayle Moller's chapter, "Honoring the Uniqueness of Teacher Leaders," is excerpted from their prophetically titled book *Awakening the Sleeping Giant*. This chapter focuses less on what and how—technical and instrumental issues—of teacher leadership than squarely on the "who" question—the value of knowing "who I am" as a teacher leader. Finally, Laura Reasoner Jones ends Part I not with a "definition" of teacher leadership but perhaps more aptly, a mind-set for others to emulate. "I'm Not Like You" is an honest self-appraisal showing the humility of teacher leaders who recognize how much they still can and do learn from others.

## 1

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*Surprising Outcomes**Or Why Do They Read Macbeth?*

Elizabeth Wiley

*A high school teacher becomes the chair of her English Department and learns to balance ambition and collegueship.*

**F**our years ago, the English department was a fairly comfortable place. We knew all the rules—we were the good guys, our critics were the bad guys, the principal was a coward—and we spent our department meetings rephrasing those rules with the style, grace, and nuance (heavy on the nuance) that only English teachers can exercise in the late afternoon.

We had reason to feel besieged. People had often chosen to move to our community because the schools were good, and generally they'd been satisfied, or at least they'd been quiet about their dissatisfaction. In the past years, though, as our reputation climbed higher and higher (a phenomenon tied to the introduction of statewide testing), people seemed to

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From Donaldson & Marnik, *As Leaders Learn: Personal Stories of Growth in School Leadership*, Chapter 2, pp. 12–18. © 1995, Corwin Press. Reprinted with permission.

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feel duped. If we were the best in the state, why weren't their children learning more? Why couldn't they read and write better? And why, oh why, weren't their SAT scores higher? They called us lazy and inept. We called them overambitious and naive. Of course, because the two camps never talked to each other, all of this name-calling stayed sub rosa and we were able to be woodenly polite at soccer games and awards banquets.

Then we found a common enemy in our new principal. He was a good man with very good intentions—in fact, he was primarily responsible for most of the positive changes that happened, sometimes painfully, over the next few years—but he offended as many people as he pleased. It wasn't intentional; he simply lacked grace in dealing with people. His enthusiasm was seen as insensitivity; his candor, as arrogance. I've spent months wondering where his administration went wrong, and that's as close as I can get to the source of the trouble.

However complex the reasons, our initial reactions to the principal were based on simple things. We disliked him because he was in charge when the school board increased the English teacher load from four classes to five. Parents disliked him because he couldn't "schmooze." We assured each other that he was the trouble and did nothing more.

But then he moved into our territory. It's hard for me to stay mad at him here because he was rushing to my defense at the time, so I'll try to tell the story without embellishment. Historically, the chair of the English department has allotted course divisions after consulting with teachers. It's not very complicated; we all have our specialties and we usually teach pretty much the same load from year to year. The difficulty comes when a particularly large class moves through and adjustments must be made to the standard pattern.

It was June and the courses had been allotted. The switch from four to five classes was scheduled for the next year and the principal was making conciliatory visits to each of us before we disappeared for the summer. He told me that it was his hope that we could each keep the same number of students spread over five classes so that, although we'd have more preparations, we'd have no more papers to grade. I told him that my load was way up from 80 (our school board has really tried to limit our student load to 80, which is one of several reasons I like teaching here).

He checked the figures. It turned out that the chair of the English department was teaching three junior classes and two study skills courses for a total of 66 students. I had three senior classes and two freshman for a total of 110. I know that teachers too often get bogged down in comparing workloads, but I also know that teachers don't husband their energy, giving out less to each student when there are more of them in a class. We worry about each student, we plan lessons for individual interests, we call parents when we need information. We don't worry, plan, or call less when there are more students; we try to stretch our energies to cover them all. I was not looking forward to that much stretching.

Because I was on vacation and taking a course, what happened next is hazy to me. I've heard two versions, but because there are almost no points

of agreement between the two I'll cut to the result. In September, I was teaching three senior classes, the chair had three junior classes, and we each had one freshman class and one study skills course. And she had resigned as chair of the department.

It was an awful year. First, we had no chair. Then the principal was going to chair our meetings. Then he asked us all to chair them jointly. Then our old chair was back, but our meetings were still devoted to licking our wounds. We didn't even do the ritualistic department bookkeeping (cleverly designed to keep us off awkward subjects like "What are we doing and why?"). By May, most of the department still wasn't speaking to the principal, and the chair had found a job in New Hampshire for the following year. You'd think that we would all be filing transfers to the math department, but when they asked for applications for the position as chair, three of the five of us applied.

## CAN I MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

I don't know why I got the job, except that I was the only applicant who hadn't chaired a department before and they were relying on beginner's luck. I don't even know why I wanted it so badly. I love teaching, and I was learning more about it every day. Shifting my focus to being department chair might slow that down. But I was frustrated with going it alone and I thought I could help the department make a collective impact on kids. It seemed that I alone could do very little to affect my students' learning; they came to me from the void and disappeared into it again. Oh, I knew that they read *Romeo and Juliet* as freshmen and *Macbeth* as seniors, but I hadn't any idea what they were supposed to *know* when they came to me—or, for that matter, what they were supposed to know when they left. It was safer to teach them everything I could. Maybe, if I could use my role as chair to get us to talk, the other English teachers would drop some hints.

I had come into education in my mid-thirties, recruited into an experimental program to certify teachers who had had other careers. We, the other interns and I, had felt our way tentatively through our training and internships, learning the complicated ways of schools and making sense of them only through hours of discussion. Those discussions had supported, excited, and galvanized me through my first few years in the classroom. Maybe that's what I hoped to recapture in department meetings. I didn't hope for big changes quickly, though. My goal was to discuss the teaching of English by the following spring. We almost made it.

That first year I led by example. I was collegial, friendly, and collaborative with my fellow teachers. I gave them fliers for conferences and urged them to go. I passed out mailings from the Foxfire Network and the Coalition of Essential Schools and coaxed them into discussing them. I wrote up agendas that focused on authentic assessment and heterogeneous grouping. Upon reflection, I was arrogant, presumptuous, and rude.

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These were all experienced teachers—much more experienced than I—and I presumed to tell them, through my not-so-subtle messages, that they needed to improve and that I knew exactly what form that improvement should take.

The summer after my first year as chair, several forces came together serendipitously to show me how wrong I had been: I read Stephen Covey's *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* (1990), went to a summer institute, and spent nine days at a national conference on assessment run by some of the guiding lights of the reform movement. The last was particularly enlightening: They preached with a holier-than-thou tone that I found repulsive, yet familiar. Then I realized that that was what I must have sounded like to my colleagues in the English department.

I knew that I had been treating them badly, but treating them well couldn't mean going back to the status quo where we were all independent operators blaming any shortcomings on the kids or on the system. I still didn't know why my students read *Macbeth* or what I was expected to teach them; I couldn't even guarantee that they had really learned what I had taught. That's where the outcomes grant came in.

### ONE SUCCESS CAN LEAD TO ANOTHER . . .

Recently we had been given a \$25,000 grant through the Coalition of Essential Schools to write outcomes in every subject. The rest of the school had at least started on this task, but our department hadn't. I had reminded the members of the department regularly—probably in that same whining tone that makes me flinch now to remember—but they'd managed to shrug me off.

I had a long talk with myself—several, in fact—and because I walk when I talk, I was in great shape when fall rolled around. By then I had decided what mattered to me: that we have a good set of working outcomes by November, that we spend the rest of the year evaluating them, and that we begin working together as a team for the benefit of the students. So, in the best interests of everyone, I told a little lie.

Actually, it was more of a manipulation of the truth. I knew that the school board was interested in the progress of the outcomes and that the department would be more likely to work on them if they knew that the board was watching, so I called the superintendent and asked when she'd like the department to report to the board. She liked the idea so much that she put together a whole language arts presentation—K-12—and scheduled it for November.

At the end of August, I wrote to the members of the department telling them of the reporting deadline and informing them that we'd need to meet twice a month to get ready. I also told them that I knew that collectively we knew everything we needed to know to write outcomes that would work in the best interests of our students; we would be our own experts, our

own consultants, because there weren't any better ones around. And I meant it.

They were wonderful—once they were convinced that I truly valued their expertise. We started with outcomes in writing research papers, partly because they were the least personal, partly because our wonderful librarian was eager to help. Most of us knew that we needed to teach our students how to write research papers, but none of us had ever developed the same careful lessons and units in this area that we had in reading, writing, and speech (the other outcome areas). In fact, with the exception of one teacher of American literature, most of us had hurried through research papers, remembering—and probably duplicating—our own unpleasant high school experiences.

We started with the Coalition injunction to plan backwards. What did we want seniors to be able to do in research by the time they left us? We envisioned self-motivated researchers, designing their own projects and presenting them to a panel of critics (why not dream big?). With some form of that as an end product, we worked backwards to the junior project, a lengthy paper that incorporated primary sources and was marked by a student-designed, original thesis. The sophomore paper would ask students to compare two systems—of belief, social order, mythology, whatever. The freshman research would be modeled on Ken McCrory's I-Search paper, a process that starts in a student's own expertise and pushes it into new territory.

When we were done, we not only had a design for challenging research outcomes and systems for helping students to meet those challenges, we had a model for working together that was both effective and pleasant. From there on, nothing could stop us. We sailed through those outcomes, arguing over sequence and wrestling with details, but working together. By November, we not only had a good working set of outcomes, we owned them.

## **EXPECT THE BEST, AND GET IT**

Somewhere along the way, I had learned more about leadership than any workshop, any self-help book, or any lecture could ever teach. In describing others as whiny and self-centered, I'd only been describing myself. When I learned to honor my colleagues as professionals, they treated me professionally. It felt almost like magic, but it shouldn't have: We know that students reflect the expectations that adults have for them. And, as any teacher knows, most classroom lessons are metaphors for the rest of life.

Department meetings are still contentious, but now we're wrestling with bigger questions: How much can a department work together without inhibiting the creativity of individual members? Is teaching—as one colleague claims—an ephemeral art that can't be taught? If it is, how do we

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ever guarantee that students learn what they need to know? Where does community opinion come in? Should parents be consulted on major curriculum issues? Course assignments? And which parents?

I wanted to become chair because I wanted to provide leadership for the department; now I find myself looking for a higher vision of leadership—not from the principal or the superintendent; they've both been wonderful—but from the community, as interpreted by the school board. The greatest achievement of my tenure—the outcomes—came because we had a clear sense of what the community expected of us and what it wanted for its children. The most painful moments—arguments over standards, politics surrounding teaching assignments—came when the community was clearly ambivalent.

I'm not asking the board to take sides on all these issues but to continue to formulate a vision for the school that becomes paramount, that supersedes any squabbles, and that provides a touchstone for those of us who have to make the thousands of little decisions that cumulatively create a school. A good starting point would be for all of us to treat everyone involved in schools—staff, students, parents, community—with honor and dignity. It has worked for us in our department. I know it would work for our schools.

## REFERENCE

Covey, S. (1990). *The seven habits of highly effective people: Restoring the character ethic*. New York: Simon & Schuster.