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Building Teacher Self-Efficacy: A University/District Leadership Academy Model

Abstract

Introduction: In an era dominated by higher standards and greater accountability for America's *If you want to join us, we would be delighted schools*, leaders are needed at all levels. Teachers must continue learning and growing professionally long after that transition from pre-service to practitioner.

Building Teacher Self-Efficacy: A University/District Leadership Academy Model

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Introduction

In an era dominated by higher standards and greater accountability for America's *If you want to join us, we would be delighted* schools, leaders are needed at all levels. Teachers must continue learning and growing professionally long after that transition from pre-service to practitioner. They must grow in pedagogy and content expertise; they must grow in capacity as teacher leaders. Successful school and district leaders understand the importance of this concept and intentionally plan for building teacher leadership capacity as part of on-going professional development programs. Universities and districts are forming partnerships that merge theory of research and best practice with the demands of schools and district contexts in the 21st Century, where university faculty and district leaders work together to customize teacher leadership programs that deliver standards based content in a selected context (Miller, Devin, & Shoop, 2005).

Just as professional development school partnerships between teacher preparation programs and field practice prepare teachers for transitioning from pre-service student to classroom teacher, a similar partnership has become a powerful model for building leadership capacity required to transform novice teachers into the teacher leaders our schools must have to produce student success in the 21st Century. Bangs and Frost (2012) state, "A teacher with strong beliefs in his or her own efficacy will be resilient, able to solve problems and, most importantly, learn from their experience" (p. 3). This article describes the success of one such model by sharing evidence of the changes produced in teachers' understanding of the role of the leader and of their personal sense of efficacy as related to becoming confident, capable, and effective leaders.

Description of the Teacher Leadership Academy Model

Leadership matters and it produces the greatest improvement in student outcomes when focused on the right things. Researchers validated a statistically significant 50th to 60th percentile increase in mean student achievement as a result of improved leadership performance (Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2003). Leithwood

(2006) found a positive correlation between high rates of teachers' self-efficacious beliefs and higher levels of student achievement. In this partnership model districts select as participants local teachers who have demonstrated potential for becoming leaders ready to meet future district needs. Together the district and the university custom design a two-year master's degree program blending on-site class sessions with technology-based interaction. Field practice under the guidance of experienced mentors assigned by the district connect what is learned in the classroom to what is occurring in the school site as teachers take on increasingly responsible roles as leaders while remaining in their teaching positions.

University faculty work with district leaders to weave national leadership standards across various local context specifics such as size, geography, culture, and learning goals into the leadership capacity building model design. In place of the traditional discrete course delivery, an integrated, spiraling curriculum makes a strong connection between theory and practice. Academy planners intentionally create a curriculum that integrates rich opportunities for learning within a spiraling framework leading students towards mastery of standards based content (Devin, 2004). University faculty and district administrators learn with the aspiring leaders and their mentors. Strong learning networks are formed, new conversations focused on systemic improvement are initiated in schools, and a culture of working collaboratively spreads beyond the cohort group.

The Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) Standards (see Appendix) that drive the university educational leadership programs and the state licensing requirements for educational leaders also frame the partnership academies. Using the same rubric in place for all educational leadership department programs in the university, teacher leadership academy students self-assess their level of development in the areas of knowledge, dispositions, and performance for each of six leadership standards at the beginning and again at conclusion of the two-year cohort masters program. The difference between the measures at these two points indicates growth in the teacher's perception of personal leadership development. The data analysis that follows focuses on students' pre and post points on that self-assessment of the ISLLC standards and the resulting indication of perceived levels of growth.

Data Analysis

Data from four master degree leadership academies present evidence of changes produced by a university/district partnership preparation model on individual student perceptions of their capacity as teacher leaders. The assessment measures student perceived level of development in three separate categories (knowledge, dispositions, and performance) for each of the six ISLLC standards for educational leaders and is completed by students as a pre-measure at the beginning of the

program and repeated as a post measure at the completion of the two year duration. Self-assessing three categories across each of the six standards, an individual student produces a total of 18 data points for each pre and post assessment. Participants are asked to place themselves appropriately on a continuum of Little Understanding, Basic, Proficient, and Distinguished for each standard. The four academies in the data took place across three different Kansas school districts between 2008 and 2013.

Pre and post data on student perceived level of understanding of knowledge, dispositions, and performance across the six ISLLC standards offers evidence of the changes in levels of self-efficacy as a leader by the close of the academy experience. Table 1 displays the number of participants in each academy and the number and percent of data points recorded across all students in each of four developmental levels at both pre and post measures. Looking at the individual academies, it is notable that student perception points are consistently concentrated in the lower two levels of development on the pre measure. Across the four groups, 76% of all assessment data points are less than proficient, as would be expected at the beginning of their study. Conversely, at the conclusion of year two, across all four academy groups, a grand total of 97% of the data points selected by students to describe themselves were proficient or distinguished on the developmental continuum—a dramatic shift in reported self-image. It is also worth noting that the level of distinguished ratings alone moved from 2% to 41%.

Considering all six standards there were a total of 1116 total data point self-ratings reported from the 62 participants across the four academies. Only 32 (3%) of that 1116 were below the proficient level of development at the end of the four academies. In respect to distribution among the four developmental levels, 15 (47%) of the 32 came from the performance category including all standards except Standard 2: Teaching and Learning, where there were no self-ratings below proficient in performance. The second highest of the four developmental levels in self-assessed rankings below proficient was in the Knowledge category (12 or 38%). Looking at the below proficient ratings by Standard, Standard 6 Policy/Larger Context gathered the greatest number of total self-ratings below proficient with 14 (44%) of the 32 ratings scattered across the four developmental levels. Standard 4 yielded the second highest number at 7 (22%) of the 32 self-assessed ratings below proficient, also distributed across the developmental levels.

Students were provided with a rubric describing each of the four developmental levels. We can see from Table 1 the change in percent of the total ratings at a given level and the change from the pre to post measure. Data show dramatic shifts from ratings of less than proficient to those of proficient or above through this lens. Academy 4 begins with a higher percentage at proficient and moves to a comparable significant final percentage at the distinguished level, indicating program flexibility enables content to be adjusted to effectively match current student ability. This would

require further program analysis.

The goal of the university/district partnership is to move students from below proficient to proficient or above in terms of the knowledge of what makes leadership successful, the dispositions contributing to successful leadership, and the ability to perform as successful leaders in the district sponsoring the academy.

Table 2 provides a brief snapshot of the data measuring the change in student self-perception above and below proficient across those areas. The percent of students self-assessing development below proficient ranged from 57% to 84% across the four academies to a range of 1% to 8% at the end of the two years. On the proficient or above side, academies ranged from pre-measures of 16% to 43%, to a range of 92% to 99% for the post-measure. Student's self-assessment across standards indicates marked perceived growth from the beginning to the end of the leadership academy.

Conclusion

The self-assessment data obtained from these four teacher leadership academies highlights changes in the way students think about themselves as leaders in terms of knowledge about leadership, dispositions underlying successful leadership, and performance as leaders after completing the academy teacher leadership program. University and district planners for these partnerships note the success of the model for preparing teacher leaders in the consistent development of self-efficacy related to performing more confidently in leadership roles. Teachers completing an academy offered through a partnership between the university and their district report seeing themselves as more capable and competent leaders in the school setting. Across the four academies, 97% of the student self-assessment ratings were at the level of proficient or above. Within the 3% remaining below proficient, the greatest number 47% fell in areas related to performance and 38% were related to knowledge levels. The only standard receiving no ratings less than proficient at the end of the academy was Standard 2; Teaching and Learning. In respect to distributions across standards, the greatest number of less than proficient ratings occurred in Standard 6: Policy and Larger Context and Standard 4: Collaboration.

This review of a self-assessment of performance provides valuable insight into the university/district model's effectiveness in building teacher self-efficacy, a key component of teacher leadership. This is a significant outcome supporting the continued value using the university and district partnership model for preparing competent and responsive leaders for the schools of today and the future.

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Table 1

*Teacher Leadership Academies – Number and Percent each Developmental Level
Pre/Post ISLLC Self-Assessment across all Six Standards*

Academy	Little Understanding		Basic		Proficient		Distinguished	
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
Academy 1 n=20	141 39%	0 0%	162 45%	8 2%	50 14%	201 56%	7 2%	151 42%
Academy 2 n=12	45 21%	0 0%	115 53%	17 8%	56 26%	159 74%	0 0%	40 18%
Academy 3 n=20	63 18%	0 0%	221 61%	6 2%	75 21%	166 46%	1 0%	188 52%
Academy 4 n=10	17 9%	0 0%	86 48%	1 1%	68 38%	98 54%	9 5%	81 45%
Total n = 62	266 24%	0 0	584 52%	32 3%	249 22%	624 56%	17 2%	460 41%

Table 2

*Teacher Leadership Academies - Range of Percent Combined Levels of Performance across
Four Academies*

Combined Performance Levels	Pre Measure Range	Post Measure Range
Little Understanding/Basic	57% to 84%	1% to 8%
Proficient/Distinguished	16% to 43%	92% to 99%