

My Leadership Philosophy

Leadership for MS Science
EDU 587-630
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Leadership experience prior to MISEP

I can remember early in my career, as somewhat a new teacher, I had in the back of my head that one day I would be a school principal. For me, it was a natural form of progressing. But for a number of years I focused on being a classroom teacher, by staying mostly to myself and focusing primarily on my students. At one school, I recall how the principal established various committees and expected teachers to sign up for one. It was sort of forcing one into a leadership role. At another school, I remember when the principal told me that she wanted to use my classroom as a meeting place to show case what a model classroom should look like. I have to admit; I did like that kind of recognition. So on occasion, I participated in the “sharing out of ideas and experiences” during staff development. In my twenty plus years of teaching in Philadelphia, I have had numerous leadership roles. Some I have sought out and applied for, whereas others were offered and suggested to me. With that, it sparked new interest for me to pursue a Masters in Administration with a Principal Certification that I started in 1998 at Cheyney University’s Urban Satellite campus in West Philadelphia.

With the exception of math, the leadership roles that I’ve held were nonspecific to a subject. I have served on various Leadership teams, and S.A.T teams. I was the grade four chairperson for two years at one school. At that same school, I served as the PFT (Philadelphia Federation of Teachers) Building Representative for five years. While at that school, the staff nominated me to represent them for the Ruth Wright Hayre Award. This award honors one teacher, citywide, as the Teacher of the Year. Ironically enough, prior to that, I served as a judge for two years in the selection of a candidate for the same award. I’ve also sat on a panel of three to recognize an outstanding teacher within the region/cluster that I taught in. At two different schools, I was asked by the principal to host Student Teachers. I did this for five years. Finally, I’ve served on numerous committees throughout the schools.

What Leadership means to me.

To answer the question, what leadership means to me, I feel that I need to define it. Effective leadership is getting other people motivated enough to follow your lead or goal. Someone who wants to lead might feel that they have something to offer that may better a situation. It is this offering that drives and stimulates the desire to lead. It's a form of fulfillment for the individual. This vision is what it means to be an effective leader.

It has often been stated that great leaders are born not made. In Philadelphia, where the teacher attrition rate is high, newly hires are required to attend induction programs. Similarly mentioned in the article Preparing New Teachers For Leadership Roles, (Quinn, Haggerd and Ford) which not only focused on retaining new teachers, but making them into school leaders, Philadelphia Teachers are also assigned a "New Teacher Coach" to train and guide them through their first year of teaching. But after seeing and hearing about some Philadelphia school principals' actions, I find it hard to believe and sometimes have to wonder whether all leaders are born to lead. It is evident that some try to lead by intimidation rather than by example. An effective leader should not have to intimidate his or her workers, but rather support and guide them. I recently spoke to a teacher whom I worked with last school year (2006 -2007). He is now teaching fourth grade at another school in the same district. As a teacher of record, one needs to be able to access their current class' data via the school district's web site. One day he went to the office to inform his school's principal that he could not access his class in order to begin entering the first reporting marks. This is something the building principal needs to set up for new teachers to the building. He noticed the principal in her office at her desk, so he went straight into her office to explain the problem. She interrupted him and informed him that he would need to arrange a meeting with her through the secretary. He apologized and continued to express his concern since it would be very brief. She interrupted him again and told him to step out of her office to ask the secretary if she was available to see him. This was a major turn off for him who happened to be a very nice guy and who has just completed a degree in school administration with principal certification. He vowed not to seek her out for any future

needs. He has since put in his resignation and was hired by another school district. I have this little experiment in my head that I would like to use on a room full of administrators, perhaps during one of their professional development days. I would have them sit in what appears to be students' desks. Next, I would give them a (difficult) task to complete and when they begin to question me, I would give them short, incomplete answers. Oh, I would also be condescending and nasty. Finally, when some begin to speak up and advocate for those "poor," "helpless" students who are sitting in front of that terrible teacher, it is then that I let them know that they're playing the roles of "poor," "helpless" teachers and I am the principal.

First and foremost, a school leader starts with me, the classroom teacher, who should dedicate my all in leading the students to a full and successful learning experience. Most teachers that I know are caring of their students. One should be passionate about their teaching and have compassion for their students, without allowing them to make any excuses. When it comes to some school principals, they are so far removed from the classroom and today's youth that they can't see the "forest for the trees." Like classroom teachers, who may have a system of rewards and punishments outlined to motivate their students in order that they to stay on task, principals may have similar methods set up for teachers to follow protocol. This theory, known to educators as the "carrot stick theory," (N. Noddings 2006) is one way to try to conform masses of people. But can schools be managed like businesses and companies in order to motivate teachers to improve students' test scores? Gone are the days of being patient when it comes to educating a child. If a student don't do well on a particular day on a certain exam, then they most likely don't understand the concept and therefore should go to summer school or perhaps repeat the grade. So the student gets punished, like states and the Federal Government punish school districts for not meeting certain goals year after year (N. Noddings 2006).

Although I am given a curriculum to follow with suggested materials to use, I often look outside and beyond what my school district offers. I like to make learning fun. The passion is what drives me. Once I find something interesting, I often share it with

my colleagues, especially those teaching the same grade (or subject) as I. In the past, when given the opportunity, I have shared some of my experiences during Professional Development meeting days. Because I'm just a teacher and a colleague to other teachers, I cannot make policy decisions that will formally lead the staff to implement them. I can, however, lead by being an example of what teaching ought to be. I can lead by keeping a positive attitude when it comes to teaching today's students with limited money, materials, and resources. I can lead by being a fine example of an employee of my school district that I hope would be enough to motivate others. I can lead because I believe that my daily communication with teachers and students shows a genuine trait that allow one to look to me with ease and comfort that will, in turn, provide guidance and assurance that will be transferred to improved test scores (Waters, Marzano, and McNulty, 2004).

Basically, I believe that the initiative to lead lies within us all. Sometimes it takes others to see the faint light within us, and then give us the tools to make it brighter. But one must realize it, know how to, and when to tap into it, in order to bring it out in a way that others will listen, follow, and want to implement an idea born out of you.

Leadership experience during MISEP

Last school year, I served as my school's "Growth" Teacher. This is a newly created District-wide position that resembled the duties of a New Teacher Coach and Mentor. With this position, came yearlong membership on the school's Leadership and S.A.T. teams. It also began my leadership role as a full-fledged partner with the Science Fair Committee that I co-chair with Bill Wagenborg.

This school year brought some changes to my leadership roles. I am no longer the School Growth Teacher. Although I liked my duties and responsibilities that went with the job, I didn't want to lose my teaching position at Fell. In the School District of Philadelphia, if you choose not to return to your teaching position for another job title after one year, you will lose it and the School District can relocate you to any school in

the district. My new role here at Fell is the Math SBTL (School-based Teacher Leader). Last year, when the principal learned that I would not be continuing as School Growth Teacher, she understood because she didn't want to risk me being sent to another school. It was then she asked if I would like to be the Math SBTL.

Conclusion

So, are leaders born or are they made? Was Rosa Park's defiance to conform to a system of unfairness due to innate leadership just waiting for the right moment that would gain the most attention or was it made from the festering of hate that surrounded her daily life? Did the 9th grade, Jena, Louisiana High School student who questioned his school principal on why black students couldn't sit under what had been deemed a tree for white students only, purposely and knowingly decide to take a stand in the interest of what is right and what is wrong. Or, was it pure innocence, and he just wanted to know out of curiosity? The world may never know. What I think is that leadership requires natural ability and some common sense. Are leaders born or are they made?..... I say yes to both!

Reference:

Noddings, Nel. (Sept 2006) *Educational Leaders as Caring Teachers* (School Leadership & Management) (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. EJ743678).

Quinn, Cheri L.; Haggard, Cynthia S.; Ford, Betty A. (Feb 2006) *Preparing New Teachers for Leadership Roles* (School Leadership & Management) (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. EJ729183).

Waters, J. Timothy; Haggard, Marzano, Robert J. ; McNulty, Brian (Apr 2004) *Leadership That Sparks Learning* (Educational Leadership) (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. EJ716739).