The Problem / Motivation for Research Question

After attending an Aspiring Heads Fellows workshop at last year’s NAIS Conference, we were curious about:

- The impact of teacher shortages on independent schools
- The need for further development and growth for teachers
- Influencing millennials’ wishes for capacity building
- Existing shared leadership roles within schools
- Innovative ways to recruit and retain talented teachers

Research Question

How are independent schools leveraging distributive leadership models, professional development, and evaluation in innovative ways to successfully cultivate teachers as leaders?

Investigative Process

- Conduct Literature Review.
- Identify schools and school leaders to interview.
- Determine common interview questions.
- Analyze the data for trends, themes, and examples.
- Develop questions for further research.

Schools

Nine from: Texas, Georgia, Washington, DC, Maryland, Ohio, Online, Massachusetts

- 6 schools: K/PK-12
- 2 schools: PK/K - 6 or 8
- 1 school: Grades 9-12
- 1 school: single-sex (girls)
- 1 school: gifted children
- 1 school: online

Research Team

- Sue Belcher, The Downtown School: A Lakeside School
- Crissy Cáceres, Georgetown Day School
- Malika DeLancey, McDonogh School
- Suzie Matthews, Santa Fe Preparatory School
- Mya Sullivan, Rabun Gap-Nacoochee School

Our Mentor:

Veronica Codrington-Cazeau, The Evergreen School
Interview Questions

What innovative things is your school doing around each of the following?

What motivated you to do these things?

- Distributive leadership
- Professional development
- Attracting & retaining millennial teachers
- Teachers as leaders
- Evaluation practices

Literature: Teachers as Leaders

“Teaching is regarded as highly intellectual work, grounded in professional communities where teachers assume responsibility for the learning of their students and of one another... Under this interpretation, teachers assume roles as researchers, mentors, scholars, and developers; they expand the meaning of what it means to be a teacher. They are leaders and intellectuals who can make a difference in their schools and profession.”


Action Research: Teachers as Leaders

Each school affirmed the importance of teacher leadership.

- “We see all of our teachers as leaders.”
- Teacher leadership builds authentic connections between/among faculty members.
- One school's professional growth & evaluation model “challenges faculty members to establish themselves as growth-oriented practitioners and leaders of colleagues on campus.”

Literature: Distributive Leadership

“The evidence increasingly points towards a positive relationship between distributed leadership, organisational improvement and student achievement.”


Action Research: Distributive Leadership

Schools with distributive leadership models noted the importance of:

- The head of school embracing collaboration and shared ideas
- Articulation of catalysts for moving towards a distributed leadership model
- Having clear job descriptions
- Scheduling sacred time for administrative roles
- Having a continuous process for considering design of leadership structure

Action Research: Teachers as Leaders, Examples

- “Pathways to Leadership” program
- Training as instructional coaches
- Critical Friends Facilitator
- Diversity Leadership Committee
- Committee on Re-imagining Schools
- Task force (50-60 people) working to expand definition of leadership and professional development.
- Master Class on Inclusive Leadership
Distributive Leadership, continued

Schools raised the following questions:

- How do we encourage leadership without overwhelming teachers?
- How do we ensure that teachers remain primarily focused on teaching and learning?
- How does school size impact distributive leadership models?

Literature: Professional Development

“Job-embedded professional development planned collaboratively with other teachers and leaders to target instructional strategies and other content immediately applicable to their practice.”


Action Research: Professional Development

- “Adult learners experience the same philosophical approach we strive to provide our student learners.”
- In-house programs are more effective than outside speakers.
- Ongoing, teacher-led programs are more effective than 1-3 in-service days.
- Many of the schools noted the importance of choice for teachers in professional development process.

Findings: Professional Development (Examples)

- GDSU / Faculty Fellows
  1. Writers’ Retreat
  2. The Guide for White Women Who Teach Black Boys at GDS
  3. Using the City as a Resource and Classroom: Planning Project-based Learning and Place-based Learning Activities Using Relevant Organizations
- Week-long Teaching & Leadership Institute (McDonogh)
- Parish Inspire (20 internal examples of teachers taking on new roles)
- Several schools noted that personal growth is a part of a robust professional development program.

Literature: Evaluation

“For teachers, as for students, the most effective evaluation comes from someone who sits beside us and helps grow.”


Action Research: Evaluation

All but one school did not have an explicit process for evaluating leadership as part of teachers’ performance reviews.

- One school with a new evaluation model noted leadership is not a requirement, but there are goals around the process.
- One school is asking: How do we know this process is complete, and how do we know if it’s done well?
- Schools using Folio noted that recommendations for growth are put into Folio to capture what teachers are doing.
Action Research: Evaluation (Examples)

- Folio Collaborative
- Strengths Finder (Leading Self, Leading Team)
- Peer evaluation processes
- Shorter, more frequent check-ins that support an ongoing cycle of feedback

Almost all schools incorporated student feedback in the teacher evaluation process.

Action Research: Millennial Teachers

Schools noted that millennial teachers:

- are particularly motivated by the mission of a school.
- want to be inspired, do work that matters, engage in community in ways that are meaningful/personal.
- value transparency and want to be kept in the loop, even if they are not directly impacted by a decision or discussion.
- desire leadership titles within 3-5 years.

Further Questions for Consideration

- How are modes of communication at your school being used to increase transparency? (ex.: Slack Channels, protocols around who is copied/blind copied on emails)
- What is required of teachers who do outside professional development?
- How should schools evaluate leadership in teachers?
- Who decides the topics for Professional Days?

Further Questions, Continued

- How might choice in professional development/evaluation models unintentionally lead to inequity?
- How are evaluators (department chairs, etc.) trained and evaluated?
- How do schools intentionally continue to move away from a “culture of nice”?
- What questions would we want on an instrument to measure leadership growth?

Recommended Reading


Recommended Reading, Continued


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