

Chapter 10

Unwrapping the Shrink Wrap: Teacher Led Improvement in Writing Instruction

Sarah Vander Zanden

University of Northern Iowa, USA

Lois Berger

University of Northern Iowa, USA

Katie Simpson

Cedar Falls Public Schools, USA

Kristen Schrock

Cedar Falls Public Schools, USA

Erin Becker

Cedar Falls Public Schools, USA

Jenifer Dise

Cedar Falls Public Schools, USA

Katie Taylor Clausen

Cedar Falls Public Schools, USA

ABSTRACT

This chapter describes a team of teachers and university instructors' investigation of teacher-led instructional improvements in elementary classroom writing instruction through peer observation and collective dialogue examining everyday teaching practices. Established tools and processes in place such as district curriculum, the Units of Study, and tools of observation and collaboration, specifically Learning

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Labs (www.pebc.org) protocol and professional learning communities, supported a naturalistic inquiry of practice. Teacher leadership, like writing instruction, is a process, and these educators identified co-constructed observation as a tool for sustaining joy, an under researched element of teacher leadership and professional development. Additionally, collaborative debriefing fostered professional growth, and collective inquiry provided inroads to autonomy in curricular decision making. The team sought to lead from within to develop understanding of and improvements in writing instruction.

INTRODUCTION

Teachers *are* leaders and the participants in this inquiry into writing instruction documents how informal teacher leadership can be a source of joy and professional growth. The group gathered with the intention of studying and identifying effective instructional practices. Through peer observation, collective debriefing, and quite a bit of laughter, project participants developed new understanding of how they were leading from within (Palmer, 1999). Palmer suggested that in a community, such as a school staff, all members are leaders and followers. By reframing leadership as a process of projecting light over shadow, members of that community are able to choose how to lead. Focusing on the inner self or as Palmer (1999) describes, leading by doing, an educator or community member elects to move beyond that which can be easily measured or evaluated to embody leadership. Leading from within is demonstrated by the teacher leaders' experiences described here as they observed, were observed themselves, and debriefed their experiences publicly and without external reward. This chapter documents how informal mentoring or building upon what Darling-Hammond, Bullmaster, & Cobb, 1995; Blase & Blase, 2006) and others label as informal teacher leadership roles, might be hailed as productive and support schoolwide understandings about teaching which in this specific case focused on elementary writing.

BACKGROUND

Informal teacher leadership is a method of leading without a formally label role. Informal teacher leadership is a concept discussed at length in Darling-Hammond and colleagues' early work with and about Professional Development Schools (Darling-Hammond, 1994; Darling-Hammond, Bullmaster, & Cobb, 1995). It

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