Hot off the Press:

**Hybrid teacher leaders and the studio classroom**


**Summary of the Article**

The focus of this study is “hybrid teacher leaders” (HTLs) and the studio classroom. A HTL is a teacher whose responsibilities are twofold; teaching in the classroom and leading other teachers in some capacity. The study is designed to assist educational leaders in the implementation of organizational and social structures that allow teacher leaders to have a positive impact on other teachers. The study was conducted over a two year period. Six teacher leaders from four school districts participated in the study. Data collected included individual and group interviews with teachers, on site observation, as well as interviews with administrators.

**Background**

Over the past twenty years, educational reform efforts and teacher professional development has shifted from the conceptual to the practical. Teacher learning is now being embedded into everyday teaching. Professional development is face-to-face, embedded in classroom contexts, and targeted. In order to accomplish this, teacher leaders are being used more and more as coaches, staff developers, and instructional leaders. There is some confusion about what these positions involve, and as these roles are created, there is not always the organizational capacity to use them effectively.

Even though there has not been a lot of research conducted on studio classrooms, indirect research highlights some possible benefits. These benefits include colleague modeling, encouragement for both the observer and teacher being observed to try different teaching strategies, having observers present prompts experimentation with new strategies, and the in-classroom support is essential for success. The practice of studio classrooms is difficult to implement, so they rarely run as planned. Many teachers consider the purpose of the observing and debriefing process of studio classrooms to be for replication in their own classrooms. It should, however, be the beginning of discussions for teacher learning.

**Key points effect change:**

- Reward awareness of struggles – the more honest and thorough, the better.
- Use data to improve rather than prove.
- Use classroom observations to learn rather than to evaluate.
- Encourage teachers to be reflective.

This article summary has been prepared for the convenience of educators who may not have time to read, or can not access the full article. The opinions expressed in this summary may not reflect the opinion of the authors of the article.

This summary was produced by: Ann McKerlie, OCT, B. Ed., M.A.
Hybrid teacher leaders and the studio classroom

Situated theory frames learning as coming from action related to others. In recent years, this has happened in education in the form of peer teacher coaches (this process parallels instructional rounds in the medical field). This allows teachers to learn from and with people who also work with students, aiming to improve classroom instruction.

A limitation of the study is the tangible synergy between HTL’s roles as “teacher” and “leader.” This was less prevalent than planned, and therefore harder to document and analyze.

Findings of Study

Administrator’s Intentions: HTLs’ plans to build a studio classroom often did not happen as a result of mixed messages from district and school administrators. One administrator argued that it was not worth the risk to students to experiment with new practices. Every student deserves the chance to experience effective teaching practices. There is often a culture of privacy where teachers are allowed to work in isolation. Overall, there was more administrative support in words than actions for the studio classroom.

Modeling: Teachers from across the sites liked having approaches modeled for them, but they did not like being observed. Seeing other teachers “in action” helped them to better understand and more deeply integrate strategies into their own classrooms. It helped to “see it.”

HTL Barriers: Collegial responses toward HTLs created barriers. Modeling made some teachers too dependent on HTLs, guest teaching is more focused on instruction than on relationships with students, and some teachers thought it was not worth their time to observe classrooms. They would rather work independently. There was the general sense that teachers were not ready for the studio classroom. HTLs were struggling to implement many of the same reforms that they were encouraging their colleagues to implement. Teachers were afraid of judgment if they opened up their classrooms for observation.

Structural Barriers: Lack of direction from administrators on expectations related to focus and frequency, scheduling conflicts between HTLs and teachers, funding, lack of instruction to encourage learning from the event. There was no process in place to link the HTLs’ observations to specified improvement.

School-Cultural Barriers: The word “observe” was never used in conjunction with classroom visitations. This resulted from union issues and the perception that it would violate the privacy that some teachers value. HTLs moved away from the classroom-based activities and into a more virtual approach as a result.

The common link among the barriers found in the study is a lack of understanding and appreciation for the teacher learning process, despite extensive research that shows that learning from mistakes is essential to changes in beliefs and practices. The structural barriers (e.g. lack of time, money, protocols, focus) enable the school-cultural barriers (e.g. fear, distrust, privacy), which are long-held within the teaching profession.

The closed door culture of teaching will not change easily. Teachers need to be encouraged to reflect on their teaching rather than replicate what may be considered “best practice.” “Leadership is in the learning, not in the perfection.” There is no holy grail for the perfect lesson. In order to start to effect change, the following can be done:

- Reward awareness of struggles – the more honest and thorough, the better.
- Use data to improve rather than prove
- Use classroom observations to learn rather than to evaluate
- Encourage teachers to be reflective