Shared Leadership (SL) Definitions

The move toward community norms, values, and expectations depends on building (or rebuilding) trusting relationships at the local school and department level based on authentically shared and deeply held commitments about students’ futures. (Leithwood, 2016, p. 136)

Shared Leadership (SL) is a feature of modern leadership based on trust, collective decision making, inspired communal acceptance of responsibilities, and increased performance of participants (Alanezi, 2016; Leithwood & Azah, 2016) which results in high morale (Hmieleski et al., 2012; Askar, 2012) and a culture of high expectations for improvement (Carpenter, 2015; Leithwood, 2016).

Voluntary cooperation, sincere interaction, and assumed responsibility imbue SL (Goksoy, 2016). Shared Leadership is fluid and reflects a culture of working in unity (Bakir, 2013). Shared Leadership and distributed leadership are separate leadership approaches, yet they share many common elements (Goksoy, 2016). Exploring supportive SL structures at schools as a function of school culture policies and procedures, Carpenter (2015) realized that SL was a form of professional collaborative action “that goes beyond formal positions and specific roles with a pedagogical purpose, shared leadership is broadly defined as teacher participation in schoolwide and instructional decision making” (Chen, Lee, Lin, & Zhang, 2016, p. 253) (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Shared Leadership

Shared Leadership Enablers

Shared Leadership includes shared values and vision that influences “teacher initiative and collaboration through interdependence and trust-building of school members” (Chen et al., 2016, p. 261). Shared Leadership enablers include the development of a positive school culture and effective PLCs that influence school improvement (Leithwood, 2016; Grille, Schulte, & Kauffeld, 2015). Leaders work with everyone to “create policies and procedures that provide teachers the leadership structure to directly impact school improvement through professional learning community collaborative efforts” (Carpenter, 2015, p. 682) (see Figure 2).

Essential school “policies, procedures and professional learning communities include, shared purpose, shared values, shared leadership, a collaborative culture, collective inquiry, and a focus on continuous improvement” (Carpenter, 2015, p. 682-683). Professional Learning Communities include supportive and SL, purpose and values, a cooperative problem solving culture, and collective focus upon continuous improvement of teaching and learning (Feger & Arruda, 2008; Leithwood, 2016). This “shared purpose is a collective and mutual agreement on how educators will work to improve the school” (Carpenter, 2015, p. 686) as collegiality leads to shared understandings and cultures of professional collaboration which improve instruction (Leithwood, 2016). The continuous improvement cycle means there is an “active collaborative culture, and a well-trained collective inquiry process” (Carpenter, 2015, p. 688).

The leader is also a “learner attending professional development, is friendly and facilitative in sharing leadership, power and authority through giving staff decision making input” (Carpenter, 2015, p. 688). The leader can “share responsibility for improvement with teachers by providing a structure where collaboration is well-defined” (Carpenter, 2015, p. 688). However, “direction-setting practices have more influence on some path variables such as achieving a shared goal” (Sun & Leithwood, 2015, p. 516). Indeed, “ensuring each member of a group of collaborators focusses on common outcomes of the continuous improvement cycle requires commonality in what and how the group functions” (Carpenter, 2015, p. 689). School organizations with a “shared vision motivates teachers to commit to and make extra efforts” (Sun & Leithwood, 2015, p. 509) and leaders must ensure they provide “supportive and
shared leadership structures that promote effective collaboration and therefore teacher doing real work in schools” (Carpenter, 2015, p. 689). Shared Leadership does require,

consistent year-long training and follow up [that] will provide common purpose and values, help promote a collaborative culture, provide the tools teachers need for collective inquiry about their practice while also promoting continuous improvement of the school at meeting the needs of the students they serve. (Carpenter, 2015, p. 681)

**Shared Leadership in the Toronto District School Board**

Within the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) “we share leadership to enhance the learning culture that supports improvement for all students” (Toronto District School Board, 2016, p. 1). Figure 3 displays the SL characteristics in the TDSB as highlighted in the TDSB’s Vision for Learning. “Shared leadership is the creation of conditions in every school, department and across the system that” (Toronto District School Board, 2016, p.1).

**Figure 3: Shared Leadership in the Toronto District School Board**

- Honours the experience and expertise of all
- Creates processes so that everyone has appropriate influence aligned with their expertise
- Understands the importance of Professional Capital-Social, Human and Decisional (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012; as cited in, TDSB, 2016, p.1).

- Realizes that decisions are not always healthy when they are made at the “top” but may lack important direction if they are only made from the “ground”
- Recognizes that formal leaders, such as principals or superintendents, play a significant role so that optimal conditions for learning exist and that efforts are coordinated. (Toronto District School Board, 2016, p. 1)

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Source: (Toronto District School Board, 2016, p.1)
Sharing leadership with all staff in coordinated ways is pivotal to our work. In order for this shared leadership model to be effective, all staff are committed to learning and continuous improvement. By collaborating together, the staff at each school will be able to meet the needs of each student. By leading together, the staff will be able to persevere in the face of any challenges, leading to improved outcomes for students. (Toronto District School Board, 2016, p. 3)

Staff well-being is also an integral part of student well-being. Staff well-being is enhanced when input is valued and when staff understand how they are contributing to student success. Good communication, shared leadership, and a trusting learning environment are critical. We have a collective responsibility to create healthy learning and work environments that contribute to lifelong learning. (Toronto District School Board, 2016, p. 9)

References


