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ECI 508

### **Teacher Leadership Essay**

In this class, my definition of leadership has changed drastically. I used to think that leaders were simply people that held positional power and that there was nothing else involved. I now understand that leadership entails much more than this. Throughout the course of this class, the following themes have emerged for me: true leadership involves developing future leaders, balance, and genuine commitment. Class discussions, my own reflections, the readings, and my interview with an educational leader all played key roles in developing these themes in my mind.

Before this class, I thought that leaders were authoritarians; I felt that their primary responsibility was to take charge and tell others what to do. I now understand that true leaders have the best interest of their school (or other organization) at heart, and they understand that goals are better met when multiple people share responsibilities. In essence, genuine leaders are selfless and do not crave attention; they want all stakeholders to be involved and reap the benefits of success. This theme was most evident to me from my interview of an educational leader. I spoke with my former assistant principal, who is now principal of a different school. She asserted that leaders are effective only when they “give others opportunities to shine” and share responsibilities with others. In sum, strong leaders use distributed leadership to accomplish goals and visions more efficiently. Most importantly, being a leader in this way develops future leaders by giving others opportunities to refine their budding leadership skills.

Balance is an essential component of leadership that I did not strongly associate with it in the past. There are many factors involved in balance; one is balancing one’s personal life with one’s professional life. When a leader is able to do this, he or she will be happier in general, which will lead to a more positive attitude. This makes leaders more approachable, and thereby effective. Another

component of balance is flexibility. If a leader is too rigid, he or she will miss invaluable opportunities to interact with staff (or other stakeholders) and try new things. In addition, lacking flexibility leads to a negative working environment. If people feel like their leader isn't understanding or too set in his or her ways, they won't take risks, and less progress will be made. In my leadership log musings, I noted that many great ideas my colleagues have are squashed by administration before they even really have the opportunity to be heard, which is extremely unfortunate. If given the chance to thoroughly explain their thinking and execute their ideas, I truly believe that students would greatly benefit. Transformative leadership cannot emerge without some degree of flexibility, and transformative leadership is what makes amazing things happen.

The most important pattern I detected in this class among effective leaders is that they are genuinely committed to their organization or cause. True leaders practice servant leadership, quiet leadership, and lead by example. All of this leads to the establishment of personal power, which makes their leadership much stronger. When coupled with positional power, personal power is extremely effective. Positional power often precedes personal power, but I do think that the order is reversed in many cases. For instance, as noted in my leadership log, if a person is extremely vested in his or her job and truly does their best each day, this is recognized and often rewarded with some degree of positional power. For example, a first grade teacher at my school came mid-year in the 2010-2011 school year. Even though she has been on the first grade team for a shorter time than all of the other team members, she was asked to be grade chair this year. Our principal based this decision on her dedication, work ethic, and willingness to help others with whom she works. This is a classic example of personal power directly leading to positional power, and when it occurs in this order I do believe it is the most effective.

I am excited about accomplishing the goals I have set for myself as a teacher leader in the future. I do feel that I have a certain degree of personal power, as my colleagues often come to me for

ideas, advice, and assistance. I also have a slight amount of positional power as I serve as grade chair and am a member of other committees. However, I do think I can enhance my distributed leadership skills by giving my teammates more grade level responsibilities instead of doing them all myself. Not only will this relieve stress for me, but it will also give them opportunities to enhance their own leadership skills. I will do this by letting my colleagues choose which tasks they would like to do rather than by delegating them out in a strict fashion. I will want them to understand that I'm not trying to tell them what to do or boss them around, but that I genuinely value their input because it will strengthen us as a team overall.

I am extremely excited about the leadership opportunities that lie in my future, and I am so glad that this class helped me realize them. The insight I have gained into how true leadership works will be invaluable throughout my career. I will always strive to give others opportunities to shine, maintain balance, and convey my heartfelt commitment to this profession to everyone I come in contact with.