

Learning to Be Teacher Leaders

A Framework for
Assessment, Planning,
and Instruction

Amy D. Broemmel
Jennifer Jordan
Beau Michael Whitsett

LEARNING TO BE TEACHER LEADERS

“What makes this book a necessity for teacher leaders is that it provides information that they can immediately implement into their personal instruction and the work they are doing with their colleagues.”

Aimee Morewood, Associate Professor, College of Education and Human Services, Curriculum and Instruction, Literacy Studies, West Virginia University, USA

“For aspiring and novice teachers, this text provides an excellent foundation in the critical elements of the field. For experienced teachers and those mentoring other teachers, it provides a tool for providing leadership and coaching for colleagues. The tone is friendly and inviting and demonstrates the expertise of the authors in the ‘real world’ of teaching practice.”

K. Victoria Dimock, Chief Program Officer, SEDL, USA

Learning to Be Teacher Leaders examines three integrated components of strong pedagogy—assessment, planning, and instruction—within a framework emphasizing the knowledge, skills, and dispositions that can empower teachers to become teacher leaders within their schools. Woven throughout are a student-centered stance toward assessment, planning, and instruction and a teacher-centered stance toward leadership. At the same time, the text recognizes the outside factors that can challenge this approach and provides strategies for coping with them.

Combining the what, why, and how of teaching, the research-based concepts are presented in a pragmatic format, relevant across grade levels, classrooms, and content areas. Designed to be specifically helpful in supporting success on national licensure assessments, this comprehensive text brings together in one place the important features of learning to be an effective teacher and becoming a teacher leader who continues to grow and develop within the profession. Using this book as a guide and resource, preservice and beginning teachers will focus on the most important factors in teaching, resulting in strengthening their pedagogy and developing a language that helps them move forward in terms of agency and advocacy. A Companion Website provides additional resources for instructors and students.

Visit the Companion Website at www.routledge.com/cw/broemmel for video links, websites, and a glossary of terms that readers will find helpful and additional readings, digital presentations, and potential in-class activities for use by instructors.

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and Beau Michael Whitsett*

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This book is dedicated to all the current and former mentors and interns who have allowed us into their classrooms and their lives. We are grateful for the opportunity to learn alongside them as they have transformed into teacher leaders who positively affect their classrooms, schools, and communities.

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FOREWORD

We found Amy, Jennifer, and Beau's new book, *Learning to Be Teacher Leaders: A Framework for Assessment, Planning, and Instruction*, a pleasure to read. A pleasure because their goal is developing novice teachers into autonomous and effective teachers and into teacher leaders. Essential topics such as the potentially powerful role of formative assessment in understanding students as learners and for planning useful and powerful instruction are presented in a practical but evidence-based manner.

They argue for a unique analogy for understanding instruction, noting in Chapter 6 that theirs is "an agricultural, organic analogy as opposed to an industrial, constrained one." Their analogy works to help teachers understand why instructional differentiation is absolutely central to teaching effectively. They also argue for a balanced model for effective teaching, a model that incorporates the best of what we have learned from both the direct instruction and the inquiry-based models of teaching. Effective teachers need to be able to provide the specific and explicit routines some learners will need to become good readers and writers. At the same time, direct instruction plays a small but critical role when delivering literacy lessons that foster student independence and self-regulation, two central outcomes of effective inquiry-based literacy lessons.

Chapter 7 focuses on developing students' academic vocabulary and academic language, both of which are critical if students are to read well. We know much about developing the academic language proficiencies of children, all children, but too often fail to see much of what we know practiced in the instruction commonly offered in American classrooms. Too often, as the authors note, children from low-income homes, as well as children who are English language learners, arrive at school with English vocabulary knowledge well below that of the native

English-speaking, middle-class children who are often their classmates. The authors point out that the very purpose of academic language differs significantly from the social purposes of language used outside of schools.

Because the goal of all reading is understanding what has been read, the authors ask in Chapter 8 the very pertinent question: Why do we only see outstanding uses of questions in effective teachers' classrooms? Along the same lines, the authors ask why do we see so little literate conversation in American classrooms? Developing reading lessons where children respond to higher-order questions after reading and talk with each other about what has been read is a proven method for enhancing children's understanding and improving their comprehension when they read independently (Taylor, Peterson, Pearson, & Rodriguez, 2002; Nystrand, 2006). Unfortunately, as the authors point out, few classrooms offer students either the opportunity to respond to higher-order questions or to engage peers in literate conversations.

In the end, this book argues that effective teachers must make themselves heard: They must ask questions when mandates concerning daily practice run counter to effective practice. Learning to be that sort of teacher is the ultimate goal of this book. The content and the advice presented here will help new teachers develop into effective teachers and into teacher leaders. We couldn't ask a book to do much more.

Richard L. Allington and Anne McGill-Franzen
University of Tennessee

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- Taylor, B. M., Peterson, D. S., Pearson, P. D., & Rodriguez, M. C. (2002). Looking inside classrooms: Reflecting on the “how” as well as the “what” in effective reading instruction. *The Reading Teacher*, 56, 270–279.

PREFACE

Far too often, novice teachers are viewed through extreme lenses. Either they are assumed to be proficient teachers upon entering the classroom for the first time, ready to face the challenges of teaching and the associated accountability measures that are increasingly part of teacher evaluations, or they are thought to know so little about effective teaching that they are required to follow a script or other program, with fidelity to the program rather than to their students. This book is our attempt to find a middle ground by respecting the knowledge and experiences that novice teachers bring with them and using straightforward, professional language to pull the important features of learning to be an effective teacher together in one place. We examine three integrated components of strong pedagogy: assessment, planning, and instruction, as well as a fourth component of leadership. We believe that addressing both effective teaching and leadership without situating them within a specific content area makes this a unique contribution to the available literature.

We are dedicated to preparing teachers who emerge with the knowledge, skills, and dispositions that champion not only effective teaching, but also leadership within elementary schools. We believe that the most effective teaching involves leading at many different levels. This book, then, is written with the intent of supporting novice teaching professionals who are looking for ways to tap the potential of all students and continue to grow professionally. We believe that in using our work as a guide and resource, beginning teachers will be able to focus on the most important factors of teaching, resulting in strengthening their pedagogy and developing a language that will allow them to move forward in terms of both agency and advocacy. Overall, our writing is devoted to addressing the pragmatic needs of the reader by presenting research-based concepts of effective teaching in

practical language, accessible to novice teachers—even those in the earliest stages of learning and leadership.

After a short introductory chapter, the book is divided into four sections: Assessment, Planning, Instruction, Teacher Leadership. Each chapter builds on and draws upon the concepts discussed in the previous ones. The arrangement of topics mirrors how we believe effective instruction works: It starts with assessing students, uses that assessment data to plan for instruction, and carries out instruction while continuing to observe and assess. This instructional cycle is mediated by the depth of knowledge and growing body of experience that teachers bring with them into the classroom. How teachers see themselves affects their efficacy and, as a result, their students' learning, so developing the kinds of thinking and actions associated with leaders can be empowering and can serve to sustain beginning teachers through their challenging first years in the classroom. Throughout the book, we take a student-centered stance toward assessment, planning, and instruction, and a teacher-centered stance toward leadership. A final chapter sums up our hopes for our own students and readers: that they consistently take responsibility for making the instructional decisions that have the potential to affect their students in the most positive ways possible.

The book is filled with examples and anecdotes drawn from our own educational experiences. These examples come from all content areas and span the elementary school years. Each chapter concludes with a list of sources where readers can go to find more information on major topics, and the content chapters (those that fall under each of the four main components) also include activities that serve to link the ideas presented to opportunities to think about them and put them into practice. We have also attempted to integrate teachers' voices, particularly in the sections on leadership, so that readers know that the kinds of things we are advocating can and do really happen in classrooms across the country. We hope the voices within both inform and inspire novice teachers.

In addition, a Companion Website developed specifically for use with this book (www.routledge.com/cw/broemmel) contains additional readings, digital presentations, and potential in-class activities for use by instructors, as well as video links, websites, and a glossary of terms that readers will find helpful. Most importantly, we have included arrows at various points throughout each chapter in order to indicate the presence of a corresponding video on the Companion Website. We encourage readers to stop reading and take a moment to visit the site at these points along the way in order to watch examples of teachers carrying out the kinds of assessment, planning, and instruction described in the text.

We wish to thank all of the teachers who allowed us to come into their classrooms and capture a bit of what they do on a daily basis on video, as well as the reviewers who so graciously gave of their time to provide us with feedback along the way. And we hope that all of the hard work and effort of all the contributors has resulted in a text that, if nothing else, makes the reader stop and think for a little while—think about what they have the power to affect in their classrooms and schools. It is often more than one might expect.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

As isolating an endeavor as writing can be, through the sometimes tedious and almost always long hours of working on this book, I never felt alone. It is likely that the words that often seemed to start in my brain really came from elsewhere. They came from my own teaching mentors, Steve, Sherri, Patti, Michele, and Jean, who humbly modeled what effective teachers do and gently smoothed my rough edges during my own first years of teaching, and from amazing teachers like Nancy, Alisa, Matthew, and Seth whom I got to watch through the eyes of a parent as my own children journeyed through their classrooms. The words came from students like Reggie, Karen, and Julie, who taught me so much about working with future teachers during my very first semester of being a professor and from mentoring teachers like Ellie, Kristi, and Shannon, who gave me time to figure out how to (mostly) balance my continued idealism with the realities of classroom teaching as I supervised the graduate teaching interns placed in their classrooms. And they came from former students and current classroom teacher leaders like Bill, Lori, Dave, and Ashley, who have become my friends and mentors in their own right. This book would have never come into being without the influence of these incredible teachers who embody the definition of “teaching professionals.”

Many thanks go out to my dear friends, Ines and Bob, whose innocent dinner invitation turned into a lesson on normative ethics and started me on the road to exploring the field, snippets of which found their way into this book. Thanks, too, go to Lauren Hopson, who was willing to talk to me for an hour on the night before school started and agreed to write about how she became an outspoken teacher leader in her school district on top of fielding calls from the media, parenting, and planning for and teaching her third graders during the first two weeks of the school year. And, thanks go out to my co-authors who made this challenging process a little easier because of their flexibility, trust, and sense of humor.

Truthfully, none of this would've come to pass without my colleague, co-author, and partner in crime, Jennifer, who agreed to embark on this crazy endeavor with me from day one.

Finally, I never would have made it through the writing process with a shred of sanity without the support of many of those I love. My kids endured many Mom-less nights, weekends, and even a family vacation, which I know wasn't easy for my daughter in particular. I'm not sure the boys really minded much, but they made me proud when they were called upon to take on extra duties in my absence and when, more often than not, they gave me an unsolicited hug just when I needed it most. Much appreciation goes to my spiritual, sarcastic, grammar-oriented friend, Jim, who always seems to appear just when I need him and upon whom I can always rely for words of wisdom, reality checks, and good laughs. I am grateful for my best friend, Chris, who could always be counted on to give me perspective—with just the right balance of praise and tough love. Without the distraction provided by our conversations and his endless suggestions for creative home improvement projects, I might have spent fewer late nights writing, but would've missed out on so much more. And, of course, I couldn't have focused enough to write even the first word of this project without my husband, who is always there to take care of everything and who, despite often being frustrated with the way I work, has always seen more potential in me than I have ever seen in myself. I will always be in your debt, Jeff.

—Amy D. Broemmel

Throughout the process of writing this book, I have come to realize that learning and leadership can take on many forms. I have always used the term “lifelong learner” to describe myself, but the last several years have solidified my understanding of that phrase. I have had the wonderful opportunity to work with some amazing students and mentors over the last fifteen years that have made more of an impact on me than they will ever realize. They helped me realize that effective teachers love their students first and teach their students second. Many of them have become leaders in their own ways, making sure that they constantly do what is best for their students rather than what is easy for the teacher.

Around the same time I embarked on the journey of teaching preservice teachers, I was blessed with my son, Henry, and my daughter, Scout. They think they look up to me to lead and teach them how the world works, but in reality, I am looking to them to teach me and make me a better person every day. See? That is what is so funny about being a leader; it is through others' eyes that you gain insight into what it truly means to lead. Leadership sometimes has an authoritative connotation, but my definition of leadership involves so much more. It means loving others and providing them the support they need to accomplish their goals. So, last but certainly not least, I would like to thank my husband, Ben, the “leader” of our family. He encourages me to not be afraid when I want to be and to stand up for what I believe in.

—Jennifer Jordan

Many thanks to Dr. Gregory Risner for introducing me to teaching and its many joys, Scott McKinnon for teaching me how to walk and talk like a teacher, and Dr. Jeffrey Davis for being a mirror to scholarly writing reflection and a window to the world of academia.

—Beau Michael Whitsett

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1

OUR VISION OF EFFECTIVE TEACHING AND TEACHER LEADERSHIP

Let's be honest: Teaching looks pretty easy. Teachers are done working by 3 o'clock every day, they have summers off, and some even get snow days! They are in charge. They tell students what to do and then decide how well assignments are done. Teachers have power in the classroom, and they use it. Many of us believe these notions of teaching are true because of our experiences as students. As a result of compulsory education in the United States, we have all watched and listened to teachers for up to eight hours a day, five days a week, thirty-six weeks a year, for thirteen years. Lortie (1975) calls this our "apprenticeship of observation" (p. 67). These in-school experiences lead us to believe we know what teaching is all about—that the years we spend in classrooms make us experts on teaching. This informal apprenticeship can be likened to watching a chef prepare a meal. It looks so simple. All the ingredients are prepared, the appliances are ready, and the oven is preheated. We watch as the chef adds a dash of this and a little extra of that, creating a seemingly perfect plate, both in looks and in flavor. What we don't see are the complex decisions the chef makes beforehand based on the available fresh, local food. Nor do we understand exactly how the chef determines what subtle touch the dish needs to make it perfect. Even though the chef makes it look easy, when we try to replicate it in our own kitchen, it doesn't typically turn out with the same exact results. Like cooking, there is more to teaching than meets the eye, and, like the chef, a teacher must make complex decisions on a daily basis.

Still, it seems that when it comes to education, everyone has an opinion, idea, or reform that is intended to fix the reportedly broken system in the United States. The media often portrays teachers as lazy and ineffective or kindhearted but naïve. Certainly, we acknowledge that although there are some teachers who do fit these descriptions, most teachers we know are hardworking, intelligent, thoughtful people who care deeply about their students. Our view seems to be