

# The Transformation From Leadership Behavior to Leadership Thinking

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## Abstract

Foreign research on teacher leadership has experienced three waves, from the personal behavior of teacher leaders to teaching ability and then to a position or a way of thinking. The behavior theory of teacher leadership mainly focuses on the formal position of teacher leaders, and sees the specific tasks of teacher leaders. The theory of teacher leadership mainly points to the classroom teaching leadership of teachers. Both see teacher leadership as an individual effort. On the other hand, the thinking mode of teacher leadership regards teacher leadership as a process of changing schools, a way and strategy to change organizational culture structure, and a collective effort. The research on teacher leadership has potential value for school improvement, which requires further clarifying the purpose of improving teacher leadership. The root of teacher leadership is to cultivate teachers' sense of responsibility, promote the growth and development of teacher leadership from an appreciation perspective, and cultivate teachers' appreciation eyes and appreciation ability.

**Keywords:** teacher leadership, leadership behavior, the way of thinking

## 1. Introduction

In the 1980s, the theory of teacher leadership emerged. In the following 30 years, scholars have conducted in-depth researches on the model construction of teacher leadership, influencing factors, teacher empowerment and its relationship with school improvement. Among them, the research on the connotation of teacher leadership can be said to be different from each other, and the theoretical analysis of teacher leadership is carried out from different perspectives and positions, which also reflects people's different understanding of the nature of teacher leadership, and also puts forward how the practice of teacher leadership can be transformed into school improvement. Overall, based on the theory of teacher leadership model, the research of teacher leadership has experienced from the teacher individual leaders behavior research, the studies of teacher leaders, stress increases the power for teachers can assign, let teachers undertake the responsibility of teaching, the teacher leading to regarded as is a kind of position, the process of teacher leadership as a way of thinking.

## 2. The Rise and Development of Teacher Leadership Theory Research

### 2.1 The Concept of "Teacher Leadership" and "Teacher Leader"

In the United States, The United Kingdom, Canada, Australia and other countries, the concept of distributed leadership has been deeply studied, which requires the recombination and distribution of power and authority of organizations. It is believed that distributed leadership is especially suitable for highly specialized organizations, such as schools. When discussing "teacher leadership" in foreign materials, "teacher leader" often appears, so that readers are confused or difficult to clarify the relationship between the two. Therefore, it is necessary to briefly explain the differences between "teacher leadership", "teacher leadership" and "teacher leader" at first. In contrast, the translation of "teacher leadership" and "teacher leadership" correspond to the same English phrase "teacher leadership". In The Chinese context, "teacher leadership" sometimes has the same meaning as "teacher leader". "Teacher leader" refers to a specific role, no matter whether it is formal or informal, as long as the role plays a role of influencing others in the actual process, no matter whether it has a formal position, it can be called "teacher leader". However, "teacher leadership" is a comprehensive and holistic role formed by teachers through influencing others. This role is the embodiment of comprehensive ability and an internal power to promote the development and reform of organizations.

The concept of "teacher leadership" originates from the practical exploration of teachers' professional development in various countries since the 1980s. With the increasing complexity of educational reform,

researchers see the irreplaceable role of teachers in student growth and school development from their professionalism. Teachers' specialization, empowerment and participation in decision-making are regarded as effective strategies to improve school management and promote school reform and development. Under the background of vigorously promoting teacher professional development, the practice and research on teacher leadership are in full swing. But up to now, there is still no agreement on what teacher leadership is, and the consensus is quite limited. Brenneman (2015) argues that "although the concept of teacher leadership is widely recognized, it remains a stubbornly amorphous idea. Through decades of research, Yorkbar and Duke (2016) point out that ways of thinking about teacher leadership have evolved over time.

### *2.2 The Tide and Progress of Teacher Leadership Theory and Practice*

Reviewing the research on the theory and practice of teacher leadership, we can find that the research on teacher leadership has experienced three main waves. In the first wave, teacher leaders were seen as people in formal positions, and teacher leadership was defined in formal roles and titles. Second wave, the teachers into teachers' curriculum leadership and teaching leadership leadership, proposed to use directly and play to teachers' teaching professional knowledge and expertise, hope teacher can for a greater impact on the school curriculum and teaching, the teachers as the course leader, developers and mentor new teachers, bear the greater leadership responsibility of teaching. The third wave emphasizes the role of teachers in the "cultural reconstruction" of schools, emphasizing that teacher leadership is a process or mode of thinking, and teachers should realize the transformation from the mode of thinking of teaching professionals to the leading mode of thinking of leaders, rather than positioning teacher leadership as a person's position or role.

On the one hand, the different understanding of teacher leadership results in many studies based on it being scattered, with diversified theoretical forms and even slow progress. On the other hand, it also provides infinite possibilities for further research on teacher leadership and provides more space for research and development. However, from the main progress of teacher leadership research, the theory of teacher leadership can be divided into teacher leadership behavior role theory, teacher leadership ability theory and teacher leadership thinking mode theory. Among them, the behavioral role theory of teacher leadership mainly focuses on the specific actions and roles of teacher leaders. The theory of teacher leadership focuses on the core qualities and key abilities of teacher leaders to complete specific tasks and mainly points to curriculum leadership and classroom teaching leadership. What these two perspectives have in common is that they view teacher leadership as an individual effort. Accordingly, the thinking mode of teacher leadership focuses on the process of changing the school and regards it as a way and strategy to change the organizational cultural structure. It considers that teacher leadership is a collective effort and emphasizes that teachers' collective wisdom leads the development of the school.

## **3. The Foreign Theories of Teacher Leadership**

The concept of teacher leadership was first proposed by Lieberman et al. in the book *Teacher Leadership: Ideas and Practices* in 1988. On the one hand, it originates from the general leadership theory and is influenced by the development of the leadership theory. At the same time, it challenges the traditional leadership theory.

### *3.1 The Behavioral Role Theory of Teacher Leadership*

The behavioral role theory of teacher leadership focuses on the specific position and influence of teacher leadership. In the behavioral role theory, the research scope of teacher Leadership is generally limited to *Teachers in Leadership Roles*, which focuses on the emphasis on Teachers' individual Leadership behaviors.

Although the theory of teacher leadership has got rid of the limitation of leadership trait theory, the initial form of its research still points to the analysis of the leadership role of teachers, such as department head, department head, curriculum leader, etc. Teacher leadership under this category is a "hero" image, emphasizing the important role of teachers in the process of school improvement. For example, Fulan (1994) sets the role of teachers as builders of school culture. He identifies six main areas where teacher leadership can influence school culture, including "teaching and learning, peer community, context, continuous learning, management of change, moral purpose and meaning". He emphasized that the concept of teacher leadership focuses on improving the leadership responsibility of individual teachers distributed in the group, leading and contributing to the group of teachers, learners and leaders, and influencing others to improve the quality of educational practice. Harries (2003) also believes that regardless of whether teachers occupy leadership positions, in essence, it refers to the practice of teachers in the form of authorization and agency on the basis of distributed theory.

This kind of teacher leadership theory has not completely gotten rid of the thought of personality worship of teacher leaders. It takes the behavior and role of teacher leaders as the research focus and defines teacher leadership based on it. In essence, this theory is the continuation of the traditional leadership position, function

and role theory. As some researchers have pointed out, “Teacher leadership in this form is an extension of administrative management, which is used to maintain the efficiency and benefit of the existing system rather than change the status quo.

### *3.2 The Energetic Theory of Teacher Leadership*

Competency theory positions teacher leadership as classroom leadership, emphasizing teachers’ teaching expertise, team leadership, curriculum development and other professional abilities, as well as teaching leadership. These leaders tend to focus on improving students’ learning and thus have the power to improve the school. Emphasis on teachers’ teaching leadership, especially in promoting curriculum reform is of great significance. Specifically, the development of teacher leadership is an important result of teachers’ adaptation to classroom changes. The core concept of teacher leadership also requires teachers to become expert teachers. As Ziful (1988) described, teacher leadership is “the product of expert practice and expert knowledge”. Such understanding of teacher leadership has a far-reaching impact. Some foreign studies show that most teachers support the positioning of teacher leadership as teaching leadership and believe that all teachers have the potential to become leaders. However, teachers’ leadership practice is mainly confined to the classroom, which is the main leading force of curriculum reform and teaching reform. Empirical studies have proved that teachers’ classroom leadership has important value for school development. When the leadership power is widely distributed in schools, when teachers have the leadership ability to dominate classroom teaching, and when teachers can participate in teaching practice and evaluation decisions, students’ performance can be improved. Teachers also gain professional satisfaction when they are involved in decision making. This kind of teacher leadership mainly plays a leading role in the classroom, but some studies have pointed out that this kind of leadership practice seems to be an “addition” rather than a “part” of teachers’ daily work (2000), which will increase the burden of teachers. Teachers should not only complete the task of teaching, but also take on the role of teaching leadership.

Researchers also influence to define of teacher leadership, but the teacher leading influence scope and utility is still confined to the scope of the specific matters such as the impact on the rest of the teachers and students, to the effect of team collaboration and the impact on the community, such as more representative views include “teacher leadership is the ability to influence colleagues to change” (1991). Other studies suggest that, broadly speaking, teacher leadership is a special role and responsibility that requires identifying the most effective teacher talents and applying them to student learning, adult learning and collaboration, school and system improvement.

These understandings have deeply revealed the characteristics of teacher leadership and provided valuable theoretical reflections on the role playing, behavior change and ability quality of teacher leaders. However, these competency-based researches and theories on teacher leadership still belong to the analytical framework of individual efforts of teacher leaders.

### *3.3 The Thinking Mode Theory of Teacher Leadership*

The thinking mode theory of teacher leadership mainly appears in the third wave of teacher leadership research. This kind of understanding of teacher leadership is in the ascendant abroad. More and more scholars believe that teacher leadership is not only a role or a special key ability, but also a philosophical position of leadership, or a way of thinking and being, rather than a set of behaviors. According to the thinking mode of teacher leadership, “teacher leadership is a way of thinking, which regards leadership as a way to build collective capacity and is the core of school improvement work”. Among them, the most representative is the research on teacher leadership conducted by Yorkbar and Duke. They believe that “teacher leadership is a process in which teachers individually or collectively influence their colleagues, principals and other school community members to improve students’ learning and achievement through improving teaching and learning practices”. This view goes beyond the limitation of certain specific behaviors and abilities of teacher leadership, and regards it as a process, a dynamic presentation, and a spiritual force that pushes the organization forward through collective efforts. It shifts the focus from individual teacher leadership to leading organizational development, reflecting the important role of teachers as primary creators and re-creators of school improvement.

In addition to seeing teacher leadership as a process, more and more researchers also see it as a shared responsibility. For example, some studies suggest that “teacher leadership is actually a collective effort”. Peter Senge (1990) also proposed earlier that leadership is “the collective ability to do useful things, and educational leadership is gradually shifting to the form of collective, shared, distributed and organizational responsibility”. Some studies have demonstrated individual effort and collective effort and pointed out that collective effort is the basis of continuous growth and reform of teacher leadership.

Yorkbar and Duke (2004) also demonstrate that teacher leadership is more concerned with collaboration than with giving one person authority. Regarding teacher leadership as individual or collective efforts also involves the relationship between ability and obligation. As Wesson and Lewis (2008) defined teacher leadership as “teachers believe that they not only have the ability to influence students’ learning, but also have the common obligation to influence students’ development”. Under this concept, the creation of shared leadership and the establishment of a common understanding foundation are the inevitable requirements for improving teacher leadership.

Teacher leadership as a way of thinking can also be used as a leadership strategy to democratize schools. The idea is to regard teacher leadership as a means and means to achieve an end, especially a strategy to promote democracy. One study, for example, suggests that “teacher leadership is often presented as a system that promotes democracy”. “As a democratic mechanism, the development of teacher leadership represents a process of democratization and modernization of management, and it is the basis for the widespread implementation of distributed leadership.

Lieberman and Miller (2004) note that “as teachers shed the mantle of technical and managerial workers and take on new roles as researchers, meaning makers, scholars, and inventors, they expand democratic views of the people and things they do”. In this way, teacher leadership becomes an effective way and strategy to achieve democracy. Therefore, the role of teacher leader needs to be changed from “representative of change” to “leader of change”.

#### **4. Reflection and Exploration on the Theory and Practice of Teacher Leadership**

Through sorting out foreign theories and researches on teacher leadership, we find that both the concept and practice of teacher leadership require teachers to realize the “transformation from leadership behavior to leadership thinking”. The specific focus and expectation of teachers are as follows: Teachers should realize the transformation from individual to collective, from ability to obligation, from simply caring about students’ learning to caring about improving organizational efficiency. These findings are of practical value to how to improve teacher leadership, but there are still some theoretical and practical problems of teacher leadership that deserve reflection and continuous exploration as to how to implement teacher leadership into school practice.

##### *4.1 The Purpose of Improving Teacher Leadership Needs to Be Further Clarified*

According to the purpose of foreign research on teacher leadership, people have different expectations on improving teacher leadership, such as under the pressure of school reform, promoting teacher professional development, retaining excellent talents, and improving student achievement. The question that needs to be considered is whether the improvement of teacher leadership is a kind of helpless action under the pressure of education reform or the initiative of teacher leadership development. Is the purpose of improving teacher leadership school development or teacher development? Some studies show different research purposes, intentionally or unintentionally surface orientation, such as “teacher leadership as tools for the implementation of school reform” “teacher leadership can be a prospective method to improve teacher quality” “now work too complex, the teacher leadership is solving our education system continues to challenge a promising strategy”, These orientations have different potential research purposes.

It should also be noted that although some models of teacher leadership have emerged in foreign studies and some ability elements needed for teacher leadership development have been proposed, what do we need teacher leaders to do? There seems to be no clear answer to this question. Under the teacher leadership theory advocated by researchers, although front-line educators support the theoretical model of teacher leadership, they are often “uncertain about what teacher leadership is, how to cultivate it, and what its key points are”. The purpose of improving teacher leadership is unclear, and many further questions remain unanswered.

##### *4.2 The Root of Teacher Leadership Lies in the Teacher’s Sense of Responsibility to the Organization*

In traditional school organizations, teachers work more in isolation, mainly in the classroom to complete their own teaching tasks. A good teacher is not only good at business, but also has the teaching ability and skills of discipline and specialty, as well as the commitment and responsibility to the organization and a sense of organizational responsibility. The theory of teacher leadership emphasizes the cultivation of a kind of cooperation and team spirit of teachers, and the transformation of individual tasks into a kind of obligation for the development of the school organization, and the occupation of teachers as a kind of social responsibility. As Cartmel and Moeller (2001) point out, the old norms of teachers working in isolation need to be replaced by new norms of collaboration and teamwork. The new school organization is a cooperative, participatory organizational structure and a shared leadership model. In this kind of organization, all members have a strong collective consciousness and responsibility, and teachers’ leadership is a kind of “collective wisdom”.

#### 4.3 The Development of Teacher Leadership in Schools Should Be Studied From the Perspective of Appreciation

Under the traditional school organizational structure and cultural characteristics, the responsibility of school development is concentrated on the principal, who controls the teachers by means of power, and the teachers are regarded as obedient and problematic groups. Research of teacher leadership, stressed that to have a positive view teacher development perspectives and appreciate the organization, is “eye” of appreciation for the development of teachers, improve teachers’ “can” of appreciation, attention from, based on the perspective of teachers’ advantage, gather the collective wisdom of the teacher, to change the way of the thinking of teachers of promote the development of the school. Teachers are regarded as dynamic and responsible groups, which shows the potential of teacher leadership in school development. The successful practice of foreign teacher leadership projects has proved that when teachers are treated with a more appreciative attitude, not only teachers themselves can gain a professional identity, but also the development of school organizations will be more dynamic and sustainable.

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