

The Vision Specialist Teacher as Leader

**Shaping a strength based approach to the
inclusion of students with vision impairment**

Everyone has strengths

Associate Professor Carolyn Palmer AM;
PhD

*“Strength does not come from
physical capacity. It comes from
an indomitable will.”*

Mahatma Gandhi

ALAME LEADERSHIP

Inspiration • Empowerment • Transformation

www.alameleadership.com



Defining Leadership

- Leadership is an exceedingly difficult concept to define
- Most definitions focus on the exercise of influence (Leithwood et al., 1999),
- The conception of effective leadership has shifted from delegation and direction to collaboration and shared responsibilities (Crowther & Olsen, 1997).

What is leadership?

- *Leadership is:*
 - about inspiring “confidence and support” among followers who are needed to achieve the goals of the organisation (DuBrin, 2004, p. 3).
 - “the principal dynamic force that motivates and coordinates the organisation in the accomplishment of its objectives” (DuBrin, 2004, p. 3).
- A common characteristic of leaders is “their ability to inspire and stimulate others to achieve worthwhile goals” (DuBrin, 2004, p. 3).



Relational and Strength-based Leadership

Leadership

- is relational and about inspiring and making a difference
- in educational contexts is a critical, relational concern (Bell & Palmer, in press)

A strength based approach to leadership

- is looking for the heart and soul of what we do
- can directly challenge deficit theorising in education and the priorities for efficiency and effectiveness (Giles, Bell, Halsey & Palmer, 2012)

Focus on Strengths

- “*Strengths based approaches seek to position us individually and collectively in ways that draw on our potential, strengths and capabilities.* (Cooperrider et al., 1987, 2001, 2008).
- The most effective leaders:
 - are always investing in strengths
 - surround themselves with the right people and then maximise their team
 - understand their followers’ needs (Rath & Conchie, 2009)

Keys to strength based leadership

- Align, don't fix
- Build diverse teams
- Create the culture of transparency
- Don't manage, empower

What is your style of leadership?



- Discuss with you neighbour what you know about leadership
- What kind of leader you think you are?



Everyone has strengths

Strengths-based approaches are being embraced in human services (Hammond, 2010).

Specialist, Strength-based vision teachers focus on the strengths of the teachers with whom they work.

The task of leadership is to create an alignment of strengths, making our weaknesses irrelevant
(Drucker)



Teacher Leadership

- A form of collective leadership with teachers leading both within and beyond the classroom. It is a process of:
 - *inspiring colleagues, and school communities, to increase the practices of teaching and learning to achieve better student learning outcomes.*
 - *leading both in the classroom and beyond it,*
 - *recognizing and contributing to a group of teachers and influencing them toward better practice in education.*
- Teacher leaders support peers to change and to do things “they wouldn’t ordinarily consider” (Wasley, 1991, cited in Muijs & Harris, 2005, p. 438).



Teachers as leaders

- Teachers have the ability to influence others toward improved educational practice (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 1996)
- Leadership is a behavior intended to positively influence school success through deliberate improvement of pedagogy (Andrews & Crowther)
- Teacher leadership can be formal or informal.



What do teacher leaders do?

- Participate in school change
- Collaborate with teachers to facilitate access to learning
- Work with parents and school communities
- Contribute to the profession
 - professional learning
 - pre and post teacher training.



Specialist Vision Teachers

- Vision Specialist Teachers are leaders in their schools
- They inspire and influence their peers and the parents of their students
- They respond to:
 - the diversity of attitudes,
 - the beliefs expressed by others,
 - the professional learning needs of teachers,
- They model exceptional teaching and student management practices and collaborate with peers



Specialist Vision Teachers as Leaders

- Bring to the regular school setting a level of expert specialist knowledge that facilitates inclusive practices
 - understand the diversity of perspectives that are brought to the education of all students
 - engage in leadership practices to ensure students with vision impairment can access, participate, succeed in all curriculum areas
 - help teachers gain insights into:
 - » how ensure children can access learning
 - » how to manage the classroom and
 - » how to cater to the needs of students with diverse abilities
- successfully lead specialist programs in schools



Specialist Vision Teachers as Leaders

- Specialist Vision Teachers leaders
 - promote the development of trust and collaboration
 - Commonly perform an array of activities
 - conduct professional development workshops,
 - co-plan and model lessons,
 - observe teaching and provide feedback,
 - collect and analyse data,
 - facilitate dialogue and reflective critique,
 - promote shared practices among peers
 - (Mangin & Stoelinga, 2010)



Specialist Vision Teachers as Leaders through their leadership

- Recognise diversity and focus on the learning needs of all students through inclusive practices
- Increase students' opportunities for learning through visual, tactual and auditory means
- Increase access to the curriculum
- Raise class teachers' awareness and understanding of the impact of loss of vision on learning
- Model and encourage teachers to do things differently, and engage in diverse pedagogies
- Focus on the learning needs of all students

Specialist Vision Teachers as Strength-based leaders

- **Strengths-based vision specialist teachers**
 - relationally situate people, experiences and objects in the credit rather than the deficit.
 - find the strengths, possibilities and opportunities. instead of habitually constructing the context and the people as a problem.
 - position others individually and collectively in ways that draw on potential, strengths and capabilities.
 - draw on the immediacy of experience as a source of emerging wisdom, strength and social change.

Specialist Vision Teachers as Strength-based leaders

- Uncover what is already working, enabling and strengthening it (Cooperrider et al, 1987, 2001, 2008).

“People have more confidence and comfort to journey to the future (the unknown) when they are invited to start with what they already know” (Hammond, 2010, p. 5).

- Imaginatively reinterpret what we habitually describe as challenges or problems as emerging opportunities .

Strength-based Specialist Vision Teacher Leaders

- Questioning ***‘why is that staff member so resistant to my recommendations?’*** is a deficit based approach which impacts on relationships and positions later action around ‘overcoming blocks’.
- **Strength-based vision specialists leaders ask,**
- *‘what are the strengths in this teacher’s approach to working with this student’*
- This question reorients their approach toward an investigation of **strengths** while positioning the teacher as actively and positively contributing to the student’s access to learning

Conclusion

- Everyone has strengths
- *The task of leadership is to create an alignment of strengths, making our weaknesses irrelevant (Drucker)*
- Specialist, Strength-based vision teachers as leaders focus on the strengths of the teachers with whom they work and through this focus and their leadership they increase students' learning opportunities and facilitate inclusive practices that benefit all students

Conclusion

Everyone
has
strengths

*The task of
leadership is to:*

- *create an alignment of strengths,*
- *Make weaknesses irrelevant (Drucker)*

**Specialist, Strength-based vision
teachers as leaders**

- focus on the strengths of the teachers with whom they work
- through this focus and their leadership

**Specialist, Strength-based vision
teachers as leaders**

- increase students' learning opportunities
- facilitate inclusive practices that benefit all students

References

- Baek, E. & Schwen, T. M. (2006). How to Build a Better Online Community: Cultural Perspectives: *Performance Improvement Quarterly*. 19, (2); pg. 51-69.
- Bell, M., & Palmer, C. (in Press). *Shaping a strengths-based approach to relational leadership*. Hershey PA, IGI Global.
- Cooperrider, D.L., & Srivasta, S. (1987). Appreciative enquiry into organizational life. *Research into Organizational Change and Development*. 11, 129-169.
- Cooperrider, D., Sorensen, P. F., Whitney, D., & Yaeger, T. F. (Eds.). (2000). *Appreciative Inquiry: Rethinking Human Organization Toward a Positive Theory of Change*. Champaign, IL: Stipes.
- Cooperrider, D., Whitney, D. D., & Stavros, J. (2008). *The appreciative inquiry handbook: For leaders of change* (2nd ed.): Berrett-Koehler Publishers
- Cunliffe, A.L., & Eriksen, M. (2011). *Relational leadership*. *Human Relations*, 64 (11): 1425-1449).
- Cunliffe, A., L., (2009) The philosopher leader: On relationalism, ethics and reflexivity – a critical perspective on teaching leadership, *Management learning* 40(1) 87-101
- Cunliffe, A.L., & Eriksen, M. (2011). Relational leadership. *Human Relations*, 64 (11): 1425-1449).
- DuBrin, A. J. (2004). *Leadership: Research findings, practice, and skills*. 4th Edn. New York: Houghton Mifflin.

References

- Giles, D., Bell, M., Halsey, J., & Palmer, C.D. (2012). Co-constructing a relational approach to educational leadership and management. Melbourne, VIC: Cengage Learning.
- Mangin, M.M., & Stoelinga, S.R. (2010). The future of instructional teacher leader roles. *The Educational Forum: 74: 49 – 62.*
- York-Barr, J. & Duke, K. (2004) What Do We Know About Teacher Leadership? Findings From Two Decades of Scholarship. *Review of Educational Research; Fall; 74, (3); pg. 255*