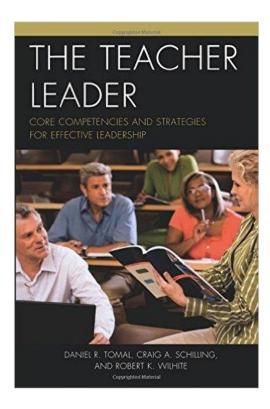## Book Review

Core Competencies and Strategies for Effective Leadership

"The Teacher Leader" by Daniel R. Tomal, Craig A. Schilling, and Robert K. Wilhite

By Meghan E. Marrero

The Teacher Leader, written by three experts in educational leadership, is a resource covering many aspects of teacher leadership in today's schools. The authors introduce the 192-page book as a guide for "leadership topics that are essential in developing the knowledge and skills needed for educators to be successful school leaders" (p. xvii). It succinctly covers many major areas of school leadership, including topics such as identifying leadership skills, motivating teachers, selecting new staff members, teacher evaluation, and managing change. Each topic is grounded in several organizations' standards for teacher leadership, including the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE), the Educational Leadership Constituent Council (ELCC), the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC), the National Education Association (NEA), and the Teacher Leadership Exploratory Consortium's Teacher Leader Model Standards, all of which are included as appendices. In fact, each of the nine chapters is introduced with learning objectives correlated to these standards, and, following a summary, concludes with a case study with a problem related to the chapter's content, along with exercises and discussion questions. The book distills many topics covered in the courses of an educational leadership degree or certificate program into a reference guidebook. The authors are quick to point out potential legal and ethical issues a teacher leader may encounter, e.g., related to hiring practices, and other issues one may encounter in the field.

The book's tone is straightforward and practical. The authors provide real-life examples of the ideas they discuss, many figures that illustrate models and theories, and concepts that underpin the content. For instance, in "Chapter 6: Communicating, Collaborating, and Evaluating," there are several figures to stress important communication tips, strategies, and pitfalls, as well as one that illustrates the

"teacher leader-employee conflict needs model." These figures appeal to different learning styles and encourage readers to consider the text in different ways, and serve to highlight important ideas.

The Teacher Leader would be most useful in a graduate course for prospective school administrators, i.e., those seeking to be department chairs, or as a reference guide for those new to the job. There are chapters and segments of chapters that discuss real-life situations pertinent to teacher leaders. One could, for example, return to Chapter 6 prior to an evaluation meeting with a teacher, for practical tips on how to conduct the conference most effectively, and strategies for communicating with a teacher whose performance is in need of improvement. If a teacher leader were about to engage in a coaching session, there is a succinct description of effective strategies for coaching and mentoring in Chapter 4, including a figure that outlines eight steps for an employee coaching session, and another on defense mechanisms that might be demonstrated by the teacher receiving constructive feedback. If used in a graduate course, the case studies and exercises are well designed and useful. The case studies outline real-world problems and ask readers to respond with a product that applies the chapter's principles to a practical setting. For instance, the case study in Chapter 9 provides sample data that illustrates the achievement gap between subgroups of students (i.e., White, general education students as compared with students of color, those with special needs, and those with limited English proficiency), and asks the reader to develop several aspects of school improvement plans to address the disparities, including a parent action plan. These exercises would prove quite valuable in a graduate course to stimulate discussion and develop skills

necessary for teacher leaders to effect change in their schools.

The book's major weakness is that it is grounded in a narrow, traditional view of a teacher leader who is essentially a school administrator. More modern views of teacher leadership include more informal roles for teacher leaders, where leadership is distributed throughout a school, and defined in different ways. A review of the literature in the field described three main types of teacher leadership: "organizational-level work (e.g., membership in a site-based decision-making council) to professional development work (e.g., mentoring) and instructional-level work (e.g., action research)" (York-Barr & Duke, 2004, p. 257). Of the three, *The Teacher Leader* makes some connections to professional development and instructional-level work, but the focus throughout is on organizational-level work, where teachers are taking on formal leadership roles. These are useful to organizational teacher leaders, but very little attention is paid to teachers who are solely in the classroom, leading in more informal capacities. There are whole sections concerning hiring staff (e.g., interviewing and selecting candidates), evaluating teachers, and managing educational resources (e.g., budgeting), which are irrelevant to many teacher leaders, and the narrow perspective is clear throughout the book. For instance, in Chapter 7, the authors state, "to be effective, teacher leaders need the staffs that they supervise or coach to invest in the changes they are advocating" (p. 118). Many teacher leaders do not formally supervise and coach at all, yet can be effective leaders and advocate changes in their schools and districts. The title would seemingly suggest that all types of teacher leadership would be addressed, not solely administrative roles. Informal leadership by teachers can include leadership functions from within a teacher's classroom, including

contributing to positive school culture, collaborative planning, and contributing to peer motivation (Harris, 2003). In summary, the book is a reasonable reference for those new to the school administration profession, but probably not for those seeking to lead from their classrooms.

References

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"The Teacher Leader: Core Competencies and Strategies for Effective Leadership." By Daniel R. Tomal, Craig A. Schilling, and Robert K. Wilhite. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2014. ISBN: 978-1-4758-0745-5

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