# TEACHER LEADERSHIP SKILLS FRAMEWORK

OVERVIEW

In order for Teacher Leaders to flourish, certain characteristics and conditions must be present. Teacher Leaders must possess the knowledge and skills needed to lead. Consequently, to be seen as a leader, they must also have a set of positive dispositions and attitudes. Finally, there must be a variety of opportunities for leadership in the school, district or larger context.

knowledge and skills

teacher leadership

dispositions

roles and opportunities

equity lens
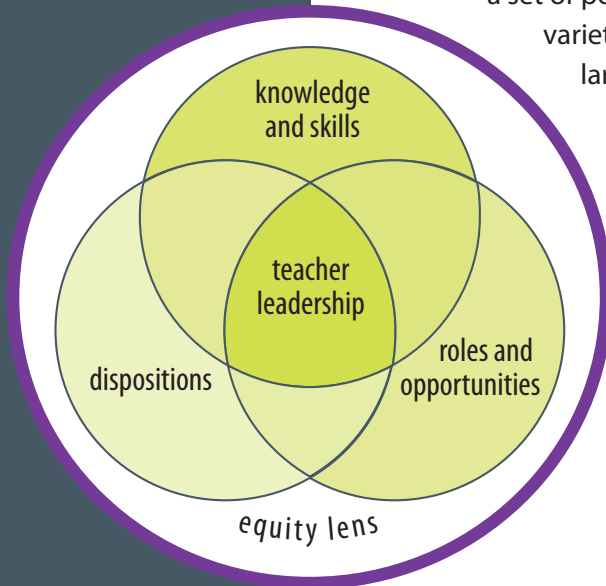
Knowledge and Skills of Effective Teacher Leaders

The skills Teacher Leaders need to develop to be effective in a variety of roles can be broken into six critical aspects. These skill sets are further defined on subsequent pages.

1. Working with Adult Learners
2. Communication
3. Collaboration
4. Knowledge of Content and Pedagogy
5. Systems Thinking
6. Equity Lens

Dispositions of Effective Teacher Leaders

Effective Teacher Leaders share, and continue to develop, a set of dispositions and attitudes. They are energetic risk takers whose integrity, high efficacy, and content knowledge give them credibility with their colleagues. Their desire to work with adults is grounded in their belief that systems-level change will positively impact student learning, and that their contributions to the profession are important and needed.

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STRENGTHENING TEACHING ONE STEP AT A TIME
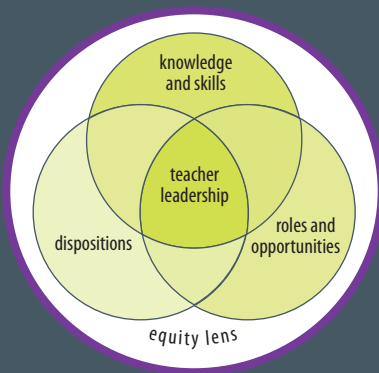
The natural curiosity of Teacher Leaders makes them lifelong learners who are open to new experiences and challenges. Juggling many important professional and personal roles, they effectively prioritize their work to maintain a sense of balance. Teacher Leaders often seek colleagues with similar intentions as allies, however they also value different ideas, approaches and values that move the work forward and offer a more diverse and inclusive outcomes. Difficult challenges require Teacher Leaders to tap into their deep sense of courage, and their unwavering perseverance helps them to follow through. When best-laid plans have unexpected outcomes, Teacher Leaders are open to constructive criticism. They reflect on their experience, learn from it, and then with resilience move forward to the next challenge.

A critical aspect of the CSTP Teacher Leadership Framework is the urgency for the framework to reflect a stronger equity lens. Though equity is embedded across all areas of the framework, it is also a separate area of focus. Without an intentional focus on equity, Teacher Leaders may unintentionally silo their efforts and therefore risk allowing inequities inherent in the system to persist. The Framework operates off the assumption that central to Teacher Leader development is the examination of inclusive systems which result in more equitable access, opportunity, representation and meaningful participation for individuals with different characteristics, such as race, language proficiency, special education status, country of origin, gender or others for educators and students.

Employing a deliberate equity lens as a Teacher Leader requires ongoing examination and challenging of one's own beliefs, assumptions, biases and experiences. Acting upon those and utilizing this framework in ways which impact and interrupt inequitable systems, practices and outcomes for students is essential.

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WORKING WITH ADULT LEARNERS
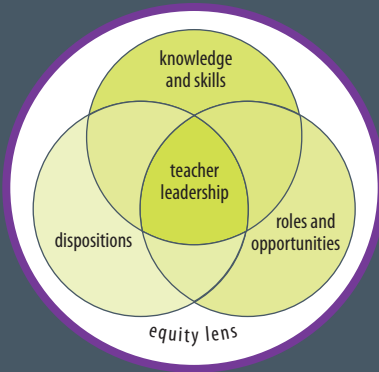
Knowledge and Skills

Builds trusting relationships
- Fosters group membership
- Takes an ethical stance
- Advocates equity, access and opportunity for each student
- Shows care, support and respect
- Creates a safe environment and navigates discomfort
- Develops and models culturally responsive practices
- Understands adults and their needs as learners

Facilitates professional learning for teachers
- Provides opportunities for reflective thinking and courageous conversations
- Structures dialogue and discussion
- Disrupts assumptions
- Fosters learners' engagement for all participants
- Encourages collegial inquiry and a growth mindset
- Understands development of teacher knowledge both in terms of content knowledge and pedagogical knowledge
- Fosters responsibility for the group's learning by all group members

Dispositions
- Believes that teacher learning is interwoven with student learning
- Values the work of all learners
- Accepts and acts on constructive feedback
- Possesses courage and vulnerability to take risks
- Reliable
- Practices empathy
- Takes a curious stance
- Believes in the capacity of self and others

VIGNETTE #1

Ethan is given a report from his principal of the numbers of failing students in World Studies, broken down by each period and teacher. Ethan notices that one teacher, who is new to the team has almost 50% of her students failing, while the other four teachers have less than 2%. He knows that the principal expects him to address this at the next PLC meeting. Ethan does not want to do anything that might embarrass the teacher or make her feel singled out, and therefore be on the defensive or resistant to an important conversation about what might be contributing to this high failure rate.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- How might the next meeting be structured so that all teachers feel safe to share, everyone's input is valued, the data can be examined and they can work as a team to support kids?
- How can Ethan structure reflection activities that can lead to honest conversations and suggestions for solutions?
- How can Ethan help the team come together as a whole to help all the teachers and students in World Studies be successful?
- What critical aspects of effective adult learning need to be considered?

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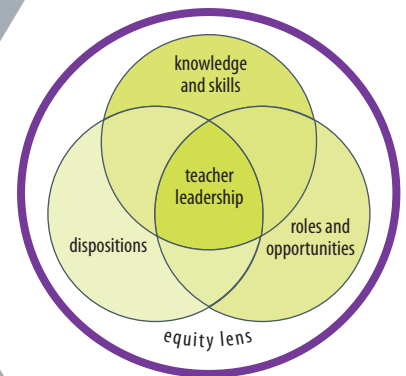
VIGNETTE #2

Maria is asked by her administrator to lead a group session on reading strategies at an upcoming professional development day in her district. Maria plans her session carefully taking into consideration how the teachers will interact and to make sure she models instructional strategies. When the session begins Maria sees one of her colleagues, who she gets along with well, sitting near the back of the room at a table alone working on her laptop. When Maria asks everyone to get up and find a partner to talk with, her colleague in the back rolls her eyes and continues working on her laptop. Maria feels very disrespected by her colleague and is taken aback by the attitude of someone she thinks of as a friend.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- What can Maria do to help engage her colleague?
- What biases and assumptions are present in this situation?
- How can Maria try to navigate her feelings as well as her interactions in this situation?
- What skills or knowledge about adult learning can Maria employ?
- What critical aspects of effective adult learning need to be considered?

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STRENGTHENING TEACHING ONE STEP AT A TIME

"If you want to go quickly, go alone.

If you want to go far, go together. "

AFRICAN PROVERB

COLLABORATIVE WORK
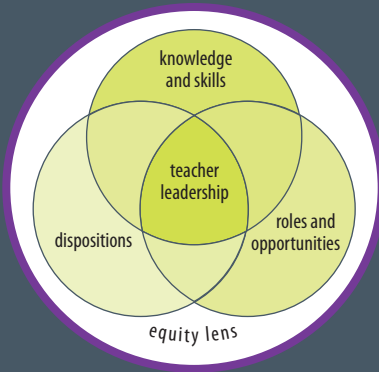
Knowledge and Skills

Collaborative/Facilitation Skills

- Teaches, develops, and uses norms of collaboration
- Uses appropriate conflict resolution/mediation skills
- Employs protocols or other collaborative tools
- Models/values diverse opinions and ensures equal opportunity for voice
- Matches language to the situation
- Shares responsibility in leadership and leveraging groups strengths
- Holds oneself accountable to the group's goals and outcomes
- Moves a group to actionable outcomes

Organizational Skills

- Documents a meeting and communicates follow-up
- Knows resources and how to access resources
- Delegates responsibility to group members
- Finds and uses inclusive content/ relevant data that invites and encourages discourse

Dispositions

- Knows when to compromise
- Reads the group
- Admits when wrong or doesn't know
- Holds passion for topics that motivate others
- Willingness to be vulnerable
- Takes a curious stance
- Practices self-awareness
- Is aware of the impact of your position and identity within the group
- Fosters community and understands that humanity requires connection

VIGNETTE #1

An ESD in rural Washington State has received a three-year math and science grant. The purpose of the grant is to improve student learning by improving instructional practices in math and science. At one elementary school, K-5 teachers are using the "Teaching and Learning Cycle" to collaboratively plan and implement lessons, analyze student work and make adjustments to their instruction. However, one grade level group is having difficulty collaborating. Sarah, a Teacher Leader on the team, shares the group's challenges with the principal. The principal responds by asking Sarah to assume leadership of the group to ensure success.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- What does Sarah need to know and understand about the group members in order to support them in collaborating?
- How should Sarah approach her new role as team leader?
- Where should Sarah begin to help the group collaborate?
- What tools might Sarah employ to help the group 'own' the work?
- What critical aspects of effective collaboration need to be considered?

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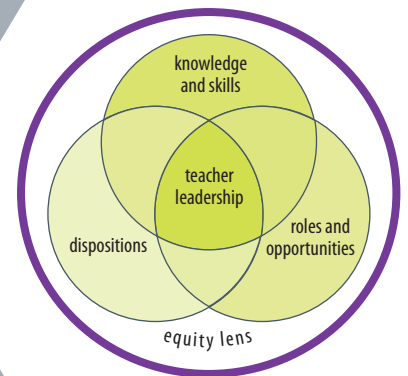
VIGNETTE #2

Susie is the leader of a cross content, multi-grade level PLC. The group is currently engaged in reading a text focusing on culturally responsive teaching practices. The group seems energized by what they are learning and are having thought provoking discussions. They have almost completed the text but Susie doesn't know what to do next to move the group from having great discussions to impacting classroom practice. The ideas in the text are new to her and she believes that as the teacher leader she should demonstrate that she has more experience or knowledge. She is especially concerned because group members do not teach the same subject or grade level.
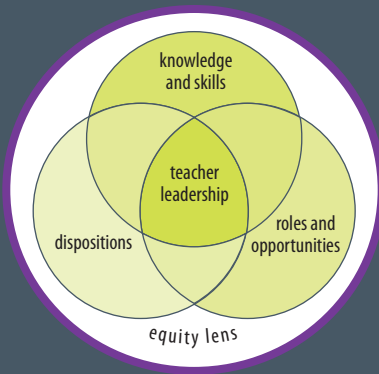
REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- What assumptions might Susie be making about her role as a leader of the PLC?
- What things might Susie have considered from the beginning?
- What might be some of Susie's fears that prevents her from supporting the group in moving forward beyond discussions?
- How might Susie move the work forward and create a powerful collaborative experience for the entire group?
- What critical aspects of effective collaboration need to be considered?

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STRENGTHENING TEACHING ONE STEP AT A TIME

"The greatest compliment that was ever paid me was when someone asked me what I thought, and attended to my answer."

HENRY DAVID THOREAU

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Knowledge and Skills

Builds relationships through communication
- Develops and models culturally responsive practices
- Invites and honors diverse views
- Is aware of diverse communication styles, modes, including what is said and unsaid

Technical skills
- Facilitates learning focused conversations
- Gives and receives feedback
- Is able to regularly plan, act and reflect
- Listens deeply (i.e. paraphrasing, asking clarifying questions) without judgment
- Uses questioning strategies
- Leads data driven dialogue
- Knows the difference between conversation, dialogue and discussion
- Uses mediation skills to synthesize, summarize and navigate discussion
- Facilitates large and small groups
- Uses technology to enhance communication
- Uses appropriate strategies for setting up spaces, materials and pacing
- Maintains objectivity

Dispositions
- Invites and listens to all perspectives and weighs them against bias and values
- Holds a positive presupposition that all are working in the best interests of students / learners (teachers as learners)
- Values professional expertise
- Is comfortable, or willing to attempt to be comfortable, with healthy, challenging discussion

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STRENGTHENING TEACHING ONE STEP AT A TIME

VIGNETTE #1

Clare is a grade level team leader. At the last team meeting the discussion went badly and two of the team members left with hurt feelings. The disagreement centered on the creation of a common formative assessment. One team member thought the assessment should be multiple-choice to match the state assessment format, while another was invested in short answer response to get at student thinking. Clare met with them the following day. She spent the first part of the meeting objectively restating the issue and had the team find where there was common ground. The team members then focused on how to compromise and agree to disagree on the assessment format.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- What presuppositions did Clare make about her teammates?
- What questions do you think Clare can ask to find common ground and ensure each person feels heard?
- What would happen if the teammates don't compromise or agree to disagree?
- Are there other strategies that might work for Clare and her team?
- What critical aspects of effective communication need to be considered?
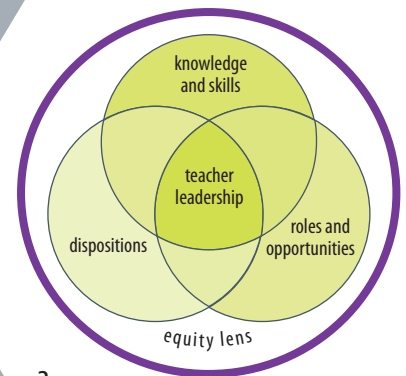
VIGNETTE #2

Brian has a great relationship with his students. He is energetic, a great motivator and has a big personality. He sees himself as a natural teacher leader and jumps in when anything is needed at the school. He is a member of Site Council, grade level lead, hosts staff lunches in his room and often speaks up for the rest of the staff. He sees his outspoken personality as a plus for a teacher leader and that it helps in advocating for his colleagues and developing community across the school. After three years of taking on leadership, one day he overhears three staff members talking. They say that while they appreciate all that Brian does, they are tired of him talking for them and always having to be seen as the voice and face of the school. They wish he would ask them their opinions and listen to them.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- What presuppositions does Brian make about his colleagues?
- What assumptions might Brian be making about leadership?
- What questions should Brian ask himself?
- What might be some possible next steps for Brian?
- What critical aspects of effective communication need to be considered?
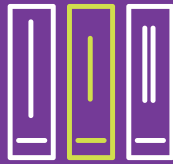
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KNOWLEDGE OF CONTENT AND PEDAGOGY
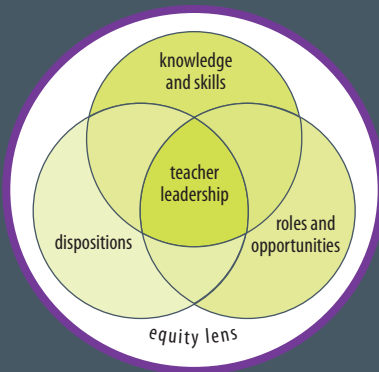
Knowledge and Skills
- Possesses strong subject matter knowledge including assessment strategies
- Has the ability to analyze both subject matter concepts and pedagogical strategies
- Uses effective pedagogical strategies in the classroom based on student need
- Assists colleagues at multiple entry points to increase content knowledge and classroom application of culturally responsive instruction
- Identifies and employs current, research-based, best practices across context and content
- Uses student data to make equitable decisions about content and pedagogy

Culturally Responsive Teaching/Instruction
- Utilizes culturally responsive instructional strategies to engage all students
- Employs data driven instructional decisions (knowing students, families, community)
- Leverages restorative practices
- Fosters collective efficacy
- Empowers students to instigate transformational change

Dispositions
- Life-long learner
- Reflects about own practice and growth
- Commits to supporting growth of others
- Appreciates challenges
- Values the whole child
- Commits to academic growth of all students to close the opportunity gap
- Is willing to risk and try new strategies and techniques to reach all students

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As an experienced middle school teacher with a math minor, Bill has built a good relationship with a colleague, Sally. At 4:00 on a Thursday Sally approaches him for help on her next day's math lesson. Bill really wants to go home but knows he needs to nurture this relationship, and deep down knows it will be valuable to share with her the reflective strategies he uses to deepen content knowledge and support students' conceptual understanding. He thinks he could give her a lesson plan on the concepts, but feels it is more important to help her own the math so she can develop the lesson. Bill invites her into his room and asks a series of questions to find an entry point. *What ideas do you have? Have you taught these concepts before? What do your students already know?* Together they look at recent student work so they can make connections. He shares strategies he has used in the past and details the ways students have thought about the concepts in response to these strategies and how he revises his plans after analyzing their misconceptions. Finally, they look at Sally's students' work and brainstorm a plan together. Bill pulls some of his resources and Sally adds some of hers. They agree to come back Friday during planning time to talk about how the lesson went.

- In what ways does Bill's response to Sally acknowledge and honor her content knowledge expertise?
- How does Bill acknowledge and honor his own expertise of the content knowledge?
- How does Sally receive the pedagogical strategies modeled and suggested by Bill?
- What skills and dispositions demonstrated by Bill and Sally align with your leadership/learning experiences?


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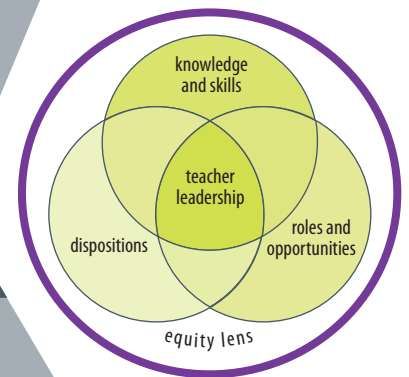
Alicia is on the district's new ELA adoption team and is responsible for helping her grade level team implement the new curriculum this coming school year. Alicia has heard a lot of teachers' fears about the new content and relearning right along with the kids. Many are concerned about being able to teach the new content and still meet their students' needs for differentiation and teach with confidence and passion. Alicia knows that she needs to make sure her team understands that the curriculum is the base content and not a plan to dictate teachers' every move. She is concerned about how to calm their fears and help them understand that the important instructional skills and training they have is in their toolboxes already.

- What assumptions might be at play in this vignette?
- How can Alicia structure a conversation so that the teachers can come away feeling confident and knowledgeable?
- What can Alicia do to help the teachers see the relationship between content knowledge, instructional practice and student experience as something they can influence and control?
- What are some entry points that Alicia might use to begin the conversation or to shift the thinking of her group?
- What critical aspects of effective knowledge of content and pedagogy need to be considered?
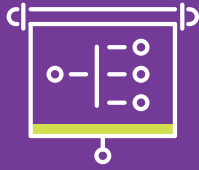
SYSTEMS THINKING
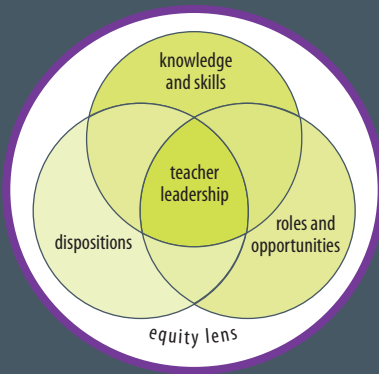
Knowledge and Skills

Works effectively within system

- Recognizes layers of system(s) and your role in it
- Understands how to work within the established power structure and who has decision making power
- Navigates the formal and informal hierarchy
- Garners support from and works with stakeholders
- Deals effectively with resistance and discomfort
- Facilitates collective inquiry practices
- Understands and leverages finances/resource allocation
- Asks the right questions at the right time
- Possesses awareness of biases within the system
- Identifies inequalities in systems

Skills of advocacy

- Sets achievable goals
- Creates and implements plan to meet goals
- Builds capacity for sustainability
- Identifies decision makers
- Crafts and delivers an effective message
- Mobilizes people into action

Dispositions

- Interest in larger/bigger picture
- Attune to relationships
- Ability to "read" people and situations
- Embraces the opportunity to work with those with diverse backgrounds, experiences, and views
- Seeks to deepen knowledge of systems of oppression

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VIGNETTE #1

Jeff is a mid-career teacher and viewed as an expert in his classroom. He keeps out of the fray of building issues and politics. One day Jeff hears there are discussions of major changes in policy that the district is contemplating that will greatly impact his teaching in a negative way. He decides going directly to board members will be the most effective and efficient route. He meets with board members in two separate meetings. He relays his concerns about the changes and why they will negatively impact his teaching and students' learning. He perceives positive feedback from them and assumes they agree with his position. A week later, Jeff is asked to meet with the superintendent and his principal. He is sure they have heard of his efforts and are ready to discuss other alternatives. Indeed, they have heard of his meetings, but aren't happy with his actions. The meeting doesn't address the potential policy change, but instead focuses on reviewing the district hierarchy, protocols and procedures for addressing district policy. Jeff leaves the meeting confused, embarrassed, frustrated and thinks he will never again elevate his voice on policy issues.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- Where do you think Jeff may have made some missteps in this scenario?
- What could he have done differently and, specifically, what steps would you have taken or advised him on that would have moved his position forward?
- What specific knowledge, skills and dispositions could Jeff draw on in this section of the Framework?
- What critical aspects of effective systems thinking need to be considered?
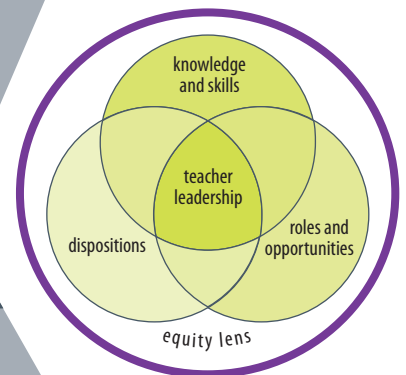
VIGNETTE #2

The Central School District has clear attendance and tardy policies. The tardy policy states that if students are more than 10 minutes late to class they are marked truant (unexcused absence) instead of tardy. Since the policy has been instituted, the high school has noticed an increase in students skipping first period so they can be marked excused as opposed to being truant. In addition, several teachers refuse to enforce the policy because of the inequities of who it impacts. Kyle, a teacher leader, is uneasy with how the well intentioned policy is playing out. He expresses to the principal that many teachers have concerns about the impact of the policy and wonders what they can do. The principal replies, "We can't do anything. It's a district policy."

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- How might Kyle respond to the principal in this conversation?
- What does Kyle need to communicate about the impact and inequities that have emerged from the policy?
- What biases and assumptions exist within this policy?
- What next steps can Kyle take to try to change the policy?
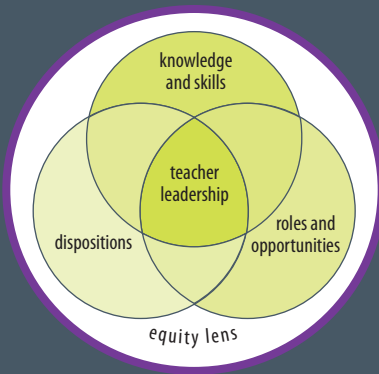- What critical aspects of effective systems thinking need to be considered?

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STRENGTHENING TEACHING ONE STEP AT A TIME

EQUITY LENS

Knowledge and Skills:

Self and Identity
- Becomes aware of own biases, both explicit and implicit
- Recognizes the impact of your intentions and position within the system
- Seeks new and current skills (lifelong learner)

Understands Race, Power, and Privilege
- Seeks to understand historical context, systems of oppression and their impact on the educational system
- Identifies the role in privilege in systems and relationships
- Distinguishes between equity versus equality
- Understands intersectionality
- Practices and models culturally responsive teaching
- Combats institutional "isms" (racism, sexism, ageism, etc.)

Facilitates
- Listens intentionally to hear and understand all voices, in order to hear and understand perspectives
- Questions to encourage equity of voice and participation
- Employs mediation skills to navigate discomfort
- Facilitates trusting relationships to allow vulnerability and growth
- Finds and uses inclusive content and data that invites and encourages discourse

Applies Culturally Relevant and Responsive Practices
- Ensures opportunities for all to voice their perspectives
- Advocates for equity in terms of access, opportunity and outcomes
- Builds ongoing cultural competence and awareness

Dispositions:
- Has courage and commitment to ask hard questions, challenge assumptions, and advocate
- Affirms identities and recognize the power of differences by systematically seeking, valuing, and working with diverse voices and perspectives
- Nurtures own social emotional health
- Believes in each person's continual need and capacity to grow and change
- Sees self as primarily accountable to the community
- Self-reflective, empathetic, and compassionate
- Understands the limits of one's own perspective

VIGNETTE #1

Laura leads the grade level team meeting discussing disaggregated data according to male/female, low-income, by race, and special groups. As the meeting progresses, the staff brings up the growing number of diverse student populations that have been emerging in the school over the last few years. As the discussion continues, two teachers begin complaining loudly about how the diverse student population has increased throughout the last few years and yet the test scores are decreasing. Other teachers start to chime in about how the students do not want to learn and don't care about what the teachers are doing in class and that parents aren't supportive.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- How might Laura stop negative comments and redirect this discussion to be about supporting students to be successful?
- What questions might she ask of the staff that prompts them to think deeper about what they are saying?
- Knowing that there are members of the group who feel negatively towards certain student groups, how can Laura, the teacher leader, structure discussion or bring in support for her grade level team?
- What critical aspects of equity lens needs to be considered?
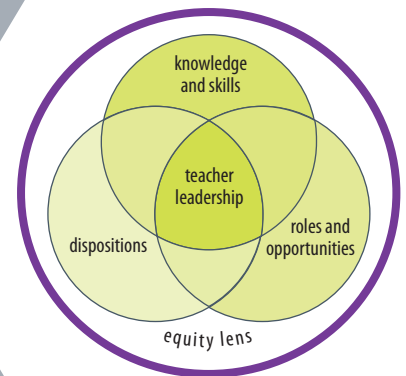
VIGNETTE #2

Faduma and Eric are Teacher Leaders working together with administration on the school equity team to facilitate conversations among staff about privilege and power in their school. A district administrator, having heard about the work that they're doing, sends Faduma an email inviting her to appear in a district video touting the district's work toward equity. Faduma is sent a script to read about how the district is using a standards-based approach to support culturally responsive teaching. Faduma expresses her concern to Eric about being tokenized as a person of color and asked to read a line in a video for work she doesn't see happening across the district.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- As a Teacher Leader, what is your initial response to this vignette?
- Prior to this incident, how can Eric, a white educator, work to build collaborative relationships with his colleagues of color that resist giving into the tendency for his whiteness and maleness to exist in a position of unequal power and privilege, which would otherwise likely be handed to him?
- How does Eric listen authentically to Faduma if she chooses to share this concern with Eric, without attempting to save or control the situation?
- How can Eric leverage his relationships with building or district administration to communicate the problematic request from the district if Faduma identifies that as a support she would see as helpful?
- What critical aspects of equity lens needs to be considered?

TEACHER LEADERSHIP SKILLS FRAMEWORK

SPECIAL THANKS

The Teacher Leadership Framework is a seminal publication of the Center for Strengthening the Teaching Profession (CSTP) that has been used in a variety of contexts and with a variety of educators. We seek to better articulate and clarify the specific professional development needs of Teacher Leaders that will positively impact learning for students in all of our schools.

This framework can be used to design professional development offerings, serve as a discussion tool to address the dilemmas that arise when leadership is shared, and contribute to the ongoing dialogue about the roles Teacher Leaders assume in efforts to improve student learning.

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