

Leadership Hacks for Teacher Leaders

Cultivating Teacher Leadership

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Building capacity for teacher leadership in international schools is important because teacher leaders often remain in their teaching positions at a school longer than school leaders. As principals and assistant principals come and go, there can be significant impacts on student learning unless the school has strong systems for curriculum leadership in place. Moving towards a model of shared leadership between school leaders and teacher leaders helps guarantee a viable curriculum. When international schools establish structures for cultivating and sharing leadership, there is a collective responsibility for student learning rather than the responsibility falling on the shoulders of one to two key people.

In the chapter, *Cultivating Teacher Leadership*, I describe my journey in cultivating teacher leadership at my school. Guided by the driving question, “How do we create and facilitate opportunities for teachers to grow in their leadership practices,” I lay out an approach that begins with developing a deep understanding of the problem and ends with tools and resources that can be adopted by other schools interested in cultivating teacher leadership.


If you are interested in putting some of my ideas into practice, the first step is taking the time to deeply understand your problem. The fishbone diagram protocol will assist you in determining a problem statement and identifying the specific categories that are contributing to your problem. Once you have mapped your problem, it is helpful to determine which of the specific categories contributing to your problems are causes and which are effects. The interrelational digraph protocol can be used to help you determine the root causes of your problem. Determining root cause(s) is an important step in the process because if you design hacks for the symptoms of the problem, your strategies are not likely to have lasting effects. A final protocol to help in your planning process is the Theory of Action protocol. This protocol will help you set a goal and identify a pathway for achieving that goal. For free access to the protocols described above visit <https://hthgse.edu/crei/protocols/>. These protocols are copy written through Creative Commons.

MacConnell, K. (2019). Cultivating Teacher Leadership. In J. Richardson (Ed.), Bringing Innovative Practices to Your School. Routledge.

The hacks I developed as a result of the process and protocols shared above are specific to the problem addressed at my school. However, if you have similar problems, there are likely to be some hacks you can put into practice right away. I categorized the hacks I tried based on implementation effort and impact on teacher leader practice. I rated each hack as mild (low effort, low impact), medium (high effort, high impact), or spicy (low effort, high impact). You can find all of the hacks beginning on page 3.

Implementation effort vs Impact on Teacher Leader Practice (mild, medium, and spicy hacks)

High Impact, Low Effort (Spicy)	High Impact, High Effort (Medium)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Norms ● Ping Pong Protocol ● Compass Points ● Reading and Discussing Research with protocols (e.g. Text Rendering Protocol; Save the Last Word) ● Consultancy Protocol ● Conversation Mapping ● Facilitation Checklist + Goal Setting ● Reflection ● Meeting Agendas ● Rounds Protocol for looking at Student Work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Work Flow using Gantt Charts ● Lotus Diagram to guide curriculum planning
Low Impact, Low Effort (Mild)	Low Impact, High Effort
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Understanding Team Purpose Activity 	

This hack is SPICY 

If you want teacher leaders to foster a collaborative culture that supports educator development and student learning try...


Compass Points

What:

Gain an understanding about how team members work best on a team.

How:

1. Read the descriptions for North, South, East, and West have group members self identify with one descriptor .
2. Form groups based the descriptors.
3. Answer questions about: strengths, limitations, which direction is hardest for your group to work with and why, what do people from the other groups need to know about your group, and what do you value about the other groups.
4. Each group shares out.
5. Debrief the experience and what this means for everyone working collaboratively on the team.
6. Visit School Reform Initiative for access to the protocol- www.schoolreforminitiative.org

This hack is SPICY 

If you want teacher leaders to foster a collaborative culture that supports educator development and student learning try...

Norms/Working Agreements

What: Establishing norms help ensure all voices on the team have an equal chance to contribute, keep the team focused on student learning and help the facilitator to lead more effective and productive meetings..

How:

1. There are many resources available online to help guide you through the creation of team norms. Find a process that works for you and your team.
2. Remember that norms are behaviors to help facilitate a process. Typically norms are developed around: listening, decision-making, participation, expectations, etc.
3. Once norms are established, the team needs to live the norms don't just let the norms exist on paper. It is important to revisit the norms and to periodically have the group reflect on how the team is living the norms. It may be necessary to add or revise norms over time.

This hack is SPICY 


If you want teacher leaders to foster a collaborative culture that supports educator development and student learning try...

Ping Pong Protocol

What: The purpose of this protocol is for all team members, who collectively face a problem, to reflect on the problem and discuss it together.

How:

1. Pose the problem as a statement or a question and make sure everyone is in agreement.
2. Have each group member spend 10 minutes writing about their approach to solving the problem from his/her perspective.
3. Spend 15-20 minutes letting each member share their approach. Someone should jot down each person's ideas on chart paper. After the person sharing has finished talking, the group can ask clarifying questions. Repeat the process for each individual.
4. The remainder of the protocol can be found at www.schoolreforminitiative.org

This hack is MILD 

If you want teacher leaders to foster a collaborative culture that supports educator development and student learning try...

Shared Purpose

What: It is important to take time to establish the purpose of teams/departments. Believe it or not, some people don't have a shared understanding about the purpose of the team.

How:

1. Ask each member of the team to write down what s/he thinks the purpose of their team is and why they come together to meet.
2. Once everyone has jotted down their ideas, share out what each person wrote.
3. Discuss what the purpose of your team is together and write a collective team purpose that everyone is in agreement with and understands.
4. Add the purpose of your team to the top of your meeting agendas.
5. Having a shared, visible purpose can help the team refocus their energy when disagreements arise.

This hack is SPICY 

If you want teacher leaders to access and use research to improve practice and student achievement try...

Reading and Discussing Text

What: Articles and books are a great way to engage in leadership conversations paired with discussion protocols.

How:

1. There are lots of great text about instructional leadership. Here are a few resources to get you going: *The Art of Coaching Teams* by Elena Aguilar; *How to Thrive as a Teacher Leader* by John G. Gabriel; *Build a Culture that Nurtures Productive Conflict* by Anthony Armstrong; *The Top Ten Learning Needs for Teacher Leaders* by Gordon, Jacobs, and Solis (2014); and *Finding Your Voice* by Valerie Von Frank.
2. Protocols keep conversations outcomes oriented. Two great resources for protocols are *School Reform Initiative* and *National School Faculty Reform*. Three of our favorite protocols were the *Text Rendering Protocol*, *Block Party*, and *Save the Last Word for me*.

This hack is SPICY 

If you want teacher leaders to promote professional learning for continuous improvement try...

Consultancy Protocol

What: This protocol is a great way to come together around problems of practice and collectively solve those problems.

How:

1. The presenter presents a problem he/she has been struggling with and frames a question to the group for consideration.
2. The group asks clarifying questions, which are factual questions that are typically easy for the presenter to answer. Following clarifying questions, the group transitions to ask probing questions. Probing questions are questions designed to push the presenters thinking.
3. At the end of the questioning, the presenter restates his/her question for the group then sits back to listen to the groups' discussion.
4. The rest of the protocol can be found at: <https://schoolreforminitiative.org/doc/consultancy.pdf>

This hack is SPICY



If you want teacher leaders to promote professional learning for continuous improvement try...

Conversation Mapping

What: Tool to understand who is participating in conversations during meetings.

How:

1. Jot down the initials of each person sitting around the table in the order in which they are sitting.
2. Decide how long you want to map the conversation.
3. Begin mapping! Each time someone speaks, draw a line from the person's initials who is speaking to the next person who speaks. Continue this process until your time is up or you believe you have a good sample.
4. Reflect: Did anyone dominate the conversation? Were there members who did not speak? How did participation impact the conversation? What might you do differently to either increase participation or balance participation?

This hack is MEDIUM



If you want teacher leaders to promote professional learning for continuous improvement try...

Workflow Planning

What: Once teams have set goals for their work, it is important to map out how that work will take place over time.

How:

1. Gantt charts and/or other project management tools are a great way to take a step back and think about what work needs to be accomplished, by when, and to identify who is responsible for which parts of the work. Knowing this information helps teacher leaders plan efficient and effective agendas.
2. Here are a few resources to get you started:
 - a. <https://www.teamgantt.com/free-gantt-chart-excel-template>
 - b. www.trello.com
 - c. <https://monday.com/>

This hack is MEDIUM 

If you want teacher leaders to promote professional learning for continuous improvement try...

Lotus Diagrams

What: A lotus map is a tool, similar to a mind map, which can help teams think through work/planning that needs to be done with guiding questions.

How:

1. Choose a topic the team needs to discuss, for example, "Assessments."
2. Write the word, assessment in the middle of the page.
3. Jot down questions the team needs to discuss. Each question should be a different idea coming from the topic, in this case, "Assessment."
4. Questions might be things like, Do we need to make any changes to our common assessment for this unit?; What different assessments are we using?; Are we missing any opportunities for authentic, formative assessment practices? Does each assessment link back to the big ideas we are teaching? Click here for a link to an example.

This hack is SPICY 

If you want teacher leaders to promote professional learning for continuous improvement try...

Goal Setting

What: Goal setting helps you set a vision for what you want to better understand, what you want to improve and helps you set a path for your learning.

How:

1. You might be familiar with the concept of SMART goals: Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, Timely and some people add on an E for Equitable. Try something a little bit different.
2. Pose your goal as a question that begins with either, "How might we..." or "How might I..."
3. Setting goals from a place of inquiry and curiosity, supported by a clear action plan can lead to powerful questions for teachers and teams of teacher to solve collaboratively.
 - a. Here are some examples to get you started: How might we increase student engagement during class discussions? How might I use student feedback to increase student voice in our class?

This hack is SPICY 

If you want teacher leaders to promote professional learning for continuous improvement try...

Reflection

What: Taking time to reflect on learning is important for improvement. Reflection tends to be one of the first things we skip when we are running short on time.

How:

1. Set aside 5 minutes at the end of each meeting for reflection.
2. Reflection can take many forms. Here are a few ideas:
 - a. Ask your colleagues to share one take away from the meeting.
 - b. Have people jot down one idea of something they will try between now and the next meeting.
 - c. Take several minutes to reflect on how the team has been doing following the norms during meetings.
 - d. What ever you decide to do, commit to taking time for reflection. Don't skip it!

This hack is SPICY 

If you want teacher leaders to facilitate improvements in instruction and student learning try...

Tuning Protocol

What: This protocol can be used during meetings to get feedback on a unit plan (or part of a unit), an assessment, a project, or any other learning activity. Tuning ideas and work leads to new ideas and improvements of student learning experiences.

How:

1. The presenter shares his/her work with a guiding question for feedback. Context is provided to the group and a copy of the unit plan/assessment, etc. is shared with the group (if needed).
2. The group asks clarifying questions (factual, easy to answer questions), followed by probing questions (questions that push the presenter's thinking).
3. The presenter sits back and listens while the group provides warm and cool feedback.
4. The presenter rejoins the conversation and shares his/her thoughts. For full details on the protocol visit: <https://schoolreforminitiative.org/doc/tuning.pdf>

This hack is SPICY 

If you want teacher leaders to use assessments and data for school improvement try...

Rounds Protocol

What: The protocol guides the group through three passes (or rounds) of examining a piece of student work.

How:

1. During the first round, participants describe specific observations, or things they notice, while examining the work.
2. In the second round, the group makes generalizations about what the student can do based on the first round of observations.
3. Finally, in round three, the group brainstorms possible next steps for instruction.
4. By taking time to slow down and follow a structure to look at student work in a new way, new insights and ideas take shape. For information go read this blog post (link to the protocol is in the blog post) <https://www.kristenmacconnell.com/single-post/2016/09/26/Looking-at-Student-Work>

This hack is SPICY 

If you want teacher leaders to promote professional learning for continuous improvement try...

Meeting Agendas

What: Meeting agendas should help facilitate productive and meaningful conversations, producing actionable results that facilitate student learning.

How:

1. Think about how much time you have for your meeting.
2. Consider each agenda item and dedicate a specific amount of time that is needed to discuss that item. How is this agenda item related to student learning?
3. Set a purpose for each agenda item: relationship building, learning, decision-making, problem solving, information sharing, and/or

BONUS Idea: Conduct an analysis of your meeting agendas. What is the purpose for the majority of your meetings? Is student learning at the center of each meeting? How are you using your time? What can you learn from the minutes? What's working? What might you change?