**The New Professionalism of Teachers**

Ashley Lamb-Sinclair 3:27 p.m. EST February 26, 2016

**Story Highlights**

* This commentary begins a new series – Classroom Connections – that will feature teachers writing about their experiences and views on education issues. Look for Classroom Connections every fourth Sunday in Forum.

Teachers are often viewed as either superheroes or villains, but I believe both are equally damaging to the profession. The superhero teacher myth perpetuates the idea that in order for a teacher to be effective, she must deplete her time, energy, and personhood for the sake of her students. The villain teacher myth encourages the notion that teachers take the path of educating our youth in order to be home by 3:00 p.m., have summers off, and do not really care about their effectiveness.

Each definition creates a false perception of the practice of teaching. I have talked with strong teachers from across the state, and they all struggle to find the balance between giving of oneself inside the classroom and making time to be a leader outside of the four walls of their classroom. This movement comes at a time when the working definitions of teacher and teaching are changing.

From these changing definitions, the concept of a teacher leader has emerged. Teacher leaders rethink their use of time with students. In the past, a teacher’s role was to stand in front of a class all day, make sure everyone behaved, and share his or her knowledge while students took notes.

Our education system now has examples of teachers such as Rush Sullivan at North Oldham High School, who ask students to view video lectures or read texts at home, so that in-class time is spent on collaborative tasks that build on the unique strengths of students in his class. Or teachers like Susan Gannott and Megan Tyrikos at Minors Lane Elementary who do not divide their 4th-grade students into classes so much as they view every child in the 4th grade as part of one learning community, which they both share.

Teacher leaders find ways to become more efficient with their time in order to maximize their impact on students and share their expertise with their colleagues. Teachers like [Sarah Yost at Westport Middle School](http://www.courier-journal.com/story/opinion/2016/02/26/how-academic-standards-empower-teachers/80850086/) and Katrina Boone at Shelby County High School have taken on hybrid positions with the University of Louisville and the Kentucky Department of Education respectively, to work with students for part of their day, and work to create change at a school, district, or state level for the remainder of their day.

Or teachers like Kip Hottman at Fern Creek High School, Josh Rhodes at Wilder Elementary, and Kristi Hodges at North Oldham High School who manage to teach a full load of classes during the school day, but spend their evenings working with teacher leadership networks in the state. These teachers represent the new definition of teaching and teachers --devoting their talents and their time equally to improving student learning experiences and outcomes, improving teacher-to-teacher learning so that every child has an effective teacher, and shaping better education policy, all of which creates stronger teachers for students.

In my own journey, never having known anything outside of the classroom in 10 years of teaching, I struggled with the myths of the teaching profession. After being [honored as Kentucky Teacher of the Year](http://www.courier-journal.com/story/news/education/2015/10/20/2016-teacher-year/74262396/), Education Commissioner Stephen Pruitt offered me the opportunity to take a sabbatical from the classroom to join him at the Kentucky Department of Education. I was tempted by the idea of sharing teacher voice with leadership at KDE, but I was also fearful of what it would mean for my students and my school.

I thought I would be viewed as a superhero if I stayed and a villain if I left. Ultimately, my students made the decision for me. One student, Lucy, said to me, “Mrs. Lamb, you’re always telling us to change the world. What kind of role model would you be if you didn’t at least try?”

Teachers across the commonwealth realize the truth of this sentiment more and more—if we are to be role models for our students, we need to show them examples of teachers who are also leaders in education.

The myths surrounding the teaching profession often prevent authentic system change from happening in education because they encourage the public, and sometimes teachers themselves, to hold onto an image of a person who is solely focused on traditional notions of teaching and learning, who has summers off and stops working at 3 p.m. (which is completely false). But as new models and definitions of teachers