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**Book Review**

*Reading Educational Research and Policy Key Issues in Teaching and Learning by David Scott*

342-346

**Arzu Akkaya & Mithat Korumaz**

**Exploring Teacher Leadership Across Cultures:  
Introduction to Teacher Leadership  
Themed Special Issue**

**Charles F. Webber**

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<b>Abstract</b>	<b>Article Info</b>
<p><i>This editorial situates the special issue in the context of some of the dominant understandings of teacher leadership that appear in literature that spans several decades and includes comprehensive literature reviews. Then the origins of the International Study of Teacher Leadership are outlined and the process of forming a large international research team, developing research questions, and creating a study design is explained. This is followed by an overview of the articles in the special issue that present the findings from the first two stages of the International Study of Teacher Leadership, plus a report about teacher leadership in southeastern Mexico. The editorial concludes with a caution about the potential inappropriate use of the concept of teacher leadership across different contexts.</i></p>	<p><b>Article History:</b> <i>Received</i> <i>August 15, 2020</i>  <i>Accepted</i> <i>September 20, 2020</i></p> <hr/> <p><b>Keywords:</b> <i>Teacher leadership,</i> <i>Cross-cultural</i> <i>research, Context.</i></p>

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## **Introduction**

Teacher leadership has been an increasing focus for researchers' attention over the past three decades and beyond. In the eighties, Howey (1988) proposed that selected teachers might teach part-time and spend the remainder of their workdays working alongside other teachers to enable both teacher and student learning. Howey (1988) also proposed more flexible teacher career patterns that could include "curriculum redesign and articulation, organizational monitoring, pedagogical development, or collaborative action research" (p. 30).

In the nineties, Little (1995) shared the image of "contested ground" (p. 47) to describe the rise of leadership in schools based on subject expertise and on successful engagement with interdisciplinary planning initiatives rather than on hierarchical leadership appointments. Katzenmeyer & Moller (1996) profiled the influence of teachers who lead throughout their school communities by collaborating with colleagues to improve teaching and learning.

In 2003, Lambert made the often repeated and sometimes contested argument that all teachers can and should be leaders. She reasoned that educational leadership, power, and authority should be manifested beyond formal authority structures so that teachers can participate in the shared and reciprocal construction of meaning. Also in 2003, Harris offered the related view that teacher leadership plays an important function in school improvement by fostering leadership that is shared by teachers in service of common goals. Harris (2003) cautioned that not all teachers need serve as leaders and drew upon distributed leadership theory to outline how formal leaders can share responsibility and authority among teachers in their schools. She underscored how distributed leadership was accompanied by the



need for ongoing professional development for teachers so they can facilitate, mentor, and collaborate effectively.

York-Barr and Duke's (2004) review of the literature related to teacher leadership provided a comprehensive summary of its benefits, manifestations, and the supportive conditions that it requires. They highlighted the benefits of sharing expertise such as better decisions, greater commitment to collective goals, and students' social and academic development. York-Barr and Duke (2004) noted the underdeveloped or even absent definitions of teacher leadership in many reports that they reviewed. However, they also highlighted the connections made in the literature between teacher leadership and related conceptualizations of leadership such as participative leadership, distributed leadership, and parallel leadership. York-Barr and Duke (2004) included their observations of the professional and experiential background of individuals identified as teacher leaders. They described the relationships among teacher leadership, school culture, roles, and organizational structures. Reflecting Harris' (2003) identification of the need for professional development for teacher leaders, York-Barr and Duke (2004) reported how teacher leadership can be viewed from a career-long perspective. That is, partnerships between teacher education institutions and schools or districts can develop the leadership capacity of early-career and established teachers alike, as can workplace-embedded professional learning.

Wenner and Campbell (2017) added another important review of the teacher leadership literature. Their findings complemented and extended those shared earlier by York-Barr and Duke (2004). They too noted the lack of clarity in the definitions of teacher leadership that appeared in the literature and cautioned that this could result in

discrepancies between the research literature and how teacher leadership is applied in schools. Wenner and Campbell (2017) also observed that the teacher leadership literature did not consider sufficiently how teacher leadership relates to equity and diversity, nor did it explore idiosyncrasies among teachers working in different subject areas. Their review described how teacher leaders can experience tensions related to altered relationships with colleagues and administrators, and to time availability and workload. Importantly, Wenner and Campbell (2017) related how the increased interest in teacher leadership has led to it being a salient factor in school reform initiatives and teacher evaluations.

In another recent comprehensive review, Nguyen et al. (2019) explored patterns in how teacher leadership research has been conducted and they identified themes in the study findings. They observed a dramatic increase in the number of teacher leadership publications in recent years, reflecting the growing interest in the topic. They also noted that only two cross-national teacher leadership studies were undertaken between 2003 and 2017 and suggested there was a need for studies of teacher leadership in non-Western contexts.

A current review of teacher leadership research (Schott et al., 2020) also noted that teacher leadership is a factor in how teacher evaluations, professional development programs, and school reforms are designed and administered. As in previous reviews, Schott et al. (2020) reported a strong Western focus, particularly within the United States, but with some attention to teacher leadership in Asian countries. Schott et al. (2020) reported that their analyses suggested that many of the studies did not meet a desirable level of methodological quality.



The extensive reviews by York-Barr and Duke (2004), Nguyen et al. (2019), Wenner and Campbell (2017), and Schott et al. (2020) are important contributions to current understandings of teacher leadership. Each of the reviews used well explained strategies for analyzing the reports selected for inclusion in the research that was considered. The reviews noted the ongoing uncertainty about how teacher leadership can or should be defined, even while the interest in teacher leadership among educational researchers, practitioners, and policy makers has increased.

The widespread use of the term teacher leadership is well documented, and its influence is evident in formal expectations for teachers in a wide range of cultural contexts. It is unlikely that it is coincidental that some of the frequently stated attributes of teacher leaders appear in teaching standards and school improvement initiatives in several countries. For example, in Canada, the *Alberta Teaching Quality Standard* (2018) requires teachers to demonstrate respect and care for members of the school community, and to elicit confidence in their work from students, parents, and other educational partners. The *Professional Standards for British Columbia Educators* (2019) outlines expectations that teachers have responsibilities to foster public confidence in their work, to contribute to democracy in Canada, and to support truth, reconciliation, and healing with Indigenous peoples. The Australian *Professional Standards for Teachers* (2018) outlines a graduated professional profile that explicitly states that newly graduated teachers will work effectively with parents, colleagues, and community representatives and progress through career stages culminating in lead teachers who also represent their schools and their profession throughout their communities. The *South African Professional Teaching Standards Draft Announcement* (2020) details how teachers are to promote social

justice within their institutions and society, and how they are expected to collaborate with members of the school communities. The South African standards state that teachers are to earn the respect of community members and to maintain the dignity of the teaching profession. *Teachers' Standards* issued by the Department of Education in England (2013) highlight standards that must be reached in order to achieve qualified teacher status, standards that also are used to assess teacher performance and conduct throughout their careers.

### **Study Origins**

It can be argued that despite teacher leadership not being well defined, it has a growing influence on teacher education, teaching standards, and teacher evaluations. This observation was discussed during a meeting among researchers from several countries who gathered in 2018 at an international conference hosted by Guangxi Normal University in Guilin, China. A major point that arose was the Western orientation of the understanding of teacher leadership and the need to explore teacher leadership in other contexts.

Participants in the meeting in Guilin used an earlier draft of the Webber article that is included in this special issue of *Research in Educational Administration and Leadership* (REAL) as a catalyst for discussing the viability of an international study of teacher leadership. Webber's (2018) discussion paper offered a rationale for the importance of teacher leadership and shared a summary of some of the attributes and indicators of teacher leadership evident in the literature. It also related teacher leadership to formal and informal leadership, school culture, professional development, and school improvement.



Following the meeting in Guilin, the initial group of researchers expanded its membership so that 10 countries are represented on the research team: Australia, Canada, China, Colombia, Mexico, Romania, South Africa, Spain, Tanzania, and Turkey. Interested colleagues met online over several months to develop overarching research questions and to design a five-stage study that began with a form of self-study to explore the understandings that team members bring to their collaboration. Other study stages include document analyses, interviews and questionnaires, case studies, and oral histories, all to be conducted in the 10 countries.

### **Themed Special Issue of REAL**

The first stages of the ISTL are the phenomenographic analysis of research team members' understandings of teacher leadership and a document analysis conducted in the context of each research team member. These stages are meant to accomplish two things. First, the phenomenographic component allowed the team members to share their conceptions of teacher leadership that they bring to their collective work. The document analyses were designed to contextualize the exploration of teacher leadership within the various cultural settings of the researchers and to profile the explicit and implicit statements related to the attributes of teacher leadership. Both stages will inform the remaining components of the ISTL: interviews and questionnaires, case studies, and oral histories.

In the first article in this special issue of REAL focusing on teacher leadership, Webber shares an updated version of his 2018 discussion paper and provides more detail about how the research team decided to proceed with the *International Study of Teacher Leadership* (ISTL) ([www.mru.ca/istl](http://www.mru.ca/istl)). This article offers a framework

for researching teacher leadership, presents the ISTL research questions, and describes the study design.

In the second article, Arden and Okoko share the results of the phenomenographic self-study that they conducted with 12 members of the ISTL researchers. They describe how they utilized mind mapping and semi-structured interviews to gain insights into how their fellow researchers relate to teacher leadership. The team members' conceptions of teacher leadership are described within three broad interrelated domains: (1) the school, school community, and formal education system, (2) the teacher-leader's professional self, and (3) the broader historical, socio-political and global contexts of teacher leadership.

In the third article, Pineda-Báez presents the findings of her analyses of documents in Colombia that focused on the recruitment, selection, and evaluation of teachers. She observed implied connections to teacher leadership in relation to pedagogical leadership, evaluation, peacebuilding, and diversity. However, there were few direct representations of teacher leadership in the documents and Pineda-Báez found that leadership was conceptualized mainly as a hierarchical phenomenon.

The fourth article reports how teacher leadership is conceptualized in the official documentation of educational organizations in South Africa. The analyses conducted by van der Vyver, Fuller, & Khumalo found that the documents referenced some of the attributes of teacher leadership found in Western literature but there was a stronger emphasis on cultural responsiveness and protection of human rights. The authors suggest that the relatively unique foci of teacher leadership in South Africa are the result of the historical, cultural, and socio-economic context of that nation.



Fierro-Evans and Fortoul-Ollivier provide a comparative analysis of educational policy documents focusing on leadership and teacher development in Spain, Colombia, and Mexico. Their analyses found limited references to teacher leadership per se, but the topic of reflection emerged as a focus within the documents in the three countries. They cautioned that reflection appears with different emphases and was described somewhat differently in each context. Nonetheless, the authors found that reflexivity offers insight and direction for teacher leadership development.

Kahler-Viene, Conway, and Andrews report the results of their analyses of educational documents at the national, state, regional, and local levels in Australia. They found differences in the dominance of various teacher leadership attributes at each of the four levels. Although accountability and advocacy for teacher leaders spanned the four levels, documents at the state level focused on professionalism and teamwork, while regional documents emphasized stability and inclusiveness.

A parallel analysis of institutional documents in Spain found that some attributes of teacher leadership appeared in government laws, teacher education programs, and school improvement proposals, but with an apparent limited understanding of the overall significance of teacher leadership. Gratacós, Ladrón de Guevara, and Rodriguez also observed few connections between principal and teacher leadership.

In the next article, Webber and Nickel report the results of their interrogation of the documentation of key educational stakeholders in Alberta, Canada. They observed six themes that related to teacher leadership: foundational understandings, student diversity, innovative curriculum and student engagement, community



engagement, 21<sup>st</sup> century competencies, and reflection and professional learning. They then identified several issues within the themes with the potential to challenge teacher leaders and used the challenges to derive a profile of teacher leaders who have the capacity to serve, influence, and thrive.

The collection of ISTL reports is complemented by a separate report that draws from three studies conducted in southeastern Mexico to describe conditions that facilitate and inhibit teacher leadership and professionalism. Cisneros-Cohernour describes how traditional power structures in schools have limited the success of educational reforms intended to strengthen the role and influence of teachers. She identifies the need for professional development for school administrators who seek to enhance their capacity to facilitate teacher leadership.

The articles in this special issue confirm that teacher leadership is more easily discerned in Western contexts like Canada and Australia. In other settings—Colombia, Mexico, South Africa, Spain—the attributes of teacher leadership were less obvious and stated more implicitly. They also addressed issues relevant to local contexts, such as correcting historical inequities and ameliorating the effects of civil strife. Further, it was evident in some contexts, such as Colombia, that hierarchical configurations served as the primary basis for enacting educational leadership.

### **Conclusion**

The ISTL is intended to address the gap in understanding of teacher leadership across organizational and cultural contexts. Currently, teacher leadership is a term that is used in Western nations as if there is a widely shared understanding of what it is and what it



means for exercising influence and making decisions. Implicit meanings and competing assumptions about teacher leadership may contribute to uncertainty and confusion in school communities. Incorporation of teacher leadership in international policy making discussions without adequate consideration of contextual, organizational, historical, and cultural differences may lead to school community members struggling to accommodate the concept or, worse, ignoring other frameworks for facilitating more culturally appropriate decision making.

Calls for shared or distributed leadership among teachers, principals, parents, and students appeal intuitively to a commonsense desire to work collaboratively toward shared goals. Indeed, multiple researchers share the understanding that teachers are a key factor in school improvement. However, definitions of teacher leadership continue to evolve and the lack of clarity about the theoretical base of teacher leadership, its actual meaning, and how it is enacted is likely to limit its utility for enhancing academic outcomes and student wellbeing.

This special issue of REAL shares the findings of research conducted in North American, European, African, Latin-American, and Australasian contexts as part of the ISTL. The purpose of sharing the findings of document analyses conducted in different cultures is to contextualize idealized descriptions of teacher leadership. Future stages of the ISTL will permit the juxtaposition of what organizations say about teacher leadership with how the phenomenon actually is experienced by classroom teachers.

The importance of how teacher leadership is manifested in schools is more elevated now than ever. Educators are experiencing unprecedented technological change that has altered how students,

teachers, parents, and community members interact. The COVID-19 global pandemic has introduced additional complexities to the work of educators at the same time that concerns about historical injustices—e.g., Black Lives Matter, Indigenous rights, decolonization, sexual orientation and gender identity—have come to the fore. Teachers around the world also are immersed in the education of extraordinary numbers of children and their families who have migrated to seek refuge from violence, economic uncertainty, and climate change. The role of teacher leaders merits additional study because of the pressing need for ongoing improvements to teaching and learning, and also because of the centrality of teachers and education systems in the development and nurturing of civil societies.

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## The Need for Cross-Cultural Exploration of Teacher Leadership

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Abstract	Article Info
<p><i>This article describes the need for additional cross-cultural study of teacher leadership. A rationale for researching teacher leadership is presented based on the need to provide clarity to the definition of the concept and to understand better how to facilitate teacher leadership development. A primary research question is shared: “How is teacher leadership conceptualized and enacted and what are the implications for educational stakeholders?” A set of attributes and indicators of teacher leadership is provided based on a review of literature focusing on teacher leadership. Then four additional concepts related to teacher leadership are described—formal and informal influence, school culture, school improvement, and professional development—followed by a summary of cautionary considerations. Finally, a multi-stage research design is presented in support of the International Study of Teacher Leadership, a cross-cultural examination of teacher leadership.</i></p>	<p><b>Article History:</b>  <i>Received</i>                      July 26, 2020   <i>Accepted</i>                      September 27, 2020</p> <hr/> <p><b>Keywords:</b>  <i>Teacher leadership, Cross-cultural research, Context.</i></p>

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## Introduction

This paper<sup>12</sup> offers a rationale for the *International Study of Teacher Leadership* (ISTL) by arguing for the need to identify the degree to which teachers around the world feel prepared for the school-based leadership responsibilities that they are expected to fulfill, duties that go beyond their classrooms to affect the larger school community. There is a need to address the research question: “How is teacher leadership conceptualized and enacted and what are the implications for educational stakeholders?” Such research would contribute to the wider understanding of teacher leadership, the impact of teacher leadership on school culture, and how professional development and university programs might contribute to teacher leadership knowledge and skill development.

### Why Teacher Leadership?

Educational leadership is a widely discussed and often contested concept and, as Leithwood (2007, p. 41) observed, “Leadership by adjective is a growth industry”... [instructional, transformational, moral, constructivist, servant, cultural, emotional and] ... “most are actually just slogans.” Harris (2003) also noted that “the literature on school leadership contains a bewildering array of definitions, theories, and models (p. 317).

With specific reference to teacher leadership and distributed leadership, Leithwood (2007) claimed that they “qualify more as

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<sup>1</sup> This report is based on research done as part of the *International Study of Teacher Leadership* conducted in Australia, Canada, China, Colombia, Mexico, Romania, South Africa, Spain, Tanzania, and Turkey. The multi-stage study commenced in 2018. For more information, see the study website: [www.mru.ca/istl](http://www.mru.ca/istl).

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movements driven much more by philosophy and democratic values than by evidence that kids actually learn more if a larger proportion of district and school leadership comes from non-traditional sources” (Leithwood, 2007, p. 42). Further, he noted:

*Much of the teacher leadership literature either describes teacher leaders engaged in administrative tasks or engaged in what most professions would agree are the normal responsibilities expected of a collection of professionals. Shared decision making and collaboration, for example, are really quite important to the success of schools. But why do we need to call them “distributed leadership”? These are activities that most of us value highly, but they should not be confused with leadership. Otherwise, the concept loses all unique meaning and significance. (Leithwood, 2007, p. 43)*

That said, it is argued here that the depth and quality of teachers’ engagement with their classrooms and school communities clearly influences how their students will experience and perceive their time in schools. Thus, Sterrett’s (2015) definition of teacher leadership is relevant: “Teacher leadership is defined as collaborative involvement, initiative, and guiding direction from the teaching faculty to help realize the school goals, mission, and vision in a reflective manner” (Sterrett, 2015, p. 43).

Such a focus on achieving mutually agreed upon goals complements Leithwood’s (2007, p. 44) claim that leadership is “all about direction and influence...improvement is the goal of leadership.” Whether there is agreement that teacher leadership is leadership per se or a philosophy rather than a model, it is clear that that facilitation of teacher and principal achievement of their professional responsibilities merits attention.

The literature on teacher leadership contains multiple observations that it is a generic term that calls for clearer definition (Campbell, Lieberman, & Yashkina, 2015; Pangan & Lupton, 2015;

Scott Williams, Lakin, & Kensler, 2015). However, several attributes of teacher leaders have emerged. For instance, the term is associated with teachers whose professional practice includes leadership within and outside of their classrooms (Dufour & Fullan, 2013). Teacher leaders also collaborate with colleagues in developing and maintaining professional school cultures (Lambert, 2003; Petersen, 2015). They are reflective practitioners (Dawson, 2014). They learn together with colleagues and they initiate positive change (Harris, 2003).

Angelle and DeHart (2016) made the important point that, “One commonality present in all of the definitions [in their review] is that leadership in a school does not have to be instilled in a single person but rather can be dispersed and shared with all school staff” (p. 90). Nguyen, Harris, and Ng (2020) clarified this point by noting that four key attributes of teacher leadership identified in their literature review are influence, “reciprocal collaboration and trust” (p. 67), engagement within and external to the classroom, and a focus on improving teaching and learning.

If teachers are to participate in shared or distributed leadership activities, then what are the types of experiences and support that will enhance their leadership skills and knowledge? In the case of principals, Webber, et al. (2014) found that their understandings of school-based leadership are often based on informal and unstructured experiences and that there was the widespread assumption that successful classroom experience is sufficient preparation for educational leadership. Further principals indicated a strong desire for formal, structured professional development, plus high-quality learning experiences that focus on localized learning needs.



The degree to which classroom-based teacher leaders share the foregoing perspectives of educational leadership with their principals is largely unexplored. Further, the literature related to teacher leadership suggests that teachers' existing understandings of the concept are varied (Cosenza, 2015; Gordon, 2004; Wenner & Campbell, 2017; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). A strong rationale for studying teacher leadership was provided by York-Barr and Duke (2004, p. 288) who stated, "Intentional and systematic efforts to support the capacity of teachers and principals to share in school leadership functions appear to be severely lacking."

The Association of Canadian Deans of Education (2017) established a set of principles of initial teacher education that includes the statements that, "Teacher education programs inspire educators to become societal leaders who work toward the public good, advocate for the betterment of society, and demonstrate their ethical and moral purposes in all professional engagements" (p. 2) and "Educators are responsive and responsible to learners, schools, colleagues, and communities, and work in partnerships with these groups" (Association of Canadian Deans of Education, 2017, p. 2-3). In addition, Ado (2016), Pangan and Lupton (2015), and Reeves and Lowenhaupt (2016) suggested that future teacher leaders should anticipate their career paths during their pre-service experiences and called for a reconceptualization of teacher leadership as the domain of seasoned professionals to include the notion of a leadership development continuum that begins at the pre-service level. Overall, the literature about teacher leadership suggests that it merits further study and clarification. In particular, it would be valuable to learn more about how classroom teachers understand the term and how prepared they feel to serve as teacher leaders.

What follows is a description of the attributes and indicators of teacher leadership, a summary of several key concepts related to teacher leadership, and the presentation of cautionary considerations for practitioners and researchers. The report closes with a description of focused local and cross-cultural studies of teacher leadership.

### **Attributes and Indicators of Teacher Leadership**

Several influential research reports and reviews of the literature relating to teacher leadership informed this report, e.g., Frost (2012), Nguyen, Harris, and Ng (2020), Schott, Van Roekel, and Tummers (2020), Smylie and Eckert (2018), Wenner and Campbell (2017), Woods and Roberts (2019), and York-Barr and Duke (2004).

In addition, Table 1 summarizes the dominant attributes and indicators of teacher leadership that emerged from a review of related literature that was conducted for the purpose of this report. Interestingly, the summary profiles the attributes and indicators that are expected of all teachers in Canadian and many other contexts. For example, Table 1 aligns closely with the Alberta Education (2018) Teaching Quality Standard. That is, Alberta teachers are expected to provide inclusive learning environments, work closely with colleagues, apply foundational knowledge of Indigenous community members, and demonstrate consistent professionalism. They are held accountable for engaging in career-long learning, applying meaningful student assessment and evaluation practices, responding to change, and inviting community members and cultural advisors into schools and classrooms.

Australian Standards for Teaching (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, 2011) also are consistent with Table 1. The Australian Standards describe what teachers should know and



do within three domains of teaching: professional knowledge, professional practice, and professional engagement. Perhaps not surprisingly, expectations for teachers in other nations such as England and South Africa vary only slightly. For instance, the Department for Education (2011) in England has set formal expectations for quality in terms of teaching and in personal and professional conduct, which are parallel to the South African Council for Educators' (2018) expectations for professional ethics, team work, social justice, content knowledge, effective teaching methods, student assessment, and learner safety and well-being.

It is apparent that researchers' understandings of teacher leadership and policy makers standards for teaching quality have strong reciprocal connections.

Table 1.

*Attributes and Indicators of Teacher Leadership*

Attributes	Indicators	Authors
Accountability	Take responsibility for outcomes Evaluation and progress monitoring provide focus	Bone, 2015 Owens, 2015 Webber & Scott, 2012
Advocacy	Student learning needs provide focus Teacher leadership has an activist dimension	Bauman, 2015 Conway, 2015 Lambert, 2003
Cultural responsiveness	Curricula and pedagogy should include students whose identities have been insufficiently considered	Nieto, 2015
Collaboration	Teachers should be part of decision making Career stage considerations are important	Bauman, 2014 Pangan & Lupton, 2015 Steffy, Wolfe, Pasch, & Enz, 2000

Openness to change	Go beyond enculturation to build capacity for transformation	Pangan & Lupton, 2015
Professionalism	Teaching is always an ethical activity Teachers are the single largest influence on students' academic achievement	Davis, et al., 2015 Lambert, 2003 Nieto, 2015
Reflection	Reflective practice should be ongoing	Carr, 2015
Risk-taking	Safety and trust are important	Lambert, 2003
Shared vision	Alignment of goals and mission are valued	Bond, 2015 Bone, 2015
Stability	Practices should be sustainable	Conway, 2015
Teamwork	Professional learning communities provide a venue for collaboration	Conway, 2015 Jackson, Burrus, Bassett, & Roberts, 2010

### **Related Concepts in the Literature**

Four concepts related to teacher leadership are described below. Figure 1 depicts the four areas: formal and informal influence, school culture, professional development, and teacher leadership as part of school improvement.

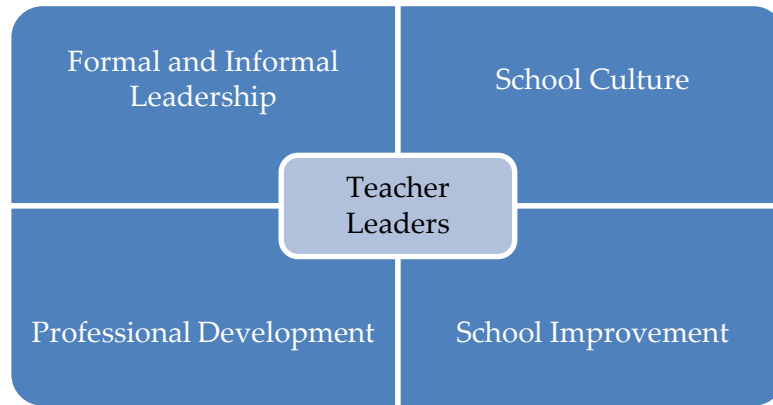


Figure 1.  
*Concepts Related to Teacher Leadership*

### **Formal and Informal Leadership**

The distinction between formal leader and teacher leader has elicited ongoing discussion and debate. For example, Crowther (2015) distinguished between teacher leaders and expert teachers, observing that teacher leaders can be involved in school leadership while expert teachers focus on classroom pedagogy. Flückiger, Lovett, and Dempster (2015) presented a perspective on the role of middle leaders—department heads, curriculum leaders, etc.—in facilitating teaching and learning effectiveness. Similarly, Stoll, Brown, Spence-Thomas, and Taylor (2015) highlighted the major influence that middle leaders exert on school improvement. Campbell, et al. (2015) suggested that teacher leadership is not about “formalized organizational authority and responsibilities” ... [but about] ... “influencing, (co)developing and sharing professional knowledge” (p. 96). Gurr and Drysdale (2013) cautioned that the term teacher leadership actually can discourage classroom teachers from

participating in professional sharing and collaboration because they do not feel prepared or willing to assume leadership roles.

However the discussion of formal versus informal teacher leadership eventually is resolved within academic circles, it is safe to say that the impacts of teacher leaders and school administrators such as principals and vice principals are significant. A pragmatic approach is contained in the description that the Innovative Designs for Enhancing Achievements in Schools (IDEAS) provides of “parallel leadership” (Andrews, et al., 2004, p. 18). Parallel leadership is the “relatedness between teacher leaders and administrator leaders that enables the knowledge-generating capacity of schools to be activated and sustained...” (p. 19). Within the IDEAS perspective, parallel leadership is characterized by collaboration balanced with individual responsibilities, alignment between vision and teaching and learning practices, sustenance of professional learning communities, and nurturing of positive school cultures.

Principals are well positioned to facilitate teacher leadership in order to maximize the realization of their shared vision and goals (Dawson, 2014; Sterrett, 2015). Also, professional influence can be exercised by more than those in formal leadership appointments (Smith, 2015; Stoll, et al., 2015). However, Harris (2003) cautioned, “this does not mean that everyone is a leader or should be” (p. 317). Rather, the focus of professional learning communities should be on relationships, connections, communication, shared goals (Campbell, et al., 2015; Carr, 2015; Harris, 2003).

### **School Culture**

The impact of school culture on student learning long has been known to be significant (Deal & Peterson, 2016). The term school or





school district ethos has been used for decades to refer to culture, atmosphere or ambience (see Coleman & LaRocque 1990; McLaughlin, 2005). Wolcott (1991) emphasized how important it is to distinguish the general abstraction of culture from how any one person acquires and makes sense of cultural information; hence, the role of individual teacher leaders is significant.

For the purposes of this article, the following discussion of school culture will be restricted to the ways people live together in schools (Webber, 1994). It is important to note that the aspects of school culture presented here in juxtaposition to the concept of teacher leaders are idealized attributes and do not include a strong focus on the negative aspects of some school cultures, those that Deal and Peterson (2010) referred to as “toxic cultures” (p. 182).

The literature focusing on teacher leaders is replete with references to norms, values, influence, shared language, purpose, and insider-versus-outsider organizational knowledge. For example, Lambert (2003) posited that leadership capacity resides within principals, teachers, parents, and students, which allows them to learn together, demonstrate commitment, and progress toward achievement of shared purposes. Bauman (2015) suggested that teachers and principals should know that striving to understand and influence their shared school culture is an ongoing process. She described the process as moving from “me to we” (Bauman, 2015, p. 52). Andrews, et al. (2004) observed the development of a shared professional language in schools with coalescing visions and goals. Conway (2015) suggested that alignment of vision, goals, and action can lead to leadership capacity building and “a dynamic culture of trust and hope with ongoing life...” (p. 30). Dawson (2014) stated that

teacher leadership development is unsustainable if it is unsafe for teachers to engage in professional experimentation and risk taking.

Others have written about the need to recognize the contributions to school culture that teacher leaders can make throughout their careers. For instance, Bond (2015) claimed that teachers who are experienced in the school context possess privileged insider knowledge that allows them to exercise influence in ways that outsiders and newcomers cannot. Conversely, early-career teachers can perceive existing patterns of behavior in ways that long serving colleagues do not, thus providing healthy disruptions to school cultures (Pangan & Lupton, 2015). Nieto (2015) observed that both early-career and long-service teachers can embrace and share culturally responsive teaching practices that manifest appreciation for students' identities while concurrently clarifying and expanding their personal and group identities.

Haskell McBee (2015) stated that "it is the informality of the teacher leader role that makes it work" (p. 19). This view is supported by Campbell, et al.'s (2015) claim that both formal and informal opportunities for teacher leadership are important and that, significantly, "teachers learn leadership by doing leadership" (p. 103). Lieberman (2015) suggested that facilitating teacher learning about leadership demonstrates respect and allows them to move past the notion that they are just teachers.

### **Professional Development**

Steffy and Wolfe (2001) shared their understanding of the life cycle of career teachers based on the premise that teachers in supportive learning environments continue to develop throughout their professional careers. They are able to evolve through six stages:



novice, apprentice, professional, expert, distinguished, and emeritus. Progress is supported through critical reflection and examination of assumptions and beliefs.

Steffy and Wolfe (2001) suggested a range of professional learning activities that support teachers at different career stages. These included development opportunities frequently cited in other teacher leadership literature such as mentoring and writing (Lieberman, 2015), self-mentoring (Carr, 2015), and leading innovations and coaching (Sterrett, 2015). Bauman (2014) also coined the term *autono-collaboration* which she defined as being able to develop independently while concurrently embracing collaboration with colleagues, which is congruent with Steffy and Wolfe's (2001) reflection-renewal-growth cycle for career teachers and with Lieberman's (2015) observation that professional leadership opportunities help both novice and experienced teachers to grow professionally as teacher leaders.

Also embedded in the teacher leadership literature are references to how leadership development opportunities promote growth from pre-service to late-career stages. For instance, Pangan & Lupton (2015) reported how teacher education programs play a role in creating teacher leaders. They urged personnel who hire new teachers to consider the opportunities applicants had in their pre-service programs to begin establishing professional identities during their field and clinical experiences. Other important considerations include opportunities new teachers had to co-teach and learn from master teachers in school classrooms. Another factor to consider is if the applicants had opportunities as teacher education students to observe, learn, and work in a range of school types and to become part of a school culture for substantive time periods.

Importantly, Pangan & Lupton (2015) argued against overlooking the leadership that new teachers can offer and suggested that veteran teachers can learn a great deal from the new perspectives offered by early-career teachers. In fact, Sterrett (2015) noted that new teachers can benefit a great deal from leadership development opportunities and support their school communities in the process. As Pangan and Lupton (2015) observed, new teachers can “initiate, share, collaborate, mentor, and generate solutions for education” (p. 29).

Campbell, et al. (2015) found that, throughout their careers, teachers develop leadership capacity when they have opportunities to actually lead professional initiatives. That is, collaborating with colleagues and community members and managing human and financial resources is a form of significant leadership development. Similarly, Dawson (2014) described how experienced but disengaged teachers can rejuvenate their purpose and passion through teacher leadership opportunities. Finally, it is important to remember that new teachers can be new to their schools and districts or new to a grade level or subject area (Pangan & Lupton, 2015), not just new to the profession, and their diverse situations call for different forms of teacher leadership.

### **School Improvement**

Teddle and Stringfield (2007) summarized early school improvement research in the United States throughout the 20th century. They defined school improvement “as the examination of the processes and outcomes associated with interventions designed to improve schools” (para. 5). They tracked efforts to improve schools through a 1930s school reform study commissioned by the Progressive Education Association to post-Sputnik curriculum reform



initiatives in the 1960s and 1970s, both of which produced the finding that local adaption of any reform is essential for successful implementation. Related findings emerged from studies conducted in the latter half of the 20th century—Rand Change Agent Study, Follow-Through Classroom Observation Evaluation, Dissemination Efforts Supporting School Improvement—that outlined the need for local variability, the importance of principal support, the value of time-on-task, and the understanding that changes in beliefs can follow changes in behavior, rather than the reverse (Teddlie & Stringfield, 2007).

The related concept of school effectiveness also was the focus of studies conducted during the latter half of the 20th century in the United States. Teddlie and Stringfield (2007) described how this research led to the listing of several school effectiveness concepts that correlate strongly with student learning: principal leadership, instructional focus, safe school climate, high expectations, and use of student achievement data for monitoring program success.

Crowther (2004), who was the initial influence behind Australia’s IDEAS initiative, stated, “IDEAS is fundamentally different from conventional school improvement processes on a number of counts” (Crowther, 2004, p. 3). In turn, Campbell, et al. (2015), in their description of the Teacher Learning and Leadership Program (TLLP) in Ontario, Canada, distinguished its approach from IDEAS by defining teacher leadership as that of influencing, creating, and sharing educational knowledge rather than participation in formal organizational authority and responsibilities.

The point of the preceding (incomplete) overview of school improvement in relation to teacher leadership and school effectiveness is that our understandings of these concepts continue to

grow and evolve, and that certainty about their utility and the benefits of their implementation continues to elude researchers and practitioners. Even when certainty is claimed, it is important to know that the application of school improvement and school effectiveness initiatives has varying degrees of acceptance and success.

### **Cautionary Considerations**

The brief overview of teacher leadership presented here as an issue that warrants further research is understandably incomplete. Therefore, the following cautionary considerations are offered with the intent of fostering debate and focusing further research.

Table 2 presents five issues related to teacher leadership along with possible research questions and a list of related factors. The issues are societal context, leadership capacity, group dynamics, political beliefs, and the evidence base supporting teacher leadership.

Table 2.

#### *Cautionary Considerations*

<b>Issues</b>	<b>Questions</b>	<b>Factors to Consider</b>
Context	Is current teacher leadership transferable across cultures?	Cultural norms Cultural appropriation Colonialism Governance structures Societal history Financial capacity Population mobility Social stability
Leadership capacity	How do we know that everyone can be or wishes to be a leader?	Budgeting Facilities management Scheduling



		Position descriptions Predictability Responsibility
Group dynamics	How do group dynamics influence the capacity of teachers and principals to share leadership?	Socialization influences Individual expectations Trust Risk tolerance Conflict Alliances Work ethic Communication skills Career stage Commitment Ability Homeostasis Folklore
Political beliefs	What level of professional autonomy for teachers is appropriate in society?	Accountability Advocacy Governance Legal framework Standardization Assessment Terminology Privilege Entitlement Safety
Evidence base	What evidence indicates that teacher leadership affects student learning?	Direct Indirect Measures

## **Context**

Context is a factor that influences how we understand and live teacher leadership. For example, Owens (2015) characterized some schools in England as fraught with racism, violence, and socio-economic disadvantage. At first reading, the descriptors seemed transferable to other contexts, at least those in the West. However, even a brief reflection suggests that the context of English schools in a nation that is small geographically but with a relatively large population is very different from the contexts of Australia or Canada, for example, notwithstanding other Commonwealth countries. Owens' (2015) description may be accurate within the context of England and clearly diversity of all sorts is evident throughout that country, but the massive differences in history, language, dominant cultures, economics, religions, and more, suggest that how teacher leaders act in England versus Kenya, for example, is likely to be very different.

Even within countries, wide contextual diversity exists. In Canada, there is variability within cities such as Toronto, Calgary, and Vancouver—cultural, economic, linguistic, religious, and economic—that demands differences in the practices of teacher leaders depending upon their own cultural literacy, gender, language, and more. It is unlikely that the descriptions of teacher leadership contained in this report can be applied similarly across those highly multicultural cities or in the many rural, isolated, and Indigenous schools scattered across such a vast and sparsely populated nation as Canada. Indeed, teacher leadership in the rural remote Canadian schools studied by Crow (2008) undoubtedly will be understood and manifested differently from teacher leadership in Toronto schools. Despite such widely varying contexts, much of the





literature about teacher leaders offers interpretations, conceptual frameworks, and recommendations as if they are appropriate elsewhere. Cautious interpretation is warranted.

### **Leadership Capacity**

Lambert (2003, p. 33) stated, “In the same way that everyone is born to learn, everyone is born to lead.” While recognizing the merit in inviting and appreciating the sharing of all teachers’ knowledge and insights, it is reasonable to ask if every teacher can or even wants to be a leader? Leithwood (2007) asked, “It begs the question, what do we mean by leadership?” ... [and] ... “It also begs the question, if everyone is a leader, who are the followers?” ... [and] ... “What could this possibly mean?” (p. 43).

Earlier in this report, the apparent attributes and indicators of teacher leadership were summarized. No doubt the list is incomplete and should be contested. However, it is academically sound to ask that advocates for teacher leadership, including this author, be able to articulate clear descriptions of the assumptions and values inherent in their belief that teacher leadership is a positive construct. Equally sound considerations are the tensions between valuing leading and egalitarianism, and the infrastructure that will be needed to change from top-down governance to professional autonomy for teachers.

### **Group Dynamics**

School staff member interactions are characterized by the full complement of opportunities and challenges seen in other workplaces. For example, as Gallavan (2015) asserted, existing practices can become accepted and resistant to examination, teachers may form close relationships and be reluctant to challenge one another’s perspectives and practices, and conflict can escalate to the

point where toxic work environments are firmly established. Traditional teacher isolation may be hard to overcome, union influences may mitigate against the effectiveness of distributed or shared leadership, and not everyone will necessarily be accepted as teacher leaders by their peers. As Lambert (2003) and Campbell, et al. (2015) qualified, participation in professional initiatives does not automatically lead to the development of leadership capacity and, in fact, may have negative consequences. For example, new teachers may feel unrecognized and senior teachers may feel usurped.

### **Apparent Political Beliefs**

The literature reviewed for this report contained numerous mentions of high-stakes testing, unprincipled politicians seeking quick fixes in order to be re-elected, overly prescriptive curricula, the need for teachers to practice advocacy, interference with teachers' facilitation of deep learning, pockets of teacher resistance to reforms that are not in the best interests of students, inappropriate educational standardization, "wrong drivers" and "right drivers" for change management, and more. In fact, these types of statements have appeared so frequently in the educational literature throughout the West in recent decades that they have become uncontested and taken-for-granted.

The almost universal acceptance of the mantra of bad politicians, unfortunate standardized tests, and so forth, gives rise to the questions that follow to be offered with some trepidation, even in a context in which trust and safety are posited as values underpinning teacher leadership, the very focus of this report. Nonetheless, it may be useful for teacher leaders to consider how educators should be accountable to students, parents, and legislators



in the context of Western societies where public education is viewed by most as an essential component of society.

Also, when is educator resistance to lawful policies designed by various levels of legitimate governments appropriate and what agencies should have responsibility for policy making in the public sphere? When are standardized testing programs appropriate and should members of the public have access to test data in aggregate form, even if those data are misused and misunderstood? Finally, should it be safe to offer responsible questions about taken-for-granted viewpoints that dominate academic discourse?

### **Evidence Base for Teacher Leadership**

The need for further research that measures the utility and impact of teacher leaders seems clear (Scott Williams, et al., 2015). It may be that the impact of teacher leadership on student learning is indirect and challenging to measure. Teacher leaders may not have the skills, resources or time to engage with research about their professional practices (Stoll, et al., 2015). Perhaps the suggestion that educational principles should be applied with caution across cultures (Webber, et al., 2014) is unnecessary. However, there seems to be sufficient evidence in the literature in support of further cross-cultural study of teacher leaders.

### **A Framework for Researching Teacher Leadership**

The literature discussed earlier in this report provides a solid base for considering teacher leadership, in its various manifestations, to be an important dimension of teacher professionalism. The literature also suggests that there is potential value in contributing to the wider understanding of teacher leadership and of how

professional development and university programs can contribute to teacher leadership knowledge and skill development.

As a result, an international team with members from 10 countries formed in 2018 during a conference hosted by Guangxi Normal University in Guilin, China, to plan a cross-cultural study, called the International Study of Teacher Leadership (ISTL) ([www.mru.ca/istl](http://www.mru.ca/istl)), that is focused on the primary research question, *How is teacher leadership conceptualized and enacted and what are the implications for educational stakeholders?* The team’s secondary research questions include: *How do school-based educators conceptualize teacher leadership? How do systems leaders conceptualize teacher leadership? What are the values, beliefs, and assumption underpinning teacher leadership discourses? How prepared are classroom teachers to serve as teacher leaders?*

The ISTL team members collaborated to design a five-part research plan as presented in Table 3.

Table 3.

*Research Plan*

Study Component	Description
<b>Phenomenographic Component</b>	This initial stage of the study involved the use of semi-structured interviews to map the diverse understandings and experiences of teacher leadership among the members of the ISTL teacher leadership team.
<b>Document Analyses</b>	Research team members examined key documents in each cultural context, e.g., school authority policies, accreditation requirements, standards documents, position descriptions, department of education policies, teacher education curricula, union position statements, and government and organizational web materials. Documents were analyzed utilizing these lenses: conceptualizations of teacher



	leadership, values, beliefs, commonalities, contradictions, guiding principles, and accountabilities. The analyses provided contextualized descriptions of how the construct of teacher leadership is described in each of cultural setting.
<b>Interviews and Questionnaires</b>	Informed by the document analyses, research team members continue to conduct individual interviews with a sample of educational stakeholders and to invite them to complete questionnaires related to teacher leadership. Invitees include representatives of public and private school systems.
<b>Case Studies</b>	<p>This study component was interrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic. However, it involves immersion in the context of one-to-two schools selected because of teacher leadership reputation. The case studies employ ethnographic-like strategies.</p> <p>An interim strategy used during the pandemic is to conduct online video and audio interviews with a sample of teacher leaders and formal leaders from specific schools to garner a beginning understanding of how teacher leadership is lived in those schools.</p>
<b>Oral Histories</b>	Despite pandemic-related restrictions, researchers have been able to conduct a series of online video and audio interviews with samples of current or past classroom teachers selected because of their perceived extraordinary influence within a school or local educational authority.

The study components (see Figure 2) reflect the ISTL team’s desire to explore the personal and collective understandings of teacher leadership that they bring to the study. The goal is to ground the overall study in a description of the beliefs and values that influence research team members’ data gathering, analyses, and reports of study findings.

The study components also are intended to investigate the coherence of, (a) educational organizations' public expectations for teacher leaders, (b) educators' personal understandings of teacher leadership, (c) contextualized manifestations of teacher leadership, and (d) retrospective accounts of how teacher leadership is lived.

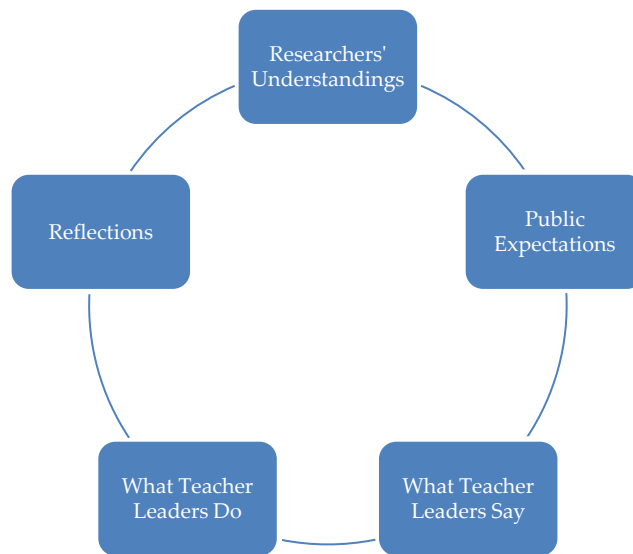


Figure 2.

*Study Components*

The study components are intended to address the now frequent descriptions of the importance of cross-cultural research focusing on teacher leadership, as espoused by Harris and Jones (2015), Schott, van Roekel, and Tummers (2020), and Smylie and Eckert (2018). They also address Hallinger' (2018) description of the importance of studying leadership in context. Finally, the study components were influenced by Wenner and Campbell's (2017) observation that international studies of teacher leadership can draw upon and contribute to the common literature. Further, they noted



that shared concerns arise in a range of international contexts that can inform practitioners, policy makers, teacher educators, and researchers.

### **Conclusion**

The International Study of Teacher Leadership research team is contributing in several ways. First, it is helping to clarify understandings of the concept and to describe the beliefs and actions that distinguish teacher leaders from other teachers. Also, the research team members are describing how some views of teacher leadership are dominant and striving to go beyond its Western theoretical and empirical base. They are delving into the value of sharing cross-cultural understanding of teacher leadership and they seek to explain why context matters.

The researchers are examining who is leading the discourse about teacher leadership and considering who should. Organizational expectations for teacher leaders are being compared with what teachers think about how they can fulfill their teacher leadership functions. The relationships between teacher leader autonomy and teacher leader accountability are being highlighted. Study participants are sharing their views about how their ability to serve as teacher leaders varies at different career stages and describing the factors that influence their teacher leadership capacity. Researchers and study participants are describing the reciprocal connections among teacher leadership, organizational culture, professional development, and school improvement. The ISTL research team also is describing the types of pre-service and professional development initiatives that facilitate growth in teacher leaders' knowledge and skill.

Finally, the research team is keeping open the possibility that teacher leadership is a fluid concept. Perhaps the overlapping definitions and descriptions in the literature simply are evidence of the value of teacher leadership as a malleable concept that can lead to greater collaboration among school community members and to more effective teaching and learning.

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**Exploring Cross-Cultural Perspectives of Teacher  
Leadership Among the Members of an International  
Research Team: A Phenomenographic Study**

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<b>Abstract</b>	<b>Article Info</b>
<p><i>This paper reports a phenomenographic study exploring diverse understandings and experiences of teacher leadership among 12 members of the International Study of Teacher Leadership research team comprised of 20 academics located in 10 countries. Mind mapping and semi-structured, online interviews were used to explore the ways that the participants related with the phenomenon of interest: 'teacher leadership'. Phenomenographic analysis of interview artefacts revealed nine qualitatively different conceptions of teacher leadership in the study's outcome space across three broad domains: A: The school, school community and formal education system; B: The teacher leader's professional self; C: The broader historical, socio-political and global contexts of teacher leadership. In addition to providing a 'touchstone' for the team's ongoing research, these findings serve as an experiential framework for thinking about teacher leadership, potentially encouraging more inclusive, more complete and richer understandings of the phenomenon.</i></p>	<p><b>Article History:</b> <i>Received</i> March 1, 2020  <i>Accepted</i> September 7, 2020</p> <hr/> <p><b>Keywords:</b> <i>Phenomenography, Teacher leadership, Cultural variation, Educational leadership, Sociocultural contexts.</i></p>



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**Introduction**

This article<sup>1</sup> reports a phenomenographic study investigating the culturally diverse understandings, experiences and perspectives of teacher leadership among the membership of an International Study of Teacher Leadership (ISTL) research team comprised of 20 academics working in universities in Australia, Canada, Latin America, South Africa, Tanzania, China and Europe. Through their collaborative research, the team seeks to contribute to the wider understanding of teacher leadership and of how professional development and university programs might contribute to teacher leadership knowledge and skill development ([www.mru.ca/istl](http://www.mru.ca/istl)). The impetus for this phenomenographic study, which is one of five components of the ISTL research program, emerged as a direct result of discussions at a 2018 conference in which ISTL team members expressed interest in exploring perspectives of teacher leadership among the team to inform their ongoing collaborative research.

The recent literature on educational leadership and teacher leadership suggests that both teachers' and researchers' understandings of these concepts are widely varied (Cheng & Szeto,

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<sup>1</sup> This report is based on research done as part of the International Study of Teacher Leadership conducted in Australia, Canada, China, Colombia, Mexico, Romania, South Africa, Spain, Tanzania, and Turkey. The multi-stage study commenced in 2018. For more information, see the study website: [www.mru.ca/istl](http://www.mru.ca/istl).



2016; Nguyen, Harris & Ng, 2017; Spillane & Coldren, 2011; Webber, 2018). Moreover, much of the literature on teacher leadership is said to be based on a normative conception of educational leadership and has been found to offer interpretations, conceptual frameworks and recommendations reliant on a knowledge base in which Western notions of leadership are embedded as if they were culturally transferable (Hallinger & Walker, 2011; Litz, 2011; Webber, 2018). Hallinger (2011, p. 310) further argued that education scholars have been “much slower to embrace international or cross-cultural perspectives in their research” than scholars from other disciplines, which he claims has resulted in a “‘blind spot’ in the conceptual lenses employed” in the empirical study of educational leadership (Hallinger & Walker, 2011 pp. 299). Exploring how a group of researchers from culturally and geographically diverse communities views teacher leadership is seen as a useful starting point in the quest to illuminate, and potentially go some way towards eliminating, this blind spot.

Using a phenomenographic approach, the researchers set out to explore, capture, map and share the diverse conceptions, experiences and perspectives of teacher leadership in order to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the qualitatively different ways that members of the International Study of Teacher Leadership (ISTL) research team experience ‘teacher leadership’?
2. How might we draw on insights gained from this study to inform our work as a research team?

The purpose of this study was thus twofold: firstly, to provide a ‘touchstone’ for the larger ISTL project by illuminating the diverse conceptions and experiences of teacher leadership among the

membership of the research team. This would in turn provide a “point of comparison” and “stimulus for dialogue” (Pham, Bruce & Stoodley, 2005, p. 230) among the culturally diverse team members, thereby strengthening the ISTL research community by fostering a shared and more culturally inclusive understandings of teacher leadership. Secondly, it was hoped that the findings would add to the body of knowledge about teacher leadership by providing an “experiential framework” (Pham et al., 2005, p. 220) for more culturally nuanced thinking about teacher leadership and teacher leadership research.

In this paper, the authors locate the study in the emerging literature on culturally diverse perspectives of teacher leadership and present a sociocultural theoretical framework (Rogoff, 2003) to guide interpretation and discussion of the findings through a cross-cultural learning lens. The choice of phenomenography as the approach taken to exploring diverse perspectives and experiences of teacher leadership among participating ISTL team members is justified and the study’s conceptual framework and methodology outlined. Procedures and instruments for data collection and analysis are reported. The findings – a set of nine qualitatively different ways of experiencing teacher leadership – are presented in the form of nine categories of description in the phenomenographic outcome space, mapped to reflect their structural relationships and representing a point-in-time snapshot of the collective consciousness (Pham, Bruce & Stoodley, 2002) of teacher leadership among this particular group of culturally diverse and geographically dispersed researchers. The findings are then interpreted with reference to the study’s theoretical framework to highlight sociocultural nuances of the findings. Implications of the findings discussed with a view to promoting more culturally inclusive and diverse conceptions of teacher leadership



among the ISTL team and, potentially, the broader teacher leadership research community.

### **Literature Review**

As scholars like Spillane and Coldren (2011) and Cheng and Szeto (2016) stated, there is hardly any consensus on the definition of teacher leadership, but its essence is mainly grounded in the act of influencing others to contribute to school improvement or education practice. When it comes to how it manifests, some scholars have taken the instructional aspect and described it as skills demonstrated by teachers who influence others in improving the quality of teaching and learning beyond their classrooms (Danielson, 2006). Similarly, Liberman (2014), after reviewing various studies, described teacher leadership as a way of organizing learning and understanding the connection between knowledge and practice, associating it with a teacher's ability and capacity for developing and nurturing community among peers. Other authors have focused on teacher leadership as a cultural construction that affords some teachers more authority than others (Scribner & Bradley-Levine, 2010). Scribner and Bradley-Levine (2010) described teacher leadership and the related interactions as either legitimized through roles, content area expertise, or gendered leadership roles. Cansoy and Parlar (2017) concluded that teachers' perceptions of teacher leadership mainly focused on organizational development and that the significant predictors of leadership were professional development and collaboration with colleagues. Frost and Durant (2003) challenged the orthodoxy of school organization and argued teacher leadership is part of distributed leadership. Others have challenged the notion of viewing teacher leadership as an individual empowerment

phenomenon and advocated for an organizational or system development approach to teacher leadership (Gul, Demir & Criswell, 2019; Smylie & Denny, 1990).

There have also been studies that have examined the concept from a country-specific lens such as Wang and Ho (2018), who looked at teacher leadership in early childhood education in China and concluded that both the formal and the informal roles were important dimensions of teacher leadership in the policy-driven Chinese context. Liljenberg's study (2016) that examined modes and practices of teacher leadership in the Swedish context identified three leadership modes – coordinating, change-focused and learning-facilitating – and concluded that leadership perspectives affected the modes, and also the ability of teacher leaders to promote pedagogical development and school improvement. Beachum and Dentith's (2004) study of teacher leaders and the cultures of school renewal in a USA urban school district proposed teacher leadership as a model and theory of leadership for school renewal. Their study revealed that teacher leadership thrived with the presence of support for teachers as leaders, including: (1) specific school structures and organizational patterns; (2) particular processes and identities; and (3) a deliberate use of outside resources with consistent, strong community relationships.

However, teacher leadership research has been criticized for failing to adequately conceptualize teacher leadership as being situated in and subordinate to sociocultural communities beyond the school setting – that is, the school as an organization and the school community or district. These broader social and cultural contexts include, for example, nation states and their cultural, economic and political contexts and histories (Dimmock & Walker, 2000; Hallinger,



2018), globalized cultural communities (Litz, 2011) and the macro context of society more broadly seen from a sociological perspective (Ylimaki et al., 2017).

The findings of Nguyen, Harris and Ng's (2020) review of empirical studies of teacher leadership support this critique. They found that the key factors influencing teacher leadership reported in this literature were "school culture, school structure, principal leadership, peer relationships and person-specific factors" (p. 68). They further noted that the studies included in the review were those that had used one or more of "teacher leadership", "teacher leader" or "teacher leaders" (p. 72) in their articles. Studies investigating perspectives and practices of educational leadership relevant to teacher leadership that did not use these specific terms (either in English or as translated from an article published in another language) were not included and are therefore not represented in the findings. Among their recommendations for future research, two are particularly relevant to our study and the work of the ISTL research team: more studies investigating indigenous teacher leadership models and practices in non-Western countries; and a stronger focus on "defining the core theoretical dimensions of teacher leadership" (Nguyen et al., 2020, p. 73).

### **Sociocultural Perspectives of Teacher Leadership**

It is widely accepted by scholars in various fields or specialisations of educational leadership that, when viewed through a sociocultural lens, leadership – including teacher leadership – is a culturally mediated endeavour (Hallinger & Walker, 2011; Hallinger, 2011, 2018; Rogoff, 2003), whereby "individual views about educational success [and leadership] are shaped by personal

sociocultural and linguistic experiences” (Ylimaki et al, 2017, p 75). Thus, educational leaders’ understandings and practices of leadership develop from the cultural traditions of their local communities, and notions of what constitutes effective leadership are context-specific and subject to cultural bias (Okoko, 2018; Rogoff, 2003; van Emmerick, Euema & Wendt, 2008). It is also well accepted that globalisation and the resulting internationalization of education are facilitating the cross-fertilisation and exchange of new ideas and new ways of thinking, increasing adoption and hybridization (Bottery, 2006; Litz, 2011).

Hallinger seeks to make a contribution to “framing the challenge faced by the field of education leadership and management in developing a global knowledge base that takes account of the diversity of contexts in which school leaders practice” (2018, p. 6). His (2018) conceptual article on the contexts of school leadership takes a refreshing look at how factors in economic, political and socio-cultural contexts – labelled by Leithwood as “widely-shared contexts” (cited in Hallinger, p. 18) – influence school leadership. Hallinger (2018) noted that reference to such broader contexts of teacher leadership such as national culture really only came to prominence with Hofstede’s framework of national culture. Inspired by this framework and the work of other scholars in the field interested in exploring these “widely-shared contexts” of educational leadership, Hallinger (2018, pp. 11-12) concluded that it was being recognized that “in order to achieve results, leaders must adapt their leadership styles in ways that are consonant with the prevailing values and norms in their different socio-cultural contexts” and that as researchers, we need to “build our knowledge base from data gathered in a more diverse set of national social contexts”. It is this latter agenda to which this study seeks to contribute.



## Theoretical Framework

This study draws its theoretical underpinnings from sociocultural theory of human development (Rogoff, 2003) as it is applied to leadership and specifically educational leadership and, by extension, teacher leadership. Drawing on Vygotskian sociocultural historical theory to inform her theorizing about the cultural nature of human development, Rogoff's (2003, p. 168) central premise is that "humans develop through their changing participation in the sociocultural activities of their communities, which also change". Adopting this sociocultural lens leads to a number of propositions underpinned by guiding assumptions and beliefs about the nature of educational leadership and teacher leadership that are important for this study:

*Proposition 1:* Teacher leadership, as a form of educational leadership, is a socio-cultural construct emerging from and situated within the ideas and practices of particular cultural communities (Rogoff, 2003).

*Proposition 2:* These cultural ideas and practices "[r]elate to broad historical patterns (such as industrialization and bureaucratic organization, and other historical changes)", to "cultural variation in goals of [human] development" and to the "[p]atterns of cultural processes – the cultural ways in which people can organize their way of life" (Rogoff, pp. 23, 166). Teacher leadership as a form of educational leadership is concerned with human development goals and priorities, such as and especially related to the goals and practices of child-rearing (Rogoff, 2003) and therefore also – but not exclusively – to processes of school and community leadership and organization.



*Proposition 3:* “Cultural differences are generally variations on themes of universal import [such as education and child-rearing], with different emphasis or value placed on particular practices rather than all-or-none differences” (Rogoff, p. 64). Thus, the idea of teacher leadership can be seen as a cultural variation of educational leadership as a global “theme of universal import” (Rogoff, p. 64). From this perspective, understanding cultural variation becomes central to understanding and theorizing about the nature of educational leadership, and concomitantly, teacher leadership.

*Proposition 4:* “To continue to function, a community adapts with changing times, experimenting with and resisting new ideas in ways that maintain core values while learning from changes that are desired or required” (Rogoff, pp. 81, 91). Thus, as noted by Litz (2011, p. 52), ideas of teacher leadership are subject to both “cultural globalization” (an increased cultural diversity of perspectives) and “cultural standardization ... where the ideas, values and practices of a dominant culture permeate other cultures, resulting in “cultural uniformity”.

*Proposition 5:* “The process of trying to understand other people is essential for...scholarly work” (Rogoff, p. 30). Thus, “the creative process of learning from cultural variation” (p. 162) in understandings and practices of teacher leadership – has intrinsic value for educational researchers and practitioners interested in teacher leadership as well as potential extrinsic value in terms of contributing to knowledge in the field, a point also noted by Hallinger and Kantamara (2000) and Hallinger (2018).

The central premise of this last proposition is now elaborated for the purposes of this study with reference to how a group of teacher leadership researchers from diverse geographical and



sociocultural communities engaged in just such a “creative process of learning from cultural variation” (Rogoff, p. 162) in order to develop shared understandings of their research object and territory (Bruce et al., 2002) – teacher leadership and teacher leadership research respectively – by participating in this phenomenographic study.

## **Methodology**

### **Design and Methods**

Reflecting a “broadly interpretive epistemological orientation” (Collier-Reed, Ingerman & Berglund 2009, p. 2) with links to sociocultural, social constructivist and situated cognitivist epistemologies (Booth, 2008), phenomenography was selected as the most suitable approach to investigate the ways that the members of the ISTL research team, as the study’s participants, relate with the phenomenon of interest, teacher leadership. In line with the aim of discovering variations (differences), rather than commonalities (Marton, 1998), in ways of understanding and experiencing teacher leadership, purposive sampling of the full membership of the ISTL research team (that is, all 20 team members from 10 countries) was aimed for in order to maximize heterogeneity (Akerlind, 2012) (in this case, cultural, gender and geographical diversity) of the sample. After obtaining university ethics clearance, all 20 members of the research team were invited to participate in the study. Twelve of these 20, representing all 10 countries of origin of the team’s membership at the time of the study, agreed to participate in the research. The countries represented in the findings include, in alphabetical order, Australia, Canada, China, Colombia, Mexico, Romania, Spain, South Africa, Tanzania and Turkey, comprising of five female and seven

male members of the ISTL team. Further details of the participating team members are withheld to maintain participants' anonymity.

### **Analytical Framework**

The central unit of analysis and description in phenomenographic studies is the 'conception' or 'way of experiencing' the phenomenon and is inclusive of meanings, understandings, experiences and perspectives the participants ascribe to the phenomenon (Barnard et al, 1999, p. 215) – in this study, the phenomenon of teacher leadership. For the purposes of analysis, a conception or way of experiencing is comprised of a *referential* and a *structural* component, which are said to be co-constitutive and "dialectically intertwined" (Akerlind, 2005 p. 70). The referential component refers to the meaning that the phenomenon has for the subject (for example, its significance and value) (Bruce, 1990), and the structural component "describes how relevant parts of the world are seen and are related" with reference to:

- i. what is thematized or focal in [the participant's] awareness;
- ii. what is at the margin of awareness or in the ground; and
- iii. how the subject delimits or discerns the object from its context (Bruce, 1990, p. 6).

Figure 1 illustrates the application of these concepts to the analytical framework for the ISTL study.

## Referential and structural components of awareness

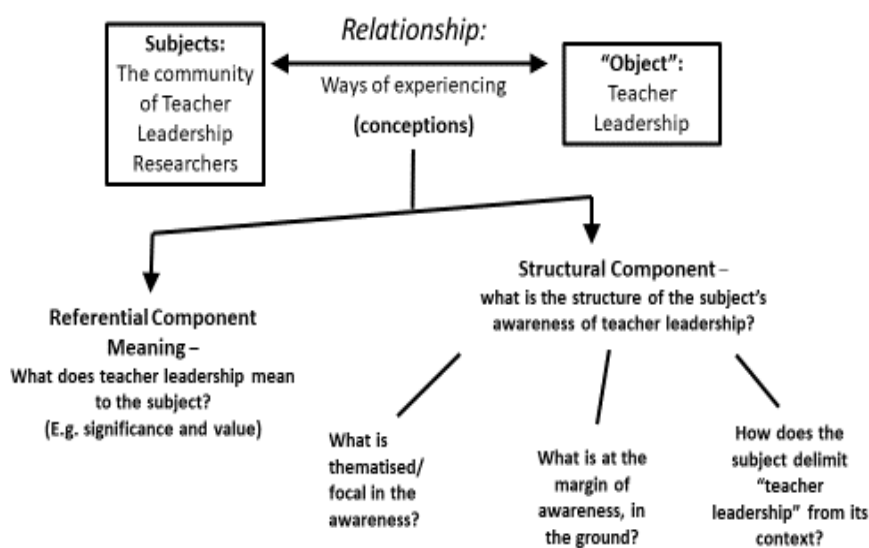


Figure 1.

*The experience of teacher leadership as a relational phenomenon showing referential and structural components of awareness. Adapted from Pham, Bruce & Stoodley (2005)*

### Data Collection

Consistent with the kinds of data collection techniques traditionally used in phenomenographic research (Marton, 1988; Sin, 2010), individual, semi-structured interviews in combination with mind-mapping (Buzan & Buzan, 2003; Arden 2016) were used to explore participants' conceptions and experiences of teacher leadership. A one-hour online interview was conducted with each participant using Zoom videoconferencing technology, with

interviews video-recorded for later analysis. Participants were also asked to complete a pre-interview mind-mapping activity in which they mapped their response to the question: What does 'teacher leadership' mean to you? Each participant completed and emailed his or her mind map to the researchers prior to the interview so that they could be printed out by the researchers for use during the interview, for reference and for the purposes of annotation. Both co-researchers conducted the interviews together, alternating between the roles of lead interviewer and supporting interviewer. The interview protocol including both the online interview and mind mapping components was piloted by the principal researcher with an academic colleague with a background in teacher leadership prior to being used for the study. The data from the pilot interview have not been included in the study.

Participants' mind maps were used as the point of departure for the interview, with participants asked to "talk through" (describe and explain) their mind maps of teacher leadership, starting at any point. The lead interviewer took responsibility for guiding the interview process and where necessary, redirecting the participant back to their mind map, whilst the supporting interviewer would focus on note-taking and asking probe questions to interrogate different aspects of participants' awareness, understandings and experiences of teacher leadership illustrated in the analytical framework in Figure 1. As each participant talked through his or her mind map during their interview, the interviewers annotated their copies of the participant's mind map, noting down critical, verbatim utterances on the relevant sections of the mind map and taking other notes for later reference. Using this procedure allowed participants to talk freely about their own conceptions and experiences of teacher leadership without having to be guided by a priori concepts and constructs inherent in



structured interview questions, thus minimising the interviewers' influence on the interviewees' thinking and thereby helping to maximize the trustworthiness of the data gathered (Arden, 2016; Collier-Reed, Ingerman & Berglund, 2009).

### **Phenomenographic Data Analysis**

The resulting artefacts from the interviews – zoom interview recordings, participants' original mind maps along with those annotated by the researchers and other researcher notes – were then subject to analysis following a systematic phenomenographic analysis process that had been trialled and refined as part of the pilot interview and involving the following four broad stages.

#### ***Stage 1: Focus on individuals to identify discrete ways of experiencing teacher leadership evident in the interview data***

Immediately on conclusion of each individual interview, the researchers would sit and work independently on the first stage of the phenomenographic data analysis process to identify discrete and significant conceptions of teacher leadership reflected in the data from each of the individual interviews. To support this process, the researchers completed a data analysis template designed to guide and document the identification of referential components of awareness (the *meanings* of teacher leadership evident in the data) and then the structural components (the *structure of the participant's awareness* of teacher leadership evident in the data). On completing this first step individually, the two researchers would then share their completed data analysis templates via email and discuss their findings in a zoom meeting to check their interpretations. An important part of this first step was to validate the discrete meanings of teacher leadership identified in the data using the structure of the

individual's awareness of teacher leadership (structural components), as recommended by Cope (2004).

***Stage 2: Moving focus away from individuals to sorting of data extracts into "pools of meanings" (Marton, 1988, p. 198)***

The researchers moved backwards and forwards between individual interviews and collective meaning units and sorting data extracts into discrete pools of meaning that reflect significant variation. This required the researchers intentionally and deliberately to (a) move away from a focus on individuals to 'meanings' identified in Phase 1 and (b) focus on identifying significant variation in meanings rather than commonality. The process of moving focus away from individuals to meanings and from commonality to variation was almost counter-intuitive, and required intentionality, discipline and vigilance on the part of the researchers.

***Stage 3: Identifying Dimensions of Variation and Forming Tentative Categories of Description***

The researchers then worked with these pools of meaning from the first six interviews in order to identify dimensions of variation that helped to characterize and differentiate the ways of experiencing teacher leadership. Dimensions of variation are dimensions that run as threads across the different ways of experiencing reflected in each category (Pang, 2003) and serve to illustrate the ways in which the experiences of teacher leadership vary. These preliminary dimensions of variation emerging during the Stage 2 data analysis process are presented in Table 1.



Table 1.

*Tentative Dimensions of Variation. From Arden and Okoko (2019)*

Dimensions of variation	Variations
What form does teacher leadership take in the way it is experienced in each category?	Idea/Construct/Abstraction, Process, Act, Ideal, Conviction/Mission/Value, Philosophy, Individual Person/Human?
What is the leadership domain in each category?	Personal, profession, academy, school, (formal) education system, classroom, community, geopolitical, social, teachers' work?
What is the nature of the desired change/influence sought in the way TL is experienced in each category?	Curriculum innovation, pedagogical innovation, cultural change, school improvement, legitimise/valorise teaching profession, social justice, personal development, political change, new research agenda?
How or by whom is this influence acknowledged/recognised?	Peers (teachers), education system, broader community, academy, government?
"Making a difference" – for whom? Cui bono (who benefits? Whose interests are served?)	Students, teachers, the teaching profession, the school, society?

Having completed the above steps, the researchers were able to identify and characterize the eight distinctively different conceptions of teacher leadership shown in Figure 2, each of which was then given a label designed to reflect the meaning of that particular conception of teacher leadership in a way that would hopefully make sense to others, which is referred to in the literature as communicative validity (Akerlind, 2012). Representative quotations from the interviews capturing this way of experiencing teacher leadership are provided for each conception. These preliminary findings from analysis of the first six interviews (representing data collected from ISTL members from Australia, Romania, South Africa, Mexico, Tanzania and Canada) were shared with the research team



and delegates at an international conference (Arden & Okoko, 2019), serving as an initial test of their communicative validity.

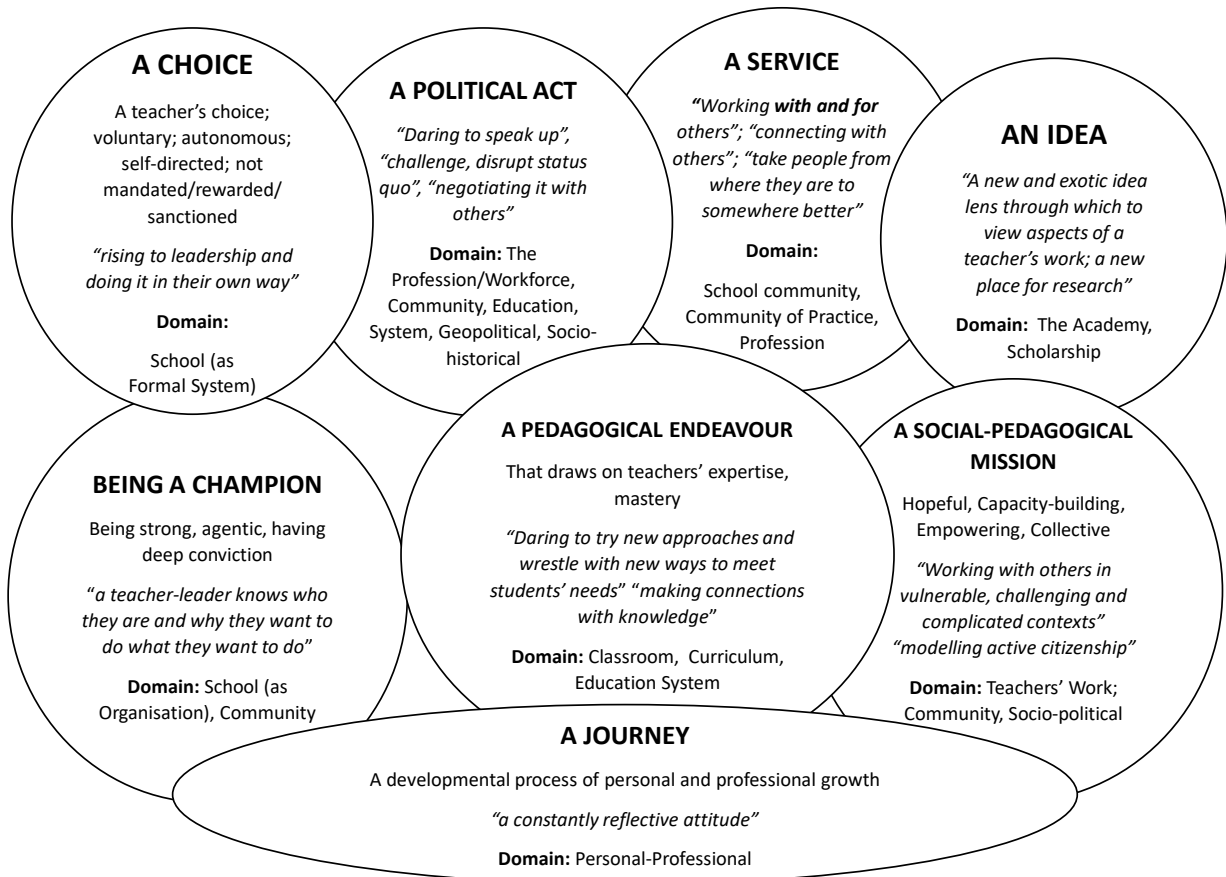


Figure 2.

*From Pools of Meaning to Tentative Categories of Description. From Arden and Okoko (2019).*



#### *Stage 4: Consolidation of Categories and Construction of the Outcome Space*

Following the conference, a further six interviews were then conducted with ISTL team members (from China, Canada, Turkey, Tanzania, Spain and Colombia), with interview artefacts analyzed following Stage 1 of the data analysis process, but this time incorporating the data from the second lot of interviews into a revisiting of Steps 2 and 3. This resulted in reconfiguration and further refinement of the initial eight conceptions along with the identification of a ninth conception. Further work on data analysis and interpretation was completed to elaborate dimensions of variation, after which the researchers were able to formalize a stable system of meanings (Marton and Booth, 1997) into nine categories of description, supported by selected extracts from the data and validated with reference to the distinctive meanings, structure of awareness and dimensions of variation. These findings, which include detailed tables elaborating the dimensions of variation used to differentiate the nine ways of experiencing teacher leadership) were subsequently shared with the ISTL team members via an unpublished written report and zoom presentation (Arden & Okoko, 2019-2020). The final step in the phenomenographic analysis process – construction of the outcome space – was then completed and presented as part of an ISTL Teacher Leadership Symposium (Okoko & Arden, 2020). These findings are now presented in the following section, beginning with a description of the conception/way of experiencing teacher leadership in each of the nine categories supported with quotations from the interview transcripts.

## Findings

The findings are representative of the set of significant variations in the ways that the participants experienced the phenomenon of teacher leadership, at the collective level, at the time of the study. The conception or way of experiencing in any one category does not necessarily represent one particular individual participant's way of experiencing teacher leadership; rather, different conceptions and ways of experiencing teacher leadership are evident in different participants' perspectives and understandings across the whole sample.

The following nine qualitatively different conceptions of teacher leadership were identified as a result of Steps 1-3 of the phenomenographic data analysis process:

1. Leading the school (the *organizational* conception)
2. Leading by choice (the *informal* conception)
3. Leading pedagogical innovation (The *pedagogical* conception)
4. Leading with and for others (The *collaborative-enabling* conception)
5. Leading for the right reasons (The *ideal* conception)
6. Leading as a life's work (The *vocational* conception)
7. Leading generative social change (The *social pedagogical* conception)
8. Leading system change (The *political* conception)
9. Leading thinking (The *academic* conception).

Descriptions of the way of experiencing teacher leadership in each category are now presented, supported with quotations from the interviews. As illustrated in the study's analytical framework in



Figure 1, the way of experiencing teacher leadership in each category is constituted by a referential component (what the experience of teacher leadership means in this conception) and a structural component (the structure of awareness of teacher leadership) in that category.

### **Category 1: Leading the school (the *organizational* conception)**

In this category, teacher leadership is experienced as leading the school. Focal in awareness in this way of experiencing teacher leadership is the teacher-leader's agency as an influential leader in the context of the school as an organization, the broader school community and the formal education system:

*"Promote school goals"; "how you steer the direction of your school"; "being able to navigate and steer the ship"; "how you influence the development of the school culture".*

Seen from this perspective, teacher leadership is personified, inhabited by the individual teacher-leader who is decisive, charismatic, accountable and *"prone to action"*:

*"Accountable to the school community"; "There needs to be a hard edge to the thing in practice...you can't be a windmill".*

The significance and value of teacher leadership lie in being effective, able to *"inspire others"* and *"leaving behind a legacy"* of positive change.

### **Category 2: Leading by choice (the *informal* conception)**

Teacher leadership is experienced as a teacher's choice; a voluntary decision taken to enact leadership in relation to a particular change or improvement goal, project or initiative in the teacher-leader's own way and on their own terms: *"rising to leadership and*

*doing it in their own way*". Focal in awareness is again the teacher-leader's agency. However, in this conception, leadership is experienced as being neither formally sanctioned nor formally recognized within the system or hierarchy of the school as an organization, but:

*"emerges in the willingness of teachers to go beyond what is expected or mandated"; "A willingness and capacity to discern the less obvious...what's happening in the informal dimension"; "from the heart; not from authority".*

Moreover, formal recognition of leadership is seen as being counterproductive, working against the informal leader's ability to exercise their leadership with those who receive formal recognition as leaders risking being *"absorbed into the system and lose track of what they were trying to do."*

**Category 3: Leading pedagogical innovation (the *pedagogical* conception)**

The experience of teacher leadership in the pedagogical conception is of leading pedagogical innovation, expressed as:

*"Daring to try new approaches and wrestle with new ways to meet students' needs".*

As is the case in the conceptions in categories 1 and 2, the individual teacher-leader's agency and willingness to go above and beyond are focal in awareness in this way of experiencing teacher leadership. However, in this conception, the significance and value of teacher leadership is seen as the teacher-leader drawing on his or her acknowledged expertise as a pedagogue to lead curriculum and pedagogical innovation:



*“going beyond day-to-day teaching”; “building connections with knowledge”; “experimentation”; “excellence.”*

#### **Category 4: Leading with and for others (the collaborative-enabling conception)**

In this category, teacher leadership is experienced as a collaborative endeavour in the context of teachers’ collegial work: *“good colleagues help each other out.”* Focal in awareness is the teacher-leader’s ability to forge connections with others, facilitate communication and collaboration, and enable shared leadership:

*“encouraging others”; “working in partnership with parents”; “students as allies”; “build collective responsibility”.*

The significance and value of teacher leadership in this conception lie in collaborating with others to help them achieve their desired and shared goals:

*“taking people from where they are to somewhere better”; “as a teacher-leader, you have an obligation to engage with development a generation of knowledge that enables and allows people to practice their profession nobly”.*

#### **Category 5: Leading for the right reasons (the ideal conception)**

The emphasis in this way of experiencing teacher leadership is on the motivations and ethical qualities of the teacher leader more so than the activity and its purpose or end goals:

*“effort guided by a deep moral conviction and an ethical mindset”; “doing things for the right reasons”; “being transparent”; “an ability to witness... to respond in front of others”.*

Teacher leadership in this conception is underpinned the teacher-leader's qualities of self-awareness, authenticity and reflexivity:

*"a teacher-leader knows who they are and why they want to do what they want to do"; "strong sense of self-awareness"; "teacher leaders must understand who they are in the context they are working in".*

The significance and value of teacher leadership in this conception thus lie in its ethical dimensions rather than in its outcomes or achievements.

#### **Category 6: Leading as a life's work (the *vocational* conception)**

In this category, teacher leadership is experienced as a journey of personal and professional growth, change and development over time:

*"learning to change, adapt"; "a constantly reflective attitude"; "You need to be able to change and adapt".*

Focal in awareness are the rapidly changing contexts and conditions of teachers' work and the recognition that there are no simple, 'one size fits all' solutions to the complex challenges facing teacher-leaders:

*"How do teacher-leaders know who they are in this context?"*

The significance and value of teacher leadership in this category lie in commitment to resolving personal-professional contradictions of being a teacher-leader:

*"Struggling to resolve the personal and professional contradictions"; "Reflection and self-analysis...cognitive dissonance... questioning values, assumptions, beliefs, understanding"; "finding your place".*



### **Category 7: Leading “generative social change” (the social pedagogical conception)**

Teacher leadership is experienced as leading “*generative social change*”. Teacher leadership is more than just being a good teacher and should “*go beyond the classroom*”:

*“Changing lives”; “Make positive changes in students’ learning and in their lives”; “By God, you’d better understand that as a teacher, you are preparing students to thrive in the context in which they live”.*

The social-pedagogical mission of teacher-leaders is focal in awareness:

*“sense of mission”; “go to families”; “modelling active citizenship”*

The significance and value of teacher leadership in this conception lie in the teacher leader’s collaborative efforts to addressing social disadvantage and inequality:

*“working with others in vulnerable, challenging and complicated contexts”; “develop solutions to problems”; “develop the capacity for critical thinking about societal problems”; “invite other teachers to become involved in students’ lives”.*

### **Category 8: Leading system change (the political conception)**

The experience of teacher leadership in this category is leading system change in the interests of promoting the teaching profession, specifically the status and influence of teachers:

*“teachers raise their voices and take their concerns to the policy-makers”; “voice for the profession”; “daring to speak up”; “challenge, mobilize, [and] disrupt [the] status quo”.*



There is an awareness of teacher leadership as a struggle against entrenched systems and policies that serve to perpetuate social disadvantage as well as poor working conditions for teachers:

*“Concerns about the situations of teachers in my country...their safety”; “Staff wellbeing...teacher wellbeing”.*

There is also a sense that these conditions work against the emergence of newer understandings and practices of teacher leadership:

*“Teachers do not recognize themselves as leaders”; “Obstacles...road blocks...”; “Teacher leadership expressed is influential...[but there is] a lack of political engagement in my country...in the arrangement of power and resources”; “The image of teachers is battered...there is suspicion and a lack of trust”; There is a diminished view of teacher leadership...teachers don’t have influence”.*

### **Category 9: Leading thinking (the academic conception)**

In this category, teacher leadership is experienced as a new idea:

*“new and exotic idea”; “a lens through which to view aspects of a teacher’s work”; “exciting...hopeful”.*

This conception of teacher leadership is situated in the context of academics’ work and global scholarship, providing a platform for academic research:

*“a new place for research”; “everything is new here which is great for me as I can work on it”.*

Focal in awareness is that teacher leadership is an idea that has been “borrowed” from elsewhere and needs to be contextualized to the participant’s particular geographical context:



*“Teacher leadership is a highly-contextualized phenomenon”; “a borrowed construct”; “trying to make it work for our context.”*

As such, teacher leadership – as an idea – provides a platform for researchers to lead new ways of thinking about teachers’ work that challenge “old ideas” and “critique the discourse” of educational leadership:

*“Educational leadership in my country has been conceptualized as top-down and hierarchical...teacher leadership turns that on its head”; “What are the conditions for teachers that promote teacher leadership?”*

### **Dimensions of Variation in the Collective Experience of Teacher Leadership**

It can be seen that the collective experience of teacher leadership among the participant group is constituted by significant variations that emerge from a foundation of threads that are common. These common threads lie across three interrelated dimensions: the *referential* dimension, which refers to the meaning of teacher leadership – what it means, what form it takes (including what kind or type of leadership is reflected); the *structural* dimension, which refers to which aspect or aspects of teacher leadership are focal in awareness; and the *teleological* dimension, which refers to the nature of the positive change or influence sought. These common threads that characterize the collective experience of teacher leadership also serve to characterize the significant variation in these experiences, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3.

*Dimensions of Variation in the Collective Experience of Teacher Leadership*

Conceptions of Teacher Leadership (TL)	Dimensions of Variation		
	Referential - What form does TL take?	Structure of awareness of TL - What aspect of TL is in focus?	Teleological - What is the nature of the positive change/influence sought?
Category 1: Leading the school	Organizational leadership	Influence, Legacy	Organizational change/School improvement
Category 2: Leading by choice	Emergent leadership	Agency	School improvement
Category 3: Leading pedagogical innovation	Curriculum /Pedagogical leadership/ innovation	Expertise	Curriculum/ Pedagogical Innovation
Category 4: Leading with and for others	Collaborative/ enabling leadership	Collegiality, Service	Generative collective action, collaboration
Category 5: Leading for the right reasons	Ethical/Moral leadership	Accountability	Formation
Category 6: Leading as a life's work	Vocational/ Career leadership	Commitment, Reflexivity	Personal mastery/ Professional Growth
Category 7: Leading generative social change	Social-pedagogical leadership	Social Justice, Advocacy	Generative social change
Category 8: Leading system change	Political leadership	Activism, Advocacy	Disruption, system change
Category 9: Leading thinking about teacher leadership	Thought leadership	TL Research	Transformation (new ways of thinking about TL)



As shown in Table 3, the teleological dimension of the experience of teacher leadership as influencing positive change of some kind is a dimension of variation that runs across all conceptions of teacher leadership, so that just as aspects of “meaning” and “awareness” are co-constitutive of a conception or way of experiencing any phenomenon (as illustrated in the analytical framework), it would appear that the goal of influencing positive change is a constituent element or aspect of teacher leadership.

These findings are now interpreted with reference to the study’s theoretical framework and their implications for the promotion of more culturally inclusive and diverse conceptions of teacher leadership discussed.

### **Interpretation and Discussion**

#### **Outcome Space: An expanding awareness of cross-cultural contexts of teacher leadership across three broad teacher leadership domains**

Further analysis of the structural components of the conceptions of teacher leadership in the above nine categories of description in the study’s outcome space reveal that they fall into three broad clusters representing three interrelated teacher leadership “domains” in which the experience of teacher leadership is broadly situated, as shown in Figure 5. Detailed tables elaborating the dimensions of variation used to differentiate the nine ways of experiencing teacher leadership provide further supporting evidence for these findings (see Arden & Okoko, 2019-20).

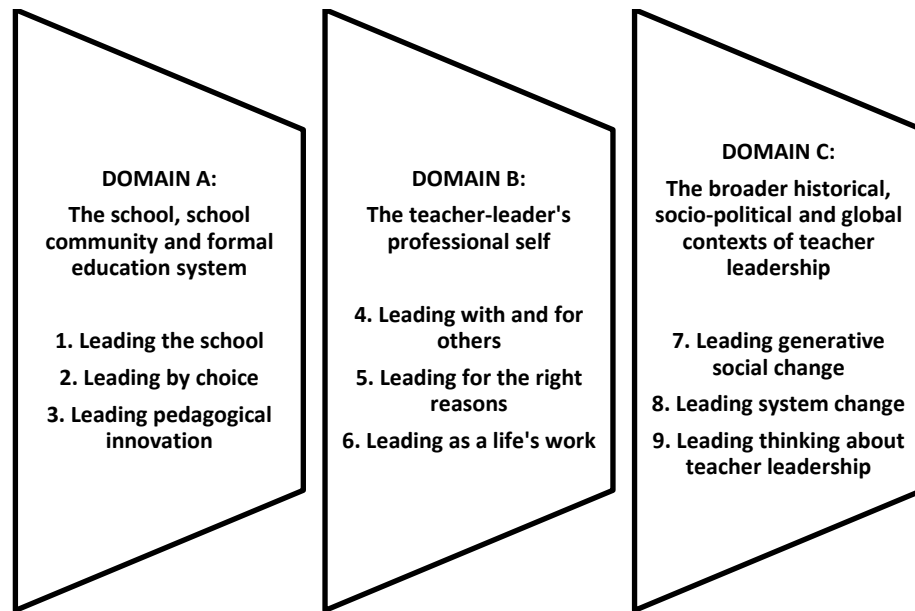


Figure 5.

*Nine qualitatively different ways of experiencing teacher leadership across three broad, interrelated teacher leadership “domains”*

As shown in Figure 5, the conceptions of teacher leadership in the first three categories in Domain A (leading the school; leading by choice; and leading pedagogical innovation) are situated epistemologically in the context of the school, the broader school community and the formal education system. The teacher-leader’s agency, influence and – in the case of the *pedagogical* conception – expertise are thematized, enacted within – and in the case of the *informal* conception – despite the formal organization and system. The teacher leader is seen as a champion, an innovator and/or an expert, with the nature of the desired change or influence sought being school improvement, pedagogical innovation and/or student success. Referring back to the sociocultural theoretical framework presented earlier in the paper, a link can be made with Proposition 2: that



teacher leadership, as a form of educational leadership, is concerned with human development goals and priorities, such as and especially related to the goals and practices of child-rearing (Rogoff, 2003) and therefore also – but not exclusively – to processes of school and community leadership and organization.

In contrast, the conceptions of teacher leadership in Domain B (leading with and for others; leading for the right reasons; and leading as a life’s work) are situated in the context of the teacher’s professional self<sup>2</sup>. Here, it is the teacher-leader’s philosophical or ethical orientation and practice that are thematized, with the teacher leader seen as being agentic in addition to collaborative, ethical and committed to their vocation. The nature of the desired change or influence sought is still positive change, but that is achieved through enabling collective agency, professional learning and development and personal mastery. Thus, there is a developmental aspect to this way of experiencing teacher leadership that includes an awareness of professional change and growth over time that clearly distinguishes the experience of teacher leadership in this cluster.

Proposition 3 of the theoretical framework is pertinent to what we can understand from these findings about the experience of teacher leadership in the six conceptions in Domains A and B, insofar as “cultural differences are generally variations on themes of universal import...with different emphasis or value placed on particular practices rather than all-or-none differences” (Rogoff, 2003, p. 64). This is evident in the different emphases and value placed on “particular practices” of teacher leadership reflected in the six

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<sup>2</sup> The researchers acknowledge the contributions of ISTL team members to the further refinement of this interpretation during a facilitated engagement with the study’s findings at an ISTL team meeting held early in 2020.

conceptions in Domains A and B, such as the focus on organizational leadership on the one hand versus leading curriculum and pedagogical innovation or on working collaboratively with others. Returning to Proposition 2 in the theoretical framework, what remains constant across all conceptions in the outcome space is the goal of influencing positive change and development.

The experiences of teacher leadership in the three conceptions in Domain C (leading generative social change; leading political change; and leading thinking about teacher leadership) are uniquely situated in a broader frame of the geographical, socio-political and global contexts of teachers' work, teacher leadership and educational leadership. In these contexts, the teacher-leader is seen as an activist for social, political and educational change respectively in the interests of social justice and breaking down what are seen as oppressive and dysfunctional systems that are supported by "old" ways of thinking about education, teachers and teachers' work. Within these "wider shared contexts" (Hallinger, 2018, p. 18), teacher leadership is experienced as a social-pedagogical, socio-political act and, related to this, as a new idea and platform for change. A connection can be made between the findings and the proposition (Proposition 1 in the theoretical framework) that people's conceptions of teacher leadership emerge from their participation in "dynamic cultural communities" that include local, national and global communities "whose cultural practices may overlap or conflict with each other" and are often related to "national and international politics" that are in turn related to development goals and priorities (Rogoff 2003, pp. 50, 81, 104).

Proposition 4 is also relevant to interpreting the conceptions of teacher leadership in this cluster: "To continue to function, a



community adapts with changing times, experimenting with and resisting new ideas in ways that maintain core values while learning from changes that are desired or required” (Rogoff, pp. 81, 91). It is here that the cultural nuances and differences in the experience of teacher leadership are most evident in the findings, confirming the need among “educationalists” for “deeper appreciation of emerging and alternative models and the increasing complexities of global educational leadership patterns” (Litz, 2011, p. 58). A key finding from this study is that in some countries, teachers’ ability to exercise their influence as teacher leaders is stymied by the low status of the teaching profession, negative societal perceptions of their role and the challenging and difficult social and political conditions of their work. For these teacher leaders, the “new idea” of teacher leadership reflected in the academic conception in Category 9 presents opportunity and hope for change.

### **Conclusion**

The findings of this study are presented as a useful starting point in the quest to illuminate, and potentially go some way towards eliminating, Hallinger and Walker’s (2011, p. 299) so-called “blind spot” in the empirical study of educational leadership. The findings provide a foundation of shared understandings as well as an opportunity to learn from differences in understanding that serve as an “experiential framework” (Pham et al., 2005, p. 220) for thinking about teacher leadership, potentially encouraging more inclusive, more complete and richer understandings of the phenomenon. We have learned that there are important differences in understandings of teacher leadership based on geographical context, but that at the same time, there is significant commonality in understandings across



contexts. We have come closer to a better understanding of how others see and experience teacher leadership and teacher leadership research, so that our own understanding of the both the research “object” (teacher leadership) and the research “territory” (teacher leadership research) is enhanced (Pham et al 2005, p. 2). In conclusion, we propose that the phenomenographic study affords a different kind of engagement on the part of readers with the findings; a kind of naturalistic generalization whereby ISTL researchers and readers familiar with the field of teacher leadership should be able to recognize their own conceptions of teacher leadership in the data in addition to meanings and perspectives that are new to them, that will perhaps prompt further inquiry. In the words of Rogoff (2003, p. 11), “Culture isn’t just what other people do...The practices of researchers, students, journalists and professors are cultural, as are the practices of oral historians, midwives and shamans”.

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## Conceptualizations of Teacher-leadership in Colombia: Evidence from Policies

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Abstract	Article Info
<p><i>This study sought to examine the conceptualization of teacher leadership in official education policies in Colombia with the aim of expanding the notion of this concept and providing information on the qualification of teachers in similar contexts. Content analysis was used to analyze documents focused on the recruitment, selection, and evaluation of teachers. The findings show that the concept of teacher leadership is nonexistent in Colombia and that the documents conceptualize leadership in terms of hierarchical figures, leaving aside the role of teachers in school improvement. However, traces of teacher leadership are found in connection to pedagogical leadership, promotion of a culture of evaluation, peacebuilding, and awareness of diversity. The study highlights the need to promote the image of the teacher as a leader and to improve the quality of initial and in-service preparation programs</i></p>	<p><b>Article History:</b>  <i>Received</i>                      January 22, 2020    <i>Accepted</i>                      September 20, 2020</p> <hr/> <p><b>Keywords:</b>  <i>Teacher leadership, Leadership, Colombia, Teacher qualification.</i></p>

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## Introduction

Teachers' effectiveness, solid pedagogical practices, and teacher leadership strongly influence student achievement (Adnot et al., 2016; Evans & Popova, 2016; Hitt & Tucker, 2016; Ingersoll et al., 2017). This understanding is especially relevant in the Latin American context, where, despite advancements in expanded coverage and investment, substantial gaps in the quality of educational experiences offered to students remain (UNESCO, 2016). Recent data show that students in the region scored below average in mathematics, reading, and science in the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA), lagging two to three schooling years in comparison with their peers in other countries (OECD, 2019). Colombian students' performance on this test shows a continuous tendency to lag two years behind (Bonilla-Mejía et al., 2018; OECD, 2018, 2019), which, apart from structural problems in the Colombian educational system, may be attributed to weak teaching methodologies and shortcomings in the preparation of teachers (OECD, 2018).

School leadership in Latin America has gained attention in recent decades and is becoming a central topic in the research and policy agendas of various countries (Aravena & Hallinger, 2017; Flessa et al., 2018). However, little is known about the role of teachers as leaders in the region. The present study intends to fill this gap by exploring how teacher leadership is conceptualized in official education policies in Colombia. The study is part of a multi-layered initiative that seeks to better understand teacher leadership in various international contexts and to provide information on the qualification of teachers. It presents an analysis of official documents regarding the recruitment, selection, and evaluation of teachers and, moreover,

discusses the findings and implications in the light of key contextual factors for teachers' professional development.

### **Context of the Study**

This section briefly describes the Colombian educational system, the general characteristics of its public education teachers, and its policies for teacher recruitment, preparation, and evaluation. The Colombian Political Constitution (Asamblea Constituyente, 1991) guarantees the right to education and emphasizes that the state is responsible for the regulation and supervision of educational services to ensure their quality. General Education Law 115 (Congreso de la República, 1994) regulates public education services in connection to the needs of the country and establishes the parameters for services for both formal and informal education. The Colombian formal education system is composed of pre-school education, basic education (which includes five years of primary school and four years of lower secondary education), upper secondary school (for two years), and higher education.

There are 299,017 teachers in the public sector in Colombia, mostly female, with an average age of 47.4 years (Bonilla-Mejía et al., 2018). Data show that the teaching force in Colombia is becoming more qualified, with teachers in secondary schools holding graduate degrees in a higher proportion than those in primary or early childhood education (Bonilla-Mejía et al., 2018; Figueroa et al., 2018). There is a high concentration of teachers in urban areas and, despite efforts to decentralize education, the distribution and permanence of teachers in rural and remote areas remain challenging (Bonilla et al., 2018; OECD, 2018). Two main reasons account for the inefficient and unequal proportion of teachers working in disadvantaged contexts.



One has to do with the uneven distribution of financial resources regulated by the General System of Transfers (OECD, 2018) and the second with the use of provisional teacher contracts to fill positions in those areas. The first reason has repercussions on the selection and professional development of teachers, which, consequently, affects student achievement (Brutti, 2016; García et al., 2014). The second reason widens the gap between rural and urban achievement and raises questions about incentives to attract qualified teachers in rural and remote regions (Figueroa et al., 2018; García et al., 2014).

Entry into the teaching profession was regulated from 1979 by Decree 2277, which established that a person holding a high-school diploma and a degree in teaching (*licenciatura*) could enter the teaching profession (Ministerio de Educación Nacional, 1979). There was no evaluation period, and the guidelines for promotion through the 14 levels of the professional ladder were not clear (Figueroa et al., 2018). However, since 2002, Decree 1278 has governed all teachers' entry into the public education system (Ministerio de Educación Nacional, 2002). The National Civil Service Commission (*Comisión Nacional del Servicio Civil, CNSC*) uses a meritocratic model for the entry, permanence, evaluation, and promotion of teachers covered by Decree 1278. The model includes an evaluation of their aptitudes, experience, competencies and interpersonal abilities.

The Ministry of Education provides the policies and guidelines for the preparation of teachers at different levels (Ministerio de Educación Nacional, 2013). Table 1 summarizes the main routes to becoming a teacher in Colombia. A person holding a teaching education degree (*licenciatura*) can be a teacher, but so can a person holding a degree from any other field if they complete pedagogical programs of study from accredited institutions.

Table 1.  
*Routes to Becoming a Teacher in Colombia*

Academic requirement	Description
Normalist <i>Normalista</i>	Requires two years of post-secondary or complementary education (different from tertiary education) in addition to the requirements for a high-school diploma. Allows teaching at the early childhood and primary level. Offered by higher teaching schools ( <i>escuelas normales</i> ).
Professional degree in education <i>(licenciatura)</i>	A four- to five-year degree. Title earned in a higher educational institution. Allows teaching at pre-school, primary, and secondary educational levels.
Professionals from other fields with a specialization in pedagogy	Professionals from different disciplines (e.g. lawyers, engineers) who complete postgraduate studies or a program in pedagogy. Offered by higher educational institutions. Teach at the secondary level.

School principals evaluate teachers annually using the parameters established by the MEN (Ministerio de Educación Nacional, 2008). This evaluation comprises evidence from eight functional competencies in three domains—academic, administrative, and community—which account for 70% of the evaluation; the remaining 30% includes seven behavioral competencies. Together, the school principal and the teacher design an improvement plan based on the evaluation. A dismissal may occur if a teacher has poor performance for two consecutive years.



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## Rationale

Research on school leadership is scarce in Colombia and has tended to focus exclusively on the role played by principals (Pineda-Báez et al., 2020; Pineda-Báez et al., 2019), overshadowing the role that teachers play in school leadership. The information provided by the present study contributes to widening the understanding of school leadership in Colombia by examining it from the lenses of policies and in connection to teacher leadership. Recent studies show the need to articulate principals and teachers' actions to improve education practices in this country (OECD, 2018). There is reason to believe that there are Colombian teachers who display leadership qualities, but their work has not been recognized (Barbosa et al., 2018). The argument of this article is that teacher leadership is important for school improvement in Colombia and that it should be promoted. In an international context, Conway, for example, (2015) argued that both principals and teachers are key actors in school improvement. Crowther et al. (2009) added that shared school vision, values, and trust between principals and teachers are necessary conditions to improve school capacity.

Additionally, as Hallinger (2018) proposed, there is a need for a more profound understanding of the context of leadership practices. Jointly, the individual context in which leaders act and their wider sociopolitical, cultural, and economic contexts should be examined so that improvement proposals can become more effective. Harris and Jones (2018) added that context and culture shape policies and their implementation and caution that, without understanding them, "our accounts of education reform will continue to be partial and potentially misleading, thus making our attempts at education change fragile" (p. 204).

An in-depth understanding of leadership in context is required for assertive pedagogical practices and for school improvement (Conway & Abawi, 2013). Wenner and Campbell (2017) characterized the term *teacher leadership* as still “muddy”, particularly for stakeholders. They called for more grounded research to support teacher-leaders. This is very important for the Latin American context, especially considering the limited skill capacities of the teaching force (Bruns & Luque, 2015) and the need for better qualification (Rivas, 2015).

### Related Literature

Teacher leadership has multiple connotations. Angelle and DeHart (2016) stated that the word is commonly associated with school culture, teachers’ actions to improve students’ learning, skills, competencies, and with instructional, distributive and parallel leadership theories that stress the role of collective work. York-Barr and Duke’s definition (2004) is widely accepted, as it encompasses the main characteristics of teacher leaders: their capacity to mobilize others and their role in student learning. The authors state that “teacher leadership is the process by which teachers individually or collectively influence their colleagues, principals, and other members of school communities to improve teaching and learning practices with the aim of increased student achievement” (2004, p. 287-288). Teacher leaders are good communicators, demonstrate skills to motivate, inspire, and energize peers and other members of the community to transform the school (Danielson, 2006; York-Barr & Duke, 2004).). From the lens of teacher preparation, programs usually aim at developing these competencies, but do not necessarily focus on teachers’ mindsets to make their leadership flourish (Matsumoto



et al., 2018). The essential feature of teacher leaders is their capacity to influence and orient all members of the school community to reach intentional development goals. When teachers engage professionally with their colleagues, promote commitment, advocate for students and seek collective solutions, they are promoting engagement in professional communities. Research has demonstrated that teacher leaders' commitment impacts students' progress and success (Calderone et al., 2018; Crowther et al., 2009; Hallinger & Heck, 2010; Hitt & Tucker, 2016; Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2009).

Recent research on the meanings attributed to teacher leadership show the concept still requires a solid theoretical foundation and that studies have not addressed issues of equity and social justice (Wenner & Campell, 2017). To fill this gap, Bradley-Levine (2018) conducted a case study in three marginalized schools where teachers were deeply committed to promote advocacy through critical pedagogical activities and collaboration. The study showed that social justice, or ethical leadership, emerges when the needs of marginalized students are met through critical practices and collective work. A similar view is presented in King's study (2017) in Ireland that demonstrated that strong commitment to inclusion and teacher leadership preparation at the preservice level are indispensable for inclusive school practices. Nevertheless, this theme remains under researched.

A different perspective was undertaken by Harrison et al. (2019) whose research pointed at four distinct characteristics of teacher leadership. One is *legitimacy* or the path that enables teachers to influence others. The second refers to *support for leadership activities* that implies the role of teachers as entrepreneurs and the external support they receive to accomplish their objectives. The third is

*objective*, which responds to the question: “how directly must teachers influence teaching and learning to be considered teacher leaders?” (p. 9). The last one is *method*, or the routes teacher leaders use to influence others and that involve dialogue and modeling of good practices, among other aspects.

Szeto and Cheng (2017) stated that teacher leadership is part of the distributed models of leadership and that teachers may be appointed by principals to assume that role. Nevertheless, they cautioned the community about the need to examine the role of culture and hierarchical structures on teacher leaders’ designation and performance. Smylie and Eckert (2018) added that teacher leaders can be appointed through different pathways such as self-initiation, exhortation and advocacy, but that teacher leadership requires development or “intentional, systematic, systemic development of teachers’ capacity for leadership and teachers’ leadership practice” (p. 557).

Smylie and Eckert (2018) highlighted that teacher leadership has received attention in the United States and in Europe as demonstrated by the increasing number of programs to promote it. Other countries such as Australia (Conway & Andrews, 2015) and Hong Kong (Szeto & Cheng, 2018; Szeto & Cheng, 2017) have also advanced in the study of this theme in connection to its development and sustainability. Conversely, the dearth of research in Latin America is a signal that more research is required to examine its meanings and application, this information is crucial to advance in the understanding of the role teachers can play in policy construction (Harris & Jones, 2019).





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## Methodology

### Design and Methods

Content analysis was the framework used in this study. It is a form of research that allows inferences to be made from texts, “provides new insights, increases a researcher’s understanding of particular phenomena, or informs practical actions” (Krippendorff, 2004, p. 18). An inductive approach that involved moving from general descriptions of leadership in key documents to instances describing teachers’ roles was used to gain an understanding of the conceptualization of teacher leadership in the Colombian context.

### Data

This study used historical documents, or an “organization’s records, minutes, and policy documents” produced in a given period that reflect the interest of the researcher (O’Leary, 2014, p. 178). As criteria for inclusion, we considered only official documents produced by the Colombian Ministry of Education, in charge of regulating all education policies in Colombia. Only documents that contained policies concerning the teaching profession in this context were included. All documents are available from the Ministry’s official web page (<https://www.mineducacion.gov.co>).

Data was drawn from 11 documents. A criterion for selecting four of them is that they represent milestones in the Colombian educational system. One was the Political Constitution (Asamblea Constituyente, 1991), which has governed the country since 1991 and grants citizens the right to education. The second document was the General Law of Education, Law 115 (Congreso de la República, 1994), which provides fundamental guidelines for the country’s educational system. The third was Act 2277 (Ministerio de Educación Nacional,

1979), which is the old statute for teachers, and the fourth was Act 1278, or the new teacher statute that has regulated the selection, recruitment, professionalization, and evaluation of teachers in the country since 2002 (Ministerio de Educación Nacional, 2002).

The remaining seven documents were selected because they are pivotal in the selection and evaluation of teachers and consequently, include descriptions of teachers' profiles and expected performance that provide information about how teachers are portrayed. One of these documents was the *Manual of Functions, Requirements and Competences for Principals and Teachers* (Ministerio de Educación Nacional, 2016). Also included in the analysis was the general policy for the education of teachers (Ministerio de Educación Nacional, 2013), along with three guidelines for their evaluation (Ministerio de Educación Nacional, 2014; 2012; 2008). The final two documents were the most recent (at the time of writing) national development plans (Departamento Nacional de Planeación, 2019) and the national education policy (Ministerio de Educación Nacional, n.d.). Documents that contained information about salary scales and decrees about health and teachers' well-being were not included in the analysis.

### **Data Analysis**

A combination of inductive and deductive processes was used to analyze the data (Klenke et al., 2016). Two phases were used. The first examined the occurrence of the word *leadership* in all documents and used open codes to identify meanings associated with it. The second phase used 11 teacher-leadership attributes and indicators (accountability, advocacy, cultural responsiveness, inclusiveness, openness to change, professionalism, reflection, risk-taking, shared vision, stability, and teamwork) synthesized in a comprehensive

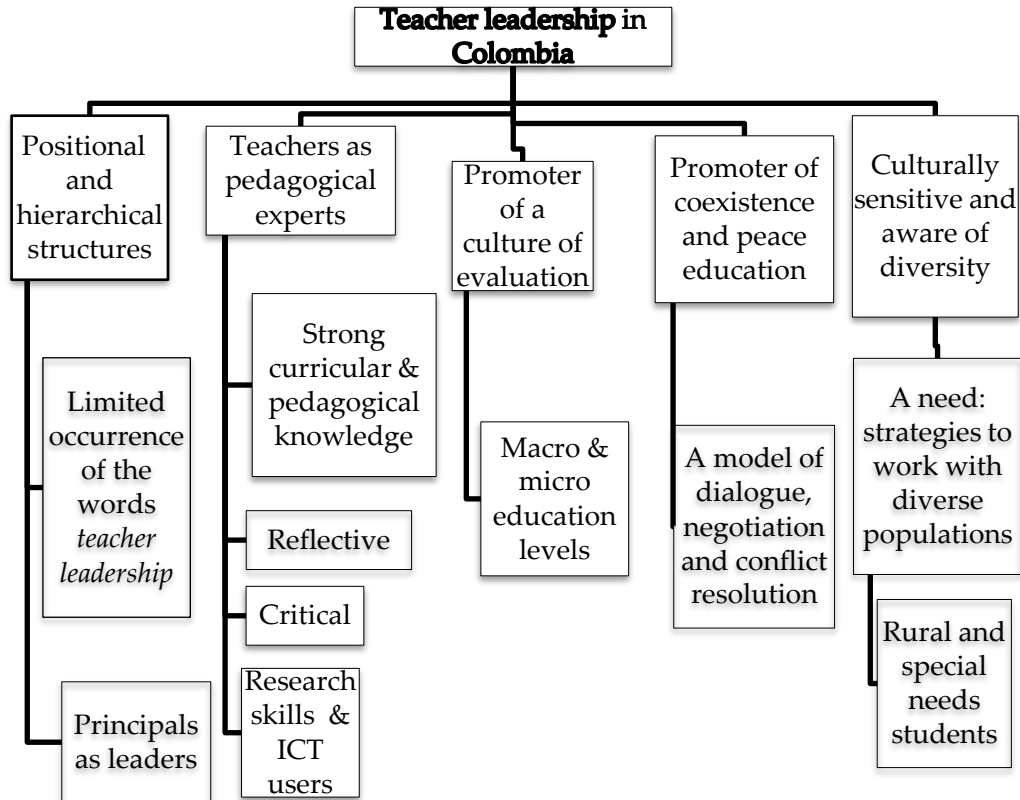


review of the literature by Webber (2018). In addition, open coding (Charmaz, 2006) was used to label the data and to expand the connotation of the attributes. A total of 63 codes emerged. Axial coding ensued, and the codes were grouped into larger categories that were constantly revised in the light of memos, an analytical tool for gathering reflections on the meaning of the data themselves (Charmaz, 2006). To give credibility to the analysis, the researcher applied semantic validity and textual evidence (Weber, 1990). An expert in school leadership in the Colombian context was invited to examine the accuracy of the words used in the codification of the data. In addition, textual evidence that was consistent with the interpretation was used.

### Findings

Data yielded 324 matches that included the string *leader* and suffixes such as *-ship* or verb conjugations. Of these, 59 matches with the phrase *teaching support leaders* were excluded. This label was introduced in 2016 by the national government for teachers supporting the pedagogical work in schools, but due to pressures from the largest teacher union in Colombia, the label was eliminated. Another set of 86 matches were ruled out because they did not refer to education. The remaining 179 matches were analyzed to examine the meanings attributed to them. Figure 1 presents the main categories that emerged from the meanings attributed to the word leadership.

Figure 1.  
Main Findings that Emerged from the Analysis



**Positional Roles and Hierarchical Structures**

Of 86 occurrences of the word *leadership*, 43 were associated with the principal, which suggests that leadership in the Colombian context is positional, assigned by work status and legitimized by normativity. Consequently, leadership relates to principals’ actions, particularly in connection to the managerial aspects of their schools. The image of principals as leaders reinforces figures of power and



leaves aside the work and contributions of other members of the community, particularly teachers. This also places principals at the center of accountability, as they are held responsible for the internal organization of the school and for external pressures represented in students' retention, promotion, and achievement, as shown in this excerpt from Act 1278:

*[The evaluation includes] an account for at least their leadership; efficiency; work organization; school results, measured in accordance with students' retention and promotion rates and with results of students' basic skills in external evaluations (Act 1278, Art. 34, p. 8).*

A school leadership framework is non-existent in Colombia, but leadership functions are an essential component of the evaluation of principals. Leadership, however, is one of the components of the behavioral competencies that both teachers and principals are expected to demonstrate (Ministerio de Educación Nacional, 2016). It embraces actions to motivate and mobilize others in the light of a shared vision, aiming at the creation of a common identity. One of the analyzed documents defines leadership as follows:

*Leadership: Ability to motivate and involve members of the educational community with the construction of a common identity and the development of the institutional vision. (Manual for the Evaluation of Principals and Teachers, Ministerio de Educación Nacional, 2008, p.12).*

It is interesting to note that there have been efforts to introduce a new teacher role called *teaching support leader*, but the largest union in Colombia (FECODE, 2017) met the proposal with strong opposition and, in 2017, the government eliminated the label. These teachers were to have acted as liaisons between classroom teachers and principals and to have been in charge of supporting and

coordinating pedagogical proposals for holistic approaches to student development, but the union claimed that there was a blurry line between the functions of regular classroom teachers and those performed by support teachers.

### **Teachers as Pedagogical Experts**

Teachers are an influential force in student progress and achievement. The analyzed documents emphasize excellence in pedagogy to improve students' learning opportunities. Teachers should possess strong theoretical foundations in curriculum, pedagogy, and teaching methodologies and should demonstrate strong epistemological foundations in the disciplines they teach. *Reflection, criticality, and research skills* are central attributes of the teacher as a pedagogical leader. As reflective practitioners, teachers adopt a critical view of the content they read and assume an inquiry-oriented position in which they examine and question their own practices. During the 1980s, a strong pedagogical movement highlighted the need to build up the image of the teacher as a professional and a critical intellectual (Calvo, 2004). This idea required teacher preparation programs to include the development of *research skills* that would encourage teachers to examine their practices and contexts in depth and to propose innovative solutions to problems they encountered. This excerpt on the profiles of inservice teachers demonstrates these attributes:

*[Teachers] know the curriculum, promote the development of pedagogical projects that articulate different areas, grades and levels. Likewise, teachers encourage the development of research, according to needs of the environment; demonstrate updated knowledge, curricular and didactic mastery of their discipline and of the areas they are in*



*charge of; efficiently and effectively manage the resources necessary for the development of their pedagogical activity (MEN, 2013, p. 92).*

As pedagogical experts, teachers use ICT skills creatively in the classroom. The guidelines for teacher preparation programs (MEN, 2013) accentuate the need to become a researcher and an advanced ICT user. Similarly, this is a component of the evaluation of teachers. One document proposes that they should “incorporate pedagogical and didactic criteria in the use of information and communication technologies (ICT) to their educational processes” (MEN, 2016, p. 11). There has been considerable investment in the qualification of teachers by past government administrations, centered on honing research skills to improve pedagogical innovation and foster collaboration (Secretaría de Educación Distrital, 2015). Nevertheless, the outcomes of those experiences have yet to be examined and scrutinized (Jurado, 2016).

### **Teachers as Part of a Culture of Evaluation**

This theme concerns government efforts to create a culture of evaluation in schools at both the macro- and micro-levels, where teachers play a determinant role. At the macro-level, they are expected to contribute key information on student development and performance to nurture the school and national quality systems. Colombia has begun to take part in international examinations (OECD, 2018) that have yielded important data for the analysis of student performance and to determine pathways toward school improvement. The national guidelines for teacher education (MEN, 2013) include evaluation as one of their three transversal axes. The other two are pedagogy and research. This document explicitly states that teacher education programs must prepare teachers to learn to evaluate and learn to be evaluated. With respect to learning to

evaluate, programs ought to “prepare teachers as evaluators so that they provide feedback about contextualized and situated teaching and learning” (MEN, 2013, p. 67). This feedback is crucial for school improvement plans and the assessment of educational quality at the national level.

At the micro-level, teachers as evaluators are to become liaisons between the school and students’ families. The aim is twofold, first, to keep families informed about students’ progress and difficulties and, second, to increase parental participation in their children’s educational processes. This aspect, as will be explained in the following category, is essential for the promotion of a healthy school climate. In general, teachers “keep students and their families informed of students’ personal and academic situations (school records, discipline, absences and performance, among others)” (MEN, 2016, p. 41).

Concerning the second perspective—that is, being evaluated—the documents emphasize the value of critically examining teachers’ actions and performance in the light of the competencies they should possess. The lens of evaluation proposed is not punitive and focuses on feedback from the principal. If the evaluation is not successful, teachers are recommended to take courses at accredited institutions (MEN, 2008). However, the documents do not specify feedback guidelines, nor do they mention peer evaluation or self-assessment formats. Teachers are evaluated annually, and their competency assessment is required for promotion. Both the macro- and micro-levels imply that teachers should be cognizant of evaluation procedures and of their applicability. It is important to highlight that teacher leaders would use their competencies in assessment and evaluation to scrutinize problems and drive the community to look





for collective solutions to improve students' experiences. However, as mentioned before, this would require that policies and preparation programs stimulate teachers' mindsets to become leaders and enact their leadership in their teams.

### **Promoters of Coexistence, Conflict Resolution and Peace**

The analyzed documents emphasized that teachers play an important part in promoting a healthy school climate and peaceful educational environment. They enact school values such as collegiality and respect for others. In their classrooms, they create pedagogical activities designed to promote harmonic coexistence. One analyzed document (MEN, 2016) stated that teachers should "develop their academic activity through pedagogical projects and other support activities for students' holistic development, oriented to school coexistence" (p. 66). Being an assertive communicator is fundamental to facilitating dialogue among all members of the school community, especially families, and to involve them in solutions for school conflicts. Teachers must be knowledgeable about the *Coexistence Manual*, an institutional document that establishes school rules, behaviors, alternatives for solving conflicts, and agreements and the consequences of breaking those agreements (Chaux et al., 2013).

Colombian teachers are expected to promote dialogue, negotiation, understanding, and participation both inside and outside the school community and should be able to "identify conflicts and promote their peaceful resolution, in order to foster a climate of understanding and recognition of differences" (Ministerio de Educación Nacional, 2016, p. 75). The Colombian government introduced a citizenship competencies plan, (Ministerio de Educación Nacional, 2011) aimed at fostering environments of respect for

human rights, democracy, and peace that teachers are expected to help implement in their classrooms. This is of enormous importance, considering that Colombia is going through a Peace Negotiation Agreement that seeks to end the violence perpetrated by different actors for more than 50 years within the country and that has permeated schools.

### **Being Culturally Sensitive and Promoting Diversity: A Diffuse Area**

The importance of being sensitive to students' individual needs, to their socio-cultural backgrounds, and to their contexts appears recurrently in the analyzed documents. The General Law of Education (Congreso de la República, 1994) establishes that "education is a process of permanent, personal, cultural and social development that is based on an integral conception of the human person, his dignity, his rights and his duties" (Article 1). Teachers' awareness of these factors leads to their adapting the curriculum and pedagogical activities to students' learning paces and styles, their cultural heritages, and the characteristics of their contexts. The guidelines for teacher preparation programs (Ministerio de Educación Nacional, 2013) state, for example, that programs must prepare teachers not only to recognize students' individual capacities but also their diverse social, ethnic, cultural, religious, and sexual orientations. Teachers promote an intercultural lens in which "teaching is contextualized, focused on dialogue and interlocation between students' own knowledge and foreign knowledge" (MEN, 2013, p. 56).

Although being culturally sensitive is emphasized in the analyzed documents, it is noticeable that terms such as *inclusion*, *Indigenous students*, *rural students*, and *special-needs students* are



seldom mentioned. None of the documents specifies alternatives for teachers to work with these kinds of groups. This is an important fact, considering the diversity of the Colombian population, which includes are Afro-descendant, Indigenous, and Rom groups that speak 68 different languages (Ministerio de Cultura, 2013), as well as a considerable number of special-needs and rural students who require specialized attention. The implications of these findings will be discussed in the following section.

### **Conclusions & Recommendations**

The first finding from the present study is that the term *teacher leadership* does not appear in the analyzed policy documents and whenever the word *leadership* is used, it refers to principals, school coordinators, and hierarchical figures. The language used in the documents indicates that those in formal positions continue to lead the way in the education of Colombian students and that teachers are passive recipients of policies who operate in vertical organizational structures. In order to build the notion of teachers as “co-constructors of educational change and key contributors to policy making” (Harris & Jones, 2019, p. 123), the language used in policies and official documents in Colombia should accentuate the image of teachers as leaders. This would help make their work visible and receive recognition. Furthermore, it would help build collaboration among all members of the school community and confront the distorted vision of leadership that has permeated education in Latin America (Flessa et al., 2018).

Including the notion of the *teacher leader* would stimulate teachers to think of themselves as influential in school change and open spaces for principals to see them as their allies, which would, in

turn, strengthen school capacity. The literature on school leadership has consistently stressed the importance of shared leadership (Printy & Marks, 2006), with principals delegating influence, interacting with teachers, and empowering them to improve learning experiences (Pineda-Báez et al., 2020; Sebastian et al., 2016; Szeto & Chen, 2018). Such empowerment leads to collective forms of leadership that influence decision-making (Ni et al., 2018). Moreover, studies show that team efforts, derived from teacher leadership, impact the improvement of students' reading and math achievement (Hallinger & Heck, 2010) and performance in advanced science and math (Calderone et al., 2018). This study reinforces the suggestion from the OECD (2018) to address conditions at the organizational and institutional levels to improve the quality of the educational experiences offered in schools. This recommendation implies stimulating synergies between principals and teachers instead of implementing programs targeted at each group separately.

Despite the fact that the notion of teacher leadership is nonexistent in the policies reviewed, it is possible to find traces of some teacher leadership attributes. The second finding from this study indicates that teachers are implicitly conceptualized as pedagogical leaders—the pillars for creating and consolidating favorable teaching and learning conditions. For the purpose of capitalizing on the knowledge and experience that teachers as pedagogical developers produce, teacher leaders should enact pedagogical leadership among their colleagues. Sergiovanni (1998) argued that pedagogical leadership develops “social and academic capital for students, and intellectual and professional capital for teachers” (p. 38). The Colombian educational system urgently requires the consolidation of a teaching framework that emphasizes teacher-leadership skills to foster these types of capital. It is



indispensable to capitalize on the knowledge and expertise of teachers who excel in their practices despite adverse circumstances. The systematization of the information from teachers who receive the *Premio Compartir* (an award given by a private organization that selects best teachers annually), in addition to that provided by other teachers in programs such as *Let's All Learn* (Ministerio de Educación Nacional, n.d.), can be used to formulate a teacher-leadership framework. Such a framework would benefit from combining bottom-up and top-down approaches (Fullan, 1994) that could facilitate the creation of a profile for teachers in Colombia and foster the expectation of the teacher as a leader. A framework agreed upon and created by teachers and other stakeholders could be a democratic tool that favored contextualized, situated, and diversified teaching and learning. It would also gain more acceptance and support from the Colombian teachers' union.

The third finding emerging from this study relates to the role of teachers in promoting a culture of evaluation. This is a key factor for changing and improving school processes and has two important implications. First, it is indispensable that teachers learn to interpret and use the data provided in national and international tests more efficiently. Consequently, literacy is required to nurture the use of such data for classroom and school improvement. Second, the evaluation of teachers requires periodicity and the assertive use of feedback. Teacher evaluation in Colombia is performed annually and, even though there are instruments to guide principals, the aim is not necessarily formative. The hypothesis of this study is that principals have limited information on feedback processes and on how to promote collegiality and exchange of ideas to enrich the schools' plans. Research demonstrates that feedback in teacher evaluation is more effective when it is performed periodically, with principals

focusing on a disciplined dialogue with teachers about their individual practices and their roles in the overall functioning of the school (Tuytens & Devos, 2017).

However, providing useful feedback is a cumbersome task that is “complicated by local contexts, organizational constraints, and principals’ knowledge of instruction, curriculum, and content-area pedagogy” (Wieczorek et al., 2019, p. 358). Research in Colombia has demonstrated that the immersion of Colombian principals in managerial tasks constrains their capacities for interacting with teachers (Sandoval-Estupiñan et al., 2020). Accordingly, Colombian education needs diagnostic studies on the interaction between principals and teachers during feedback sessions, the content of the feedback, and how the two parties perceive the usefulness of the instruments and the feedback sessions. Tuytens and Devos (2014) argued that when teachers perceive feedback as useful, they feel motivated to continue their professional development. Listening to teachers’ voices about their experiences in the evaluation process is also essential to help both the school system and the teachers themselves understand their constructions and the enactment of their effectiveness (Warren & Ward, 2019).

The fourth finding highlights teachers’ role in promoting peace, tolerance, and respect both inside and outside the classroom. This teacher-leadership attribute responds to the contextual needs of the country. Colombia has one of the longest internal conflicts in Latin America, which has generated poverty, displacement, and the exclusion of many children from the educational system. However, in 2016, the country signed a *Peace Agreement* that aims at improving conditions of equality and well-being for all citizens. The plan places education at its center and implies that teachers should lead the way



in guiding students to learn to act in a more democratic environment. Teachers have a key role in sustaining peace efforts in Colombia's post-conflict situation. They are fundamental in promoting scenarios of participation in which students value others and learn to dialogue, negotiate, and solve their conflicts. This is indispensable to mitigate the effects of the prolonged conditions of violence in the country that have permeated the schools.

The final finding has important implications for teacher preparation in Colombia and other countries in Latin America with similar characteristics. One of the implicit teacher-leadership attributes identified in the analyzed documents is teachers' awareness of diversity. This implies teachers should develop their expertise in the design of pedagogical proposals that help students develop their full capacities. However, it is unclear how well-prepared teachers are to achieve this aim. The documents reviewed do not provide guidelines or alternatives for working with the diverse classrooms in both rural and urban areas. This calls for substantial reforms in the policies guiding initial teacher preparation and in-service professional programs. Teachers must be sufficiently prepared to address the needs of the numerous Indigenous, Afro-descendent, and rural students in the country and be prepared to advocate for marginalized students as suggested by Bradley-Levine (2018). A recent study on rural education in Colombia (Fundación Compartir, 2019) indicated that, to impact education in rural areas (where many Indigenous and Afro-descendant groups live), teachers need better preparation to enable them to understand students' diversity and contextual characteristics. The present study endorses these recommendations and, furthermore, suggests that teacher preparation programs should make provisions for teachers to address the education of students with special needs and students with

disabilities. Access to the educational system for these populations in Colombia is still limited, and retention and graduation rates are low (Correa & Castro, 2016).

To sum up, the present study emphasizes that the field of teacher leadership is still incipient in Colombia and that horizontal and collegial work is still required to improve school practices. Although there are traces of the concept of teacher leadership in the documents analyzed, the country would benefit from a framework that clearly establishes the vision of the teacher as a leader and from teacher preparation programs aimed at preparing teachers to work with the country's diverse population. Questions emerge regarding how teachers themselves understand their leadership role and how leadership practices are enacted in this context.

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## Teacher Leadership in the South African Context: Areas, Attributes and Cultural Responsiveness

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Abstract	Article Info
<p><i>The purpose of this interpretive qualitative study was to determine how teacher leadership is conceptualised in official documentation in South Africa. Document analysis of national official documentation was performed, using the attributes of teacher leadership as indicated by Webber (2018) in a priori coding in the content analysis. The document analysis revealed that some of the attributes of teacher leadership corresponded with those identified by Webber; attributes that may be unique to the South African context also emerged. The findings revealed that attributes of teacher leadership in South Africa are embedded within cultural responsiveness, which is determined by the unique context of the country. Attributes of teacher leadership feature within specific leadership areas in which teachers act as leaders in formal and informal dimensions.</i></p>	<p><b>Article History:</b>  <i>Received</i>                      February 15, 2020   <i>Accepted</i>                      September 20, 2020</p> <hr/> <p><b>Keywords:</b>  <i>Teacher leadership, Attributes, South Africa, Document analysis, Areas of teacher leadership, Cultural responsiveness.</i></p>

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## **Introduction**

In a report commissioned by the Centre for Development and Enterprise, a crisis in South African education was identified, as Spaul (2013, p. 3) indicated that the country “has the worst education system of all middle-income countries that participate in cross-national assessments of educational achievement.” Ngozo and Mtantato (2018) reported that the quality of the education system is still declining. Although some improvement has been made, the Department of Basic Education (DBE) (2019) still indicates “the need to improve the quality of basic education significantly” (p. 6). A key contributor to effective education is effective leadership (Bhengu & Myende, 2016; De Villiers & Pretorius, 2011). Grant (2019) acknowledges that teacher leadership (TL) is critical in the transformation of South African schools. This transformation includes aspects such as functionality, social justice, managing diversity and providing equal learning opportunities for all.

School leadership practices in South Africa, in many instances, still follow a top-down managerial leadership approach, which has long been a favoured leadership model in the South African education system (Bush, 2007). Since managerial leadership emphasises the execution of orders prescribed by external imperatives, it is the most fitting style for leaders working in centralised school systems (Bush, 2007). Despite this model not being suitable for diverse organisational contexts, managerial leadership was considered relevant in South Africa to realise functional schools with a vital requirement for maintaining the calm and orderliness that allow learning to take place (McLennan & Thurlow, 2003).

Bush (2007), however, contends that principals and teachers working under such bureaucratic systems will lack innovation and



are destined to fail and to be inconclusive leaders when it comes to managing diversity and complexity. The responsibility of leadership should expand beyond the leadership of the school principal to a collective leadership within the school. This collective leadership is built on distributed leadership theory to include teachers in leadership and decision-making. However, the introduction of more distributed and shared leadership in the form of TL is inhibited by managerial leadership in the South African context (Bush & Glover, 2016).

In this article, we set out to understand what official documentation in South Africa, directly and indirectly, indicates about TL, directly in terms of specifically referring to teacher leadership in the wording of documentation and indirectly implying teacher leadership in the wording of the documentation.

### **Context of the Study<sup>1</sup>**

Various authors have claimed that culture and context influence principal leadership as well as TL in the school (De Villiers & Pretorius, 2012; Hallinger, 2018). Similarly, we want to argue that the specific cultural context in a country influences the manifestation and conceptualisation of TL. Hallinger (2018, p. 11) refers to the influence of different contexts, including the “natural culture context, economic context and political context”, which goes much wider than the local context of the school. South Africa’s past, with the legacy of apartheid

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<sup>1</sup> This report is based on research done as part of the *International Study of Teacher Leadership* conducted in Australia, Canada, China, Colombia, Mexico, Romania, South Africa, Spain, Tanzania, and Turkey. The multi-stage study commenced in 2018. For more information, see the study website: [www.mru.ca/istl](http://www.mru.ca/istl).

and the influence thereof on the education system, is well known (Spaull, 2013). Shortly after the establishment of democracy in 1994, the Report of the Task Team on Education Management Development indicated resistance to change in the education system, which was characterised by inequity in the provision, fragmentation and deterioration of a culture of learning and teaching (Department of Education (DOE), 1996). The government, however, showed a commitment to change, which was evident in the emergence of education policies after 1994. The South African Schools Act (1996), for instance, advanced the move from centralised decision making to a school-based system of management and leadership, which involves all stakeholders, including principals, educators, parents and learners. The Department of Education recognises that successful learning is the norm that should be used in the measurement of quality management and leadership.

Based on the National Development Plan (Presidency Republic of South Africa, 2012), the need to improve the quality of basic education is emphasised in the Medium-Term Strategic Framework (Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation, 2020). After the democratic elections in South Africa, the Department of Education (DOE, 1996) acknowledged that management and leadership should engage all members of educational organisations and not be the task of only a few. The range of policies and official documents developed after 1994 created the opportunity for TL to develop in schools, but it is not described clearly. One example is found in the Norms and Standards for Educators (Ministry of Education (MOE), 2000), which require the teacher to take on seven roles, of which one is the role of leader, manager and administrator. Despite empowering policies such as these, as well as other documents stating the importance of leadership, there seems to be a lack in adjustments to current



leadership practices that would lead to improved academic performance. Although school leadership, including TL, is indicated as an essential element for successful and effective schools (Driescher, 2016), school leadership still is based on a bureaucracy and a chain of command. Unfortunately, the influential position of classroom educators as teacher leaders is not completely acknowledged in the South African education setting, as TL is, at most, limited to the classroom (Driescher, 2016). The development of teachers as leaders allows for sharing the workload, leads to the empowerment of staff and, to some extent, erodes the bureaucratic top-down approach that has characterised education for many years.

TL seems to be an under-researched concept in the South African context (Grant, 2019; Grant, Gardner, Kajee, Moodley & Somaroo, 2010). The lack of clarity about what TL is, limits the effectiveness thereof and, furthermore, provides a strong rationale for exploring TL (Webber, 2018). With the former argument in mind, that TL is determined by context and culture, which also applies to South Africa the question that guided the research was: How is TL conceptualised in official documentation in South Africa with regard to areas, attributes and cultural responsiveness?

## **Conceptual Framework**

### **Teacher Leadership as Distributed Leadership**

Distributed leadership is seen by Grant (2017, p. 473) as a “robust and appropriate theoretical tool for investigating school leadership practice in post-apartheid South Africa.” The concept of distributed leadership has come to theorise leadership in a manner that could be viewed as an alternative to shared, collaborative or participative leadership (Harris, 2013). The current trend in school

leadership that accentuates distributed leadership is reinforced by Bush's (2011) argument that "distributed leadership has become the normatively preferred leadership model in the twenty-first century" (p. 88). Similarly, distributed leadership can also be regarded as "one of the most influential ideas to emerge in the field of educational leadership" (Harris, 2010, p. 55) and is "particularly helpful in providing greater conceptual clarity around the terrain of teacher leadership" (p. 316).

One of the assumptions of distributed leadership is that leadership does not only reside in formal positions but can also be practised outside of a formal position of authority. Leithwood, Mascall and Strauss (2009, p. 13) concurred that both formal and informal leadership approaches "co-exist and inter-relate and this interrelationship" consequently leads to improved school performance. Teachers taking up leadership roles and the practices of leadership exhibited by many teachers in South Africa inherently coincide with the model of distributed leadership. TL, for the purpose of this article, is acknowledged by the authors as a manifestation of distributed leadership practice within schools (cf. De Villiers & Pretorius, 2012; Grant, 2008).

### **Aspects of Teacher Leadership**

There are four central aspects of TL that add to a better understanding of the concept, namely "formal and informal dimensions, influence of teacher leadership on school culture, teacher leadership as professional development, and teacher leadership as part of school improvement" (Webber, 2018, p. 4). These aspects are illustrated in Figure 1 below.

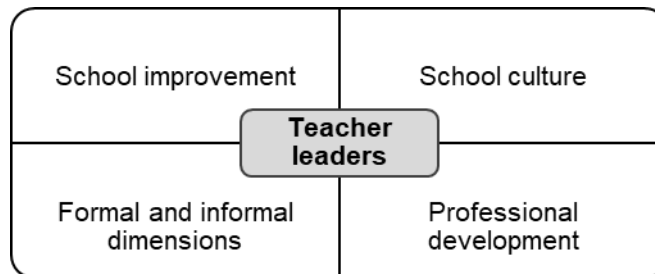


Figure 1.

*Central Aspects of TL (Webber, 2018, p. 5)*

TL includes both formal and informal dimensions of the practice of this leadership theory in schools. In the South African context, formal leadership is exercised by people in formal positions of authority, such as principals, deputy principals, department heads, subject advisors, heads of years or grades and even senior and master teachers, among others (Ash & Persall, 2000). Formal leadership for teachers can include management and pedagogical responsibilities (Muijs & Harris, 2007). Manuel (2012) mentioned that the importance of the presence of informal leadership in schools has largely been unrecognised, as it was merely seen as setting a good example.

The second dimension of TL identified by Webber (2018) is school culture. The influence of school culture on the achievement of learning outcomes is well documented (Deal & Peterson, 2016; Webber, 2018). In the South African context, one of the prerequisites for TL is “a collaborative culture with participatory decision-making and vision sharing” (Grant, 2008, p. 523). The right conditions need to exist within the school for TL to thrive; thus, leadership within the school should be redefined (Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2015). A culture of collegiality and shared decision-making can lead to the practice of TL in the school (Grant, 2008).



Thirdly, to date, several studies have demonstrated that TL can contribute to improved teaching and learning practices and lead to sustained school improvement (Crowther, Ferguson & Hann, 2009; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). The fourth dimension of TL includes professional development. The need for teachers to develop professionally and improve their leadership capabilities is accentuated in policy documents, including the Norms and Standards for Educators (MOE, 2000) as well as the Personnel Administrative Measures (DBE, 2016). Several professional development opportunities that teachers can use to develop their own leadership exists. These activities include mentoring, self-mentoring and leading innovation, and coaching (Lieberman, 2015; Sterrett, 2015).

### **Related Literature**

Recently, there has been renewed interest in TL, which warrants a more in-depth scrutiny to unpack the concept. The rationale for exploring TL stems from the fact that it would “contribute to the wider understanding of educational leadership, the impact of teacher leadership on school culture and student achievement, and how professional development and university programs might contribute to teacher leadership knowledge and skill development” (Webber, 2018, p. 1). An earlier definition of TL clarifies it as the “development, support, and nurturance of teachers who assume leadership in their schools” (Lieberman & Miller, 2004, p. 154). In addition, the concepts of distributed leadership and TL are “implicit in current South African education policy documents” (Grant, 2006, p. 512). According to Naiker and Mestry (2013), South African teachers are historically dependent and passive; therefore, TL offers a shift to empowerment



and shared responsibility. If teachers are properly nurtured and their leadership skills are developed, they are likely to contribute to school improvement and cultivate a school culture that is conducive to successful learning. In the South African context, Grant (2008) defines TL as follows:

*A form of leadership beyond headship or formal position. It refers to teachers becoming aware of and taking up informal and formal leadership roles both in the classroom and beyond. It includes teachers working collaboratively with all stakeholders towards a shared and dynamic vision of their school within a culture of fairness, inclusion, mutual respect and trust p. 88).*

De Villiers and Pretorius (2011, 2012) refer to as teacher leaders, who act as leaders within and outside the classroom, improve teaching practice through influencing others and accept responsibility and accountability for the realisation of goals, acting as change agents. Teachers need to move from playing the role of followers into the role of being leaders, which could be formal or informal roles (Grant, 2006). Gumede (2011) observed that in practice, TL does exist in South Africa, as teachers in South African schools engage in different leadership tasks, such as motivating others, collaborating in learning areas and mentoring new teachers. Teachers are practising TL without realising and labelling it as such.

There are specific attributes associated with teacher leaders. Webber (2018, p. 2) observed that the literature on TL identifies various attributes of teacher leaders, including “[p]rofessional practice that includes leadership within and outside the classroom; collaboration with colleagues; reflective practitioners; learning together with colleagues and change agents.” Webber (2018) identified the following attributes: accountability, advocacy, cultural responsiveness, inclusiveness, openness to change, professionalism,

reflection, risk taking, shared vision, stability and teamwork. These attributes guided the a priori coding in the document analysis.

## **Methodology**

### **Design and Methods**

The research methodology is underpinned by the interpretivist paradigm to deepen our understanding of the concept “teacher leadership” within the South African context. The specific research strategy pursued included document analysis of official national documentation. In the sampling of the documentation, the following inclusion criteria were applied: national-level documents; official publications; publications after 1994; and relevance to education. Sampled documents included legislation, policy documentation, reports, guidelines, plans and frameworks. After scrutinising the available documentation, 17 documents were used for analysis.

It is important to take note that most legislation changed or was promulgated shortly after the establishment of the democratic dispensation in 1994. That provides an explanation for the large number of documents dating from 1996-2001. It is also important to note that the former Department of Education (DOE) in South Africa, divided into two departments in 2009, namely the Department of Basic Education (DBE) and the Department of Higher Education.

### **Data Analysis**

The data obtained from the documents were analysed by means of content analysis. Firstly, a priori coding was applied during the analysis, using the attributes identified by Webber (2018). Secondly, open coding was used to identify emerging attributes and leadership areas related to TL. To enhance the trustworthiness of the research,



two independent researchers coded the data separately. Thereafter, the analyses were compared, and the findings confirmed, based on what each researcher had discovered separately.

### **Findings**

Particular themes emerged during the data analysis. The article focused on the conceptualisation of TL regarding areas, attributes and cultural responsiveness. Quotations from documents are included to support and illuminate the findings. The findings are structured according to main divisions: (i) areas; (ii) attributes (corresponding with Webber, 2018); and (iii) emerging attributes.

#### **Areas of Teacher Leadership**

Only three documents predominantly focused on areas in which TL features. Words associated with leadership – “be in charge, share responsibilities, manager, act as head, authority, leadership role and organizing” (DBE, 2016a; MOE, 1999; MOE, 2000)– appeared in the documents. The first area mentioned was the classroom – “manage learning in the classroom and carry out classroom administrative duties efficiently” (MOE, 2000, p. 47). The second area identified is within the broader school community. The teacher has to “participate in school decision-making structures” (MOE, 2000, p. 47), “take on a leadership role in respect of the subject, learning area or phase” (DBE, 2016a, p. 18), “foster administrative efficiency within the department” (DBE, 2016a, p. 29) and be involved in extramural activities such as “sport, artistic and cultural activities” (MOE, 2000, p. 50). Third, it was evident that teachers are expected to “develop supportive relations with parents and other key persons and organizations based on a critical understanding of community and environmental development issues” (MOE, 2000, p. 85). It was clear

from the documents that teachers are expected to fulfil leadership roles beyond the classroom and the school.

### **Attributes of Teacher Leaders**

Webber's (2018) attributes of TL guided the a priori coding in the document analysis. Some attributes clearly corresponded with the attributes identified by Webber. The findings of the correlated attributes are indicated below as particular themes emerged under each attribute.

#### ***Cultural Responsiveness***

Seven documents accentuated aspects regarding cultural responsiveness (Constitution of the republic of South Africa, 1996; DOE, 1995; DOE, 2001; MOE, 1999; MOE, 2000; National education policy act, 1996; South African Council for Educators Act, 2000). Teachers need to establish a democratic, supportive and empowering learning atmosphere and adopt teaching strategies, activities and learning programmes that are sensitive to race, gender, culture, ethnicity, geographic location and language differences among the learners. Teachers should be knowledgeable about the Constitution and the Bill of Rights and be aware of discrepancies regarding communities, ethics, religion and culture. Teachers should be sensitive to current social and educational issues, such as violence, drug abuse, poverty, child and women abuse, environmental degradation, HIV/AIDS, COVID-19 and other infectious diseases. It is imperative that teachers demonstrate responsiveness to changing circumstances and adhere to specific democratic values and principles, for example respect, equality, non-discrimination, human dignity, human rights, freedom and equity. Education White Paper 6 accentuates the importance of an inclusive approach, especially



towards learners with special educational needs. Inclusive education and training systems are required, where teachers have the necessary strategies and interventions to cope with a wide range of learning and teaching needs (DOE, 2001). The National Education Policy Act (1996) mentions the protection of the “fundamental rights of every person” and “against unfair discrimination”, as well as “achieving equitable education opportunities and the redress of past inequality in education provision” (p. 4).

### ***Accountability***

This attribute indicates that teacher leaders must take responsibility and be accountable for their actions. The National Development Plan 2030 specifically refers to “an education accountability chain, with lines of responsibility from state to classroom” (Presidency Republic of South Africa, 2012, p. 34). The White Paper on Education and Training accentuates that a “culture of accountability” should exist in education, where the necessary responsibility is taken, and accountability is applied (DOE, 1995, p. 17). Learner performance and work performance are extremely important aspects, and teachers are held accountable to ensure that specific standards are upheld, as improvement results are measured annually and curriculum coverage, learner attendance and teacher attendance are monitored (DBE, 2016b; Employment of Educators Act, 1998; National Education Policy Act, 1996; Presidency Republic of South Africa, 2012). Teachers have *in loco parentis* status and, therefore, have the responsibility to ensure classroom discipline and be accountable for every learner placed in their care (South African Schools Act, 1996, p. 69). Institutional governing bodies will hold teachers “accountable for the quality of provision and the services provided” (MOE, 1998, p. 32). It is important that teachers be “well

grounded in the knowledge, skills, values, principles, methods, and procedures relevant to the discipline, subject, learning area, phase of study, or professional or occupational practice” (National Education Policy Act, 1996, p. 47). It is further expected that teachers uphold “the principles of academic integrity and the pursuit of excellence in the field of education” (MOE, 2000, p. 51). For teachers to ensure that particular standards are met, they need to take responsibility to “take the initiative to identify the areas in which they need further development and approach the department for assistance to access training opportunities” (Presidency Republic of South Africa, 2012, p. 307). Teachers also have a responsibility towards “achieving the mission, vision and goals that have been set” (DBE, 2016b, p. 9).

### *Inclusiveness*

It is important that teachers are part of the decision-making process. The White Paper on Education and Training emphasises the “principle of democratic governance” and that all role players should be involved. Furthermore, it indicates that the “Ministry of Education is committed to a fully participatory process of curriculum development,” which includes teachers as important role players (DOE, 1995, p. 17,22). The Report of the task team on education management development, focuses on the inclusiveness of management, where the focus is on participation and collaboration, where “all members of [the] educational organization engage” and “management becomes much more inclusive.” Education management development is seen as “the key to decentralization and transformation that requires a broad and more inclusive understanding” and “can no longer be seen as being the preserve of the few” (DOE, 1996, p. 16,30,33). Two documents prescribed the inclusion of teachers in the school governing body if selected (DBE,



2016a; South African Schools Act, 1996). It is important that TL is functional where teachers are given the opportunity to take part in school decision-making structures or the development of policies, codes of conduct or any other development activities (DBE, 2015; DBE, 2016a; DBE, 2016b; MOE, 2000; South African Schools Act, 1996).

### *Openness to Change*

Two documents specifically mentioned that teachers should “demonstrate responsiveness to changing circumstances and needs” (MOE, 2000, p. 85) and must be “adaptable and responsive to change and political astuteness in situations of ambiguity, adversity or opposition” (DBE, 2016b, p. 4).

### *Professionalism*

Thirteen of the documents stated that teachers need to act professionally and accentuate the importance of professional aspects that need to be adhered to. Professional development is essential for all teachers to improve their skills and knowledge and to learn current educational approaches, practices and methods (DBE, 2016a; DBE, 2016b; DOE, 1995; MOE, 2000; Presidency Republic of South Africa, 2012). Structured programmes must meet the need of every teacher and promote professional development that would ensure expertise and specialisation (DOE, 2001; DOE, 2004; DOE, 2016; Employment of Educators Act, 1998; MOE, 1998; MOE, 2000). The National Development Plan 2030, states that “teaching should be a highly valued profession” and “attention should be given to the continuing development of teachers and promotion of professional standards” (Presidency Republic of South Africa, 2012, p. 70, 303). Ongoing professional development can take on various practices,



such as onsite training, meetings, workshops, seminars and conferences, especially for middle management (DBE, 2016a; DOE, 2001; MOE, 1998; MOE, 2000;). Teachers must “participate in departmental committees, seminars and courses in order to contribute to and/or update one’s professional views/standards” (DBE, 2016a, p. 20). The documents emphasised that all teachers must be registered with the South African Council for Educators and other relevant professional bodies (DBE, 2016a; Employment of Educators Act, 1998; MOE, 2000; National Education Policy Act, 1996; South African Council for Educators Act 31 of 2000; South African Schools Act, 1996;). They must always act in a professional manner (DBE, 2015), adhere to a code of professional ethics (South African Council for Educators Act, 2000) and may not behave in a “disgraceful, improper or unbecoming manner” (Employment of Educators Act, 1998, p. 14). Teachers must practise “and promote a critical, committed and ethical attitude towards developing a sense of respect and responsibility towards others,” “uphold the constitution and promote democratic values and practices in schools and society” and advocate “the principles of academic integrity and the pursuit of excellence in the field of education” (MOE, 2000, p. 51).

### *Reflection*

Teachers are required to reflect on various aspects and propose required adaptations. Five documents accentuated the necessity of reflective practice in the teaching profession. Teachers need to reflect on the following: learning experience; teaching strategies and the value of various learning experiences; the influence of social justice on learning; learning barriers; integrating HIV/AIDS knowledge into learning; the impact of change and ability to adapt; utilize strategies to improve; ongoing development; knowledge and experience of



ethical issues; their own professional practices and appropriate intervention strategies (DBE, 2015; DBE, 2016b; DOE, 2004; MOE, 2000; Presidency Republic of South Africa, 2012).

### ***Risk Taking***

Sometimes teachers need to take required risks, especially in an ever-changing educational environment. This attribute, according to Webber (2018), refers to an educational environment where safety and trust are established, and teachers are encouraged to take risks. However, only one document mentioned the aspect of taking risks, but it did not refer to an environment that would increase risk taking. It is merely stated that support should be given to teachers in the form of incentives that would “facilitate technological change, experimentation with new ideas, and risk taking” (DOE, 2004, p. 26).

### ***Shared Vision***

Five documents indicated the importance of working towards a shared vision. There should be a supportive management culture where “stakeholders feel ownership of the school’s mission and ethos” (DOE, 1996, p. 8). Teachers should “become instructional leaders who share the responsibility for achieving the mission, vision and goals that have been set” (DBE, 2016b, p. 9). It is important that teachers work “from a shared vision towards collectively agreed outcomes and by focusing on elements of teachers’ practice” (DBE, 2015, p. 7). There must be a “sense of unity of purpose”, and teachers must believe that they can make a difference (DBE, 2016a, p. 10). All stakeholders must be actively involved “in the realization of the mission” (DOE, 1996, p. 30) and the “development of a common purpose or mission” (DOE, 1995, p. 17) in order to create an

environment that would enhance and cultivate a culture of school improvement.

### *Teamwork*

Although teamwork is an essential aspect of TL, only three documents mentioned it. Different concepts associated with teamwork were used in the documents, such as co-operate, collaborate, share, partnership, jointly, team teaching and peer learning (MOE, 2000; DBE, 2016a; DBE, 2015). Peer learning and team teaching are important activities where teachers can learn from one another (MOE, 2000; DBE, 2015). It is also imperative that teachers “work in partnership with professional services” (MOE, 1999, p. 46) and “co-operate with further and higher education institutions” (DBE, 2016a, p. 29).

### **Emerging Attributes**

During the analysis process, some attributes emerged that were deemed significant in the South African context. The first additional attribute that emerged was support.

### *Support*

MOE (2000) indicated that teachers must “demonstrate an ability to develop a supportive and empowering environment for the learner and respond to the educational and other needs of learners and fellow educators” (p. 85). The Personnel Administrative Measures applied the word “assist” quite often, repeatedly mentioning that it is important to assist the principal in various aspects and activities regarding the learners, community, organizations, committees and other stakeholders crucial to the school (DBE, 2016a,). It was made clear in both the documents that the teacher must fulfil a supportive role towards learners, parents,



colleagues, department heads, the school management team (SMT) and the principal (MOE, 2000; DBE, 2016a).

### *Caring*

A teacher leader needs to care and have compassion for others, including caring for and protecting learners from violence. “Educators must take reasonable measures where necessary to prevent a learner from harming himself or herself or others” (MOE, 2002, p. 3). Three documents emphasised the caring aspect through the pastoral duties that teachers must fulfil about the protection, safety, progress, welfare and wellbeing of learners (MOE, 2000; DBE, 2016a; South African Council for Educators Act, 2000).

### *Being a Manager*

Teachers are not only “managers of the learning process” (DOE, 1996, p. 14) but also need to be a manager in all other related areas, “[m]anaging classroom teaching of various kinds (individualized, small group etc.) in different educational contexts and particularly with large and diverse groups” (MOE, 2000, p. 50). The teacher should “manage learning in the classroom,” which means that teachers need to manage all the aspects associated with teaching and learning, such as the learners, the school stock, textbooks, resources, planning, the curriculum, equipment, the budget for the department and subject work schemes (MOE, 2000; DBE, 2016a).

### *Mentoring*

Teacher leaders who have been teaching for some time should be experts in their subject areas, “feel at ease with the content and should be a role model with whom learners and student teachers can identify” (MOE, 1999, p. 16). They have “a professional obligation towards the education and induction into the profession of new

members of the teaching profession” (South African Council for Educators Act, 2000, p. 18). Teachers can act as mentors for student educators and colleagues or coaches for less experienced or inexperienced staff members (DBE, 2016a; MOE, 1999; MOE, 2000; South African Council for Educators Act, 2000).

### ***Researcher and Lifelong Learner***

It is very important that teacher leaders take part in research. It is essential to ensure quality through effective teaching and learning; therefore, it is vital that teachers do systematic research in their learning areas, educational problems, approaches and methodologies (MOE, 2000; National Education Policy Act, 1996). Continuous change is apparent in any education system, and teachers need to “keep abreast of educational trends and developments”, and it is imperative to promote the ongoing development of teaching as a profession (South African Council for Educators Act, 2000, p. 18). The National Education Policy Act (1996) accentuated the importance of “providing opportunities for and encouraging lifelong learning” (p. 4), especially for training in information and communication technology (Presidency Republic of South Africa, 2012) and the efficient use of e-learning methodologies (DOE, 2004).

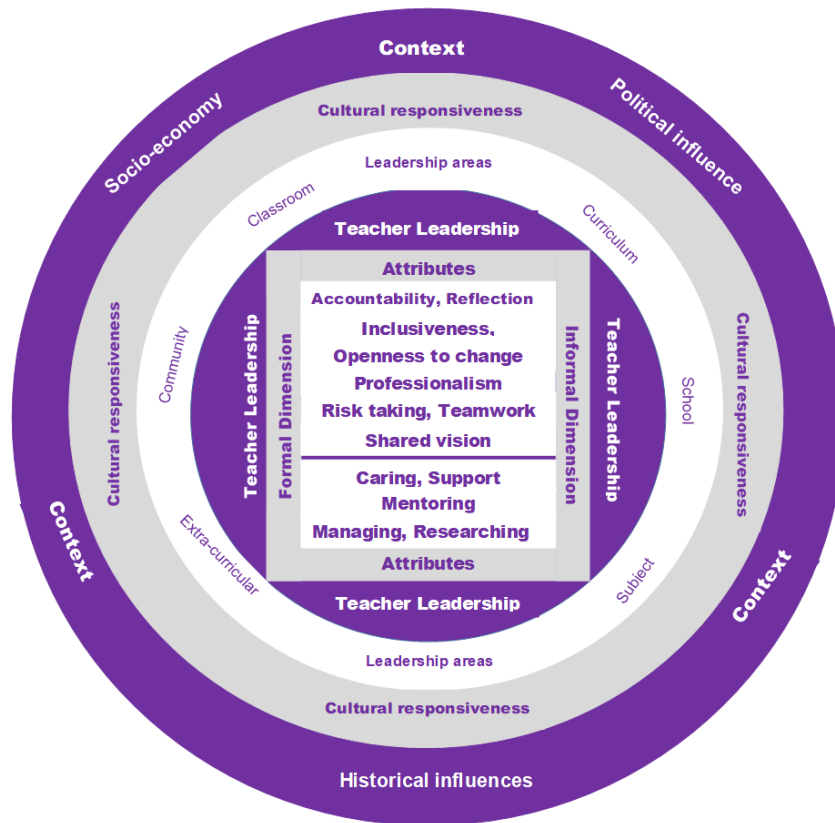


Figure 2.  
*Conceptualisation of TL*

## **Discussion and Implications**

### **Context and Cultural Responsiveness**

TL in South Africa can be conceptualised as depicted in Figure 2. Nearly half of the official documents placed emphasis on cultural responsiveness (Webber, 2018), focusing on democracy, non-discrimination, equality and racial, cultural, gender, language and religious issues. The focus was on the protection of everyone's human rights. This emphasis is a result of the historical, political and socio-economical context of South Africa. Context influences the conceptualisation and manifestation of leadership and TL, as indicated by different authors (e.g., De Villiers & Pretorius, 2012; Grant, Gardner, Kajee, Moodley & Somaroo, 2010; Hallinger, 2018). Grant et al. (2010, p. 405) rightfully acknowledged this aspect by stating, "Teacher leadership is likely to vary depending on the historical, cultural and institutional settings in which it is situated. This is particularly pertinent in South Africa where the apartheid legacy with its dysfunctional schooling system has 'not simply disappeared.'" In this sense, because of the context, not only is cultural responsiveness seen as an attribute of TL in the South African context, but it encapsulates all other attributes of TL as indicated in the second outer circle (Figure 2).

### **Areas of Teacher Leadership**

In the document analysis, different areas of TL were identified. First is the classroom, where the teacher leads both curriculum issues and teaching and learning. Second is the school, where the teacher leader provides leadership in the learning area or subject, in the school phase, department or extra-mural programme (including sports, culture, arts, etc.). Third, the teacher leader provides



leadership beyond the boundaries of the school in the community, acting as cluster leaders or serving learning area committees and extra-curricular committees.

These areas, indicated in the third outside circle of Figure 2, concur with the zones identified by Grant (2006, 2008) or areas highlighted by other authors (e.g. De Villiers & Pretorius, 2012; Grant et al., 2010; Gumede, 2011). In all these leadership areas, teacher leaders should show cultural responsiveness in their leadership of others.

### **Attributes of Teacher Leadership**

The attributes of teacher leaders (Webber, 2018) fall within both the formal and the informal dimensions of TL (Indicated in the centre of Figure 2). Whether or not appointed to formal leadership positions, teacher leaders should show these attributes. The attributes identified in the document analysis that correlated with the identified attributes of Webber (2018) include accountability, inclusiveness, openness to change, professionalism, reflection, risk taking, shared vision and teamwork.

Teacher leaders are *accountable* for learner performance (results), work performance, curriculum coverage, classroom discipline and quality of their work. Accountability goes hand in hand with the teacher leader being a professional. Accepting accountability will ensure sustained school performance. De Villiers and Pretorius (2011) indicated that accountability is embedded in the definition of TL. *Inclusiveness* as an attribute links TL to distributed leadership. In most documentation, emphasis was placed on the participation of teachers in decision-making. Mancoko (2015) points out the importance of shared decision-making or collective decision-making for the



realisation of TL. Participation in decision-making leads to greater organisational commitment, job satisfaction and productivity (Grant et al., 2010). Driescher (2016) went further and indicated that participation in decision-making ensures more commitment to the decisions made and creates relationships of trust. Inclusion further implies that teachers are part of decision-making structures within the school, for example serving on the school governing body, and taking part in the development of policies and establishing the code of conduct within the school. Therefore, school principals and school management teams should make sure that teachers are included in decision-making processes.

The attribute *openness to change* was only indicated by a few documents. Teacher leaders are described as agents of change in the literature (Driescher, 2016; Grant, 2006, 2019). Many authors not only see teacher leaders as change agents but accentuate that teacher leaders should initiate and lead change within the school (Driescher, 2016; Grant, 2006). In the words of Grant (2019, p. 48), "South African teachers in mainstream schools should initiate and lead change initiatives in the interests of learners and learning." The documents analysed placed great emphasis on *professionalism* as an attribute. There is a need for teachers to display professional behaviour in all their endeavours, promoting the professional standards of the teaching profession. In South Africa, all teachers should be registered as professionals with the South African Council for Educators in order to be appointed as teacher. Teachers should also uphold the code of professional ethics. Professional growth through development is a way of professionalising teaching and teachers should be exposed to development as leaders. Grant (2006, p. 528) claimed, "One way to restore the dignity and professionalism of teachers, is to develop a culture of TL and distributed leadership in



schools where teachers are able to reclaim their voices and where principals are able to regain their legitimacy.”

*Reflection* came to the fore as an important attribute of TL in the document analysis. Teacher leaders need to be reflective practitioners (De Villiers & Pretorius, 2011, 2012; Grant, 2019; Grant et al., 2010). Reflection implies being critical of one’s own practices; therefore, teacher leaders, apart from other aspects of reflection, should reflect on their own pedagogy (De Villiers & Pretorius, 2012).

*Risk taking* as an attribute of TL was identified in only one document. Acting as change agents, teacher leaders must come up with new ideas and initiatives and should be encouraged and feel safe taking risks. Grant (2006) indicates that TL is about courage and risk taking. De Villiers and Pretorius (2011) also encouraged teachers to take initiative. School management in South African schools should foster an environment in which teachers feel safe and are encouraged to propose new initiatives and take risks.

Working towards a *shared vision* is also seen as an attribute of TL (Webber, 2018) that became evident in the document analysis. Mancoko (2015) mentioned that one of the most important qualities of a teacher leader is to have a vision. When teachers are part of the vision development of the school, they share the responsibility of achieving this shared vision. As acknowledged by De Villiers and Pretorius (2011), teachers who collaborate in a shared vision, influence others for improved teaching and learning in the school. It is therefore important for school management to continuously revisit their vision for the school and to make teachers part of the process in establishing a new vision for the school.

*Teamwork* as an essential attribute of TL came to the fore in some of the documents. In the documents and other literature, teamwork is

also described as collaboration, first with the teachers in the school, but also with teachers from other schools (Grant, 2006). Teamwork and collaboration include sharing ideas, peer learning and team teaching. One of the skills attributed to teacher leaders is the ability to work with others (De Villiers & Pretorius, 2011). De Villiers and Pretorius (2012) rightfully claimed that collaboration contributes to school improvement and success through the development of new understandings and practices that are shared. It is essential that the school principal and management establish a culture within the school that promotes collaborative practice and collective decision making (Mancoko, 2015).

### **Emerging Attributes of Teacher Leadership**

The attributes discussed in the previous section corresponded to most of the attributes identified by Webber (2019). Attributes identified by Webber that were not identified in the document analysis were *advocacy* and *stability*. Attributes that may be more specific to the South African context of TL emerged from the document analysis.

The literature indicates that school management should establish a school culture that is supportive of TL (De Villiers & Pretorius, 2012); specifically, the role of the school principal in the support of TL is emphasised (Smylie & Eckert, 2018; Wenner & Campbell, 2017). *Support* was very prominent in the documentation – support from teacher leaders. According to the documents, teacher leaders should provide support to different stakeholders, including school management, fellow teachers, learners and parents, as well as stakeholders outside the school community. Support from teacher leaders is also acknowledged by the literature; however, emphasis is placed on support to fellow teachers (Cosenza, 2015; De Villiers &



Pretorius, 2012, Driescher, 2016; Hirsch & Bergmo-Prvulovic, 2019) and support to learners (Smylie & Eckert, 2018; Wenner & Campbell, 2017). Documentation indicated that teacher leaders should be *caring* towards others showing concern for fellow teachers and learners. De Villiers and Pretorius (2011) proclaim that teacher leaders should be caring and compassionate towards others. The caring of teacher leaders manifests in pastoral care (Gumede, 2011) that are mainly directed towards learners (Grant, 2019; York-Barr & Duke, 2004) and fellow teachers (De Villiers & Pretorius, 2012). Caring as an attribute of TL echoes in the words of Harris and Jones (2019, p. 123): “Good teachers are responsive to individual needs, are sensitive to the contexts in which they teach and care deeply about the young people in their charge.”

Teachers as leaders have the capability of being managers, specifically managing their classrooms and the learning process in the class. Apart from *managing* learning and the curriculum, teacher leaders should also be able to budget and manage resources. Driescher (2016) specifically mentioned that teacher leaders should be able to effectively manage the curriculum and the instructional programme. Being managers, teacher leaders should have administrative proficiency in terms of coordinating, managing time, delegating and monitoring the progress of learners (De Villiers & Pretorius, 2011). Teacher leaders need to be equipped for their management role through preservice and in-service training and development.

One of the attributes that emerged from the document analysis, which is acknowledged by many sources of literature, is the attribute of *mentorship*. Mentorship relates to the informal dimension of TL, where teachers take on the role of mentors and coaches of less

experienced or struggling colleagues in the school or other schools. Muijs and Harris (2007) indicated that teacher leaders should be mentors and that teachers' management skills could be enhanced through mentorship and coaching. Mentorship is seen by Grant et al. (2010) and Driescher (2016) as a core function of TL in the support and development of teachers. It is necessary for teacher leaders to be equipped for this important role.

The final attribute that emerged was *research and lifelong learners*. This attribute closely links to the reflective practice of teacher leaders. To be agents of change, teacher leaders should be involved in action research in their learning areas, identifying problems and evaluating new approaches and methodologies. In this regard, Grant (2006, p. 520) emphasised that teacher leaders should "continually research and evaluate their work to change and improve it." Teacher leaders should thus be equipped with skills to enable them to do action research, which should be incorporated in initial teacher training and professional development (Muijs & Harris, 2007).

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

Although TL is a relatively uncommon and under-researched phenomenon in South Africa, official Departmental documentation after 1994, with the establishment of democracy, directly and indirectly acknowledges TL. Teachers are encouraged by policy and legislation to take up their roles as leaders in their classrooms, schools and communities. Although TL does not replace the leadership of the principal, it supports the principal and the school management team in providing leadership in the school through the model of distributed leadership, contributing to sustained school improvement and success.



Most teachers in South Africa may still be unaware of the concept of TL and distributed leadership. Despite this fact, many teachers in South Africa already enact the role of teacher leaders without seeing themselves as leaders, as they are not appointed in formal leadership or managerial positions. The enactment of TL may still be confined, mainly to the classroom. Teachers in South Africa need to be made aware of, first, the concept of TL and, second, the areas, attributes and cultural responsiveness of TL.

Finally, they should be empowered to take up formal and informal leadership positions, as indicated by official documentation. This empowerment can happen through initial, preservice training as well as in-service professional development in the attributes and areas as identified in this research. Future research with regard to TL in South Africa should focus on the role of TL in addressing school change and improvement. TL could be the answer to many underperforming and dysfunctional schools in South Africa.

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## Reflexivity: An Essential Feature of Teacher Leadership in Mexico, Colombia and Spain<sup>1</sup>

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Abstract	Article Info
<p><i>This article presents a comparative analysis of educational policy documents on leadership and teacher development in Spain, Colombia, and Mexico, countries that are represented in the International Study of Teacher Leadership (ISTL) (Webber, 2018). We are comparing public policies in three participating countries that do not declare an explicit discourse on teacher leadership.</i></p> <p><i>This work presents some elements to answer whether teacher reflexivity is an essential attribute of teacher leadership, especially in highly complex contexts. To answer this question, we explored content on reflexivity in central public policy documents related to teachers and their professional development.</i></p> <p><i>We also reviewed academic materials related to teacher leadership. The results show that reflection is an appropriate category to explore the association between the international discourse on teacher leadership – especially in highly complex</i></p>	<p><b>Article History:</b>  <i>Received</i>                      February 16, 2020   <i>Accepted</i>                      September 9, 2020</p> <hr style="width: 50%; margin: 10px auto;"/> <p><b>Keywords:</b>  <i>Teacher leadership,                      Teacher reflexivity,                      Teacher development,                      Comparative research.</i></p>

<sup>1</sup> This report is based on research done as part of the *International Study of Teacher Leadership* conducted in Australia, Canada, China, Colombia, Mexico, Romania, South Africa, Spain, Tanzania, and Turkey. The multi-stage study commenced in 2018. For more information, see the study website: [www.mru.ca/istl](http://www.mru.ca/istl).



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*contexts –and the discourse in these countries on teacher development, without making any reference to the concept of teacher leadership.*

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### **Introduction**

The interest in the study of educational leadership, and particularly teacher leadership, emerged in the 1980s as a counterpoint to the results of the Coleman Report: “School doesn’t matter” (Coleman et al., 1966). Subsequent educational research led to an opposing position, which presents schools as “basic units for improvement,” leading to movements of “school effectiveness” and “school improvement” and later on, “improvement of school effectiveness” (Bolívar & Murillo, 2017). This evolution involved modifying teacher practice and adapting school organizations to such purposes (Hopkins, 2001). A Western understanding of leadership - with the United States and England as their places of origin - pervades such school contexts, linked to that of educational improvement: there is no improvement without leadership, and leadership without improvement has no direction (Weinstein, 2016; Weinstein & Muñoz, 2017). The importance of leadership is also associated with the need to empower the teaching profession, which has been subject to excessive control in the recent past. It is also associated with the evidence that genuine educational change is not achieved by prescriptions or mandates from a higher authority, but

rather that the importance of leadership is delivered in collaboration with the people (Hopkins, 2017).

From other geographical and theoretical references, the field of studies on teacher development has produced extensive research and teacher training proposals in the three centuries of history in Europe as well as in Latin America (Carr, 1996; Gimeno & Pérez, 1992; Tardif, 2004). In recent years, reflexivity on teacher learning and teaching profession -reflexivity understood as "the act of turning and looking inside oneself" (Ricoeur, 2002, p. 28)- has a broad consensus (Hirmas & Blanco, 2016; Poggi, 2013; Perrenoud, 2006). The proposal is that teachers should not continue to be regarded as mere executors of theories or strategies developed externally to their context of work and practice, but rather that they be considered professionals who interpret, build, and assign new meaning to their professional knowledge through reflection processes performed in action and on such action (Schön, 1998). Such critical assumptions are common in studies on leadership, as well as in studies on teacher reflection.

The analysis of the research done by Harris (2017) on teacher leadership has allowed us to identify a series of attributes on teacher leadership. Moreover, authors such as Flessa (2019), Bolívar & Murillo (2017) and Oplatka (2016) highlighted the importance of context in their studies on leadership, especially when such contexts are highly complex.

This work reports a cross-cultural exercise consisting of comparing the results of documentary research on public policies related to teacher development based on the category of teacher reflection. We are comparing public policies in three countries that do not declare an explicit discourse on teacher leadership: Spain, Colombia, and Mexico. The central assumption of this study is that





depending on the content and importance given in public policy to teacher reflection, we will be able to infer if these countries are promoting teacher leadership, explicitly or implicitly. We want to explore if reflexivity is considered as an essential attribute for teacher leadership, especially in highly complex contexts.

### Context of the Study

This work is developed in the context of *the International Study of Teacher Leadership (ISTL)* (Webber, 2018). The general purpose of this study is to contribute to the understanding of teacher leadership in ten countries<sup>2</sup> around the world. The early stage of the project was oriented towards the analysis of public policy to determine the country's vision of teacher leadership. The methodology in this stage was primarily deductive, drawn from predetermined categories by the leader of the study: accountability, advocacy, cultural responsiveness, inclusiveness, openness to change, professionalism, reflexivity, risk-taking, shared vision, stability, and teamwork (Webber, 2018).

One of the results of this stage of documentary analysis is the fact that public policy in Mexico, Spain, and Colombia share the lack of a discourse related to teacher leadership. This finding suggests the question of whether the lack of discourse on teacher leadership demonstrates that such content is absent, or whether different terms imply. To answer this question, we chose the central category on **reflexivity** in the study of teacher leadership, as this category had the most significant number of references in public policy documents in Mexico, and because it was evident in the papers in Colombia and

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<sup>2</sup> The participating countries in the ISTL are Canada, Mexico, Colombia, Spain, Romania, Turkey, China, Tanzania, South Africa, and Australia.

Spain. Moreover, teacher reflection has been considered significant in international studies related to the professionalization of teaching in the past three decades (Anderson, 2013; Poggi, 2013; Tardif, 2013).

First, we present an overview of relevant data related to each country in order to acknowledge the complexity of the challenges that schools, and teachers face in their political, social, and educational contexts.

Spain is organized in 17 autonomous communities under a parliamentary monarchy. Its GINI index (which measures the degree of inequality in the distribution of family income in a country) is 0.345; this means that income inequality levels are moderate. The proportion of international students is 8%, with a trend to increase; this represents one of the fundamental challenges to the system due the migration processes. On the other hand, in the past years, Spain has ranked 26 in the Human Development Index (The United Nations Development Program)-PNUD, 2018). The Global Impunity Index in Spain is an average level of 52.31 (Center of Studies on Impunity and Justice-CESIJ, 2017). Spain is in the 32<sup>nd</sup> place of the Global Peace Index (Institute for Economics and Peace-IEP, 2018). As a member of the European Union since 1986, Spain has adopted supranational policies and several agreements on school systems. The 2020 Strategic Plan leads the Spanish education system towards increased flexibility and equity of education, taking into consideration the elements of entrance, permanence, and results (Ministry of Education and Professions-MEFP, 2020).

Colombia is a unitary republic. It has a presidential system as its form of government. Its GINI index is 0.508, which reveals a much higher level of social inequality. The Colombian state has set a priority on the universalization of primary education for the past



decades, especially for the most vulnerable populations due to the high levels of poverty and social inequality, as well as the phenomenon of the internal guerrilla groups. Colombia has a high level of impunity, 66.57. (CESIJ, 2017). It is in the 145<sup>th</sup> place of the Global Peace Index with a score of 2661 (IEP, 2018). Some organizations, such as the United Nations (2019), recognize that Colombia suffers endemic violence. Their *Let's All Learn Program* is intended to increase the coverage and quality of education (National Ministry of Education-MEN, 2015).

Mexico is a federal republic -bordering the United States, Guatemala, and Belize- with a presidential system as the form of government. Its GINI index is 0.426, which accounts for significant levels of inequality. The National Survey on Demographic Dynamics (National Institute of Statistics and Geography-INEGI, 2018) reports that in Mexico, 18% of the total population is a domestic or foreign migrant. Mexico also has a high level of impunity, with a score of 69.21 (CESIJ, 2017). Regarding the Global Peace Index, Mexico is in the 140<sup>th</sup> place with a score of 2583 (IEP, 2018), which reflects very high levels of constant internal violence.

Both Political Constitutions of Colombia and Mexico recognize their citizens' ethnic and cultural plurality (National Constituent Assembly, 2019; Congress of the Union, 2019). However, both countries have had poor assessments in the Human Development Index in the past years (PNUD, 2018).

According to the information above, we could say that teaching practice in Mexico, Spain, and Colombia takes place in "difficult circumstances" in "complex contexts" or in "impoverished communities" (Flessa, 2019, p.318). Such circumstances bring us to present the need to promote a type of teacher leadership that allows

schools to be better prepared for the complex situations that students and the countries' development process demand.

### **Rationale**

This comparative analysis of educational policies related to teachers and their professional development in Spain, Mexico, and Colombia intends to explore the construction of the attribute on teacher reflexivity. Moreover, it seeks to present it as a possible category that will allow the association of the discourse on teacher leadership in contexts of high complexity with that of teachers and their professional development, as such policies do not present explicit references to teacher leadership. In the case of Spain, "a search in institutional documents for the words 'leader' and 'lead,' found no results" (Gratacós, Ladrón de Guevara, & Rodríguez, 2019, p. 732). On the other hand, a study from Colombia reports: "The document analysis carried out so far indicates that 'leadership' is mainly conceptualized in terms of the role performed by principals and hierarchical figures" (Pineda, 2019, p. 743). In this preliminary review, Mexico reports that 'teacher leadership' does not appear as an explicit concern in Mexican politics. (Fierro & Fortoul, 2019)<sup>3</sup>.

This taken into account, the interest of this study is to pinpoint whether public policies in these countries promote teacher leadership, considering that there is an essential reference to teacher reflexivity, even if there is not an explicit reference to the concept of leadership.

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## Conceptual Framework

The methodological-epistemological perspective of the interpretative research focuses on analyzing the description of a phenomenon without addressing its causes or consequences. We share a non-neutral epistemological assumption of critical theory that acknowledges the dependence of social and cultural reality in social phenomena (Tello, 2012). This study incorporates notions of philosophy, sociology, psycho-pedagogy, and institution management.

We have conducted empirical work based on the analysis of public policy documents, with prefixed categories, and we will interpret such public policy using these categories. The analysis involves coding the information whilst contrasting it to generate new categories, in order to allow the emergence of new hypothesis or recurring relationships among categories emerged (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

## Summary of Relevant Literature

### Teacher Leadership

In Latin America, the topic of educational leadership was marginal in school management until the 1980s, when it became a central aspect of educational improvement. It became relevant, once principals stopped being regarded as mere staff who had to apply standards, programs, and policies in their institutions; and started being recognized as proactive and assertive actors who need to drive deeper processes for pedagogical change (Weinstein & Muñoz, 2017). Currently, there are vigorous academic debates and questions around the concept of educational leadership. However, there is still no

consensus on the scope of its performance, the actors who implement it, nor the factors or critical conditions to deploy or inhibit such processes within school organizations (Webber, 2018; Weinstein & Muñoz, 2017; Consensa, 2015; Leithwood, 2007; York-Barr & Duke, 2004).

This same situation is present in teacher leadership, whereas its interpretation and comprehension are incredibly diverse (Harris & Mujs, as cited in Harris, 2017). The study of teacher leadership is a Western construction of its definition, orientation, and interpretation. However, “most academics agree that teacher leadership is present inside and outside the classroom to pervade in the pedagogical practice of the whole school” (Harris, 2017, p. 234).

Considering all the characteristics of teacher leadership proposed by Harris (2017), we select the following important aspects of teacher leadership, which are also shared by other authors:

(a) *The influence played in the actions and in the beliefs of directors and colleagues as well as when defining common goals*, (Anderson, 2004; Rutherford, 2006; Sato, Hyler & Monte-Sano, 2014; York-Barr & Duke, 2004).

(b) *This influence is based on the credibility of their teaching practice*, which is the result of their expertise in curricular content and in their classroom pedagogical skills (Angelle & Dehart, 2010; Rutherford, 2006; Wells, 2012).

(c) *Reflection is the fundamental tool for developing teacher leadership*: the intentional exercise in reflecting on the teaching practice and to focus on the construction of meaning is the way to find new meanings and to adjust practices to the needs of each specific learning context (Anderson, 2008; Lambert, 2003).



(d) *Such influence might be individual or collective, it might be formal or informal, and it can be found inside or outside the classroom* (Anderson, 2004; Katzenmeyer & Moller 2001; Patterson & Patterson, 2004; York-Barr & Duke, 2004).

(e) *The primary purpose of this influence is to improve or transform teaching practice* (Chew & Andrew, 2010; Katzenmeyer & Moller 2001; Patterson & Patterson, 2004; Sato, Hyler & Monte-Sano, 2014; Vermon-Dotson & Floyd, 2012; York-Barr & Duke, 2004).

(f) *The influence exerted it is oriented to encourage a learning community in the school, sheltered by an environment of trust* (Chew & Andrew, 2010; Katzenmeyer & Moller 2001; Lambert, 2003; Vermon-Dotson & Floyd, 2012).

### **Teacher Leadership in Highly Complex Contexts**

Research on school leadership in Latin America is subject to many tensions, as most studies are based on models or frameworks developed in foreign locations (Flessa, 2019). Consequently, such studies do not focus on the challenges faced by Latin America (Oplatka, 2019), which do not allow for a local endorsement on the research (Aravena y Hallinger, 2018). In this sense, there is a need for a framework on school leadership that reflects regional realities, where the notion of leadership “in difficult circumstances” is highlighted, or leadership in “complex contexts” or in “impoverished communities” (Flessa, 2019, p. 318). This realization is a shared perspective among other authors, such as Bolívar and Murillo (2017): “More often teachers and specialists around the world demand that the school becomes a privileged space to fight against social injustice

(...). Sure, to improve, but en route... to where?" (Bolívar & Murillo, 2017, p.90).

This approach questions the perspective of the existence of a group of individual leadership attributes that are universal and that these attributes may be executed anywhere, independently of the context. But the context does matter. Specific leadership skills and resources need to be adapted to each local context (Braun, Ball, Maguire, & Hoskins, 2011; Clarke & O'Donoghue, 2017; Pollock & Winton, 2015).

Considering the importance of the context in teacher and school leadership, as well as recognizing "high-complexity contexts", we can highlight the significance of two of the elements we have mentioned before:

(c) *Learning for everyone entails "a reflexive exercise to build the adequate answers to specific contexts"* (Poggi, 2018)

(f) *Promoting inclusion and learning for everyone will only be possible when schools become learning professional communities* (Bolívar & Murillo, 2017)

We can also add a new aspect related to teacher leadership:

(g) The primary purpose of the influence that teacher leaders exercise for improving or transforming teacher practice in high-complex contexts requires to be aligned towards *promoting the inclusion and education for everyone, avoiding exclusion, marginalization, and discrimination* (Bolívar & Murillo, 2017).

In summary, our vision of teacher leadership in contexts of inequality and highly complex contexts includes the following aspects:





Table 1.

*Attributes of Teacher Leadership in high-complex contexts*

1. The influence exercised in the actions and beliefs of their colleagues and directors and when defining goals.
2. Credibility is the basis of such influence in teaching practice, as a result of the teacher's expertise in curricular content and the teacher's pedagogy skills.
3. Reflection is the fundamental tool for developing teacher leadership in order to adjust teaching practice to the needs of each specific learning context and developing adequate answers.
4. This influence can be present in an individual or in a collective level. It can be formal or informal, and it can take place inside or outside the classroom.
5. The primary purpose of this influence is the improvement or transformation of teaching practice.
6. The influence exerted is oriented to encourage a learning professional community in the school, sheltered by an environment of trust.
7. The improvement or transformation of teaching practices in highly complex contexts has to be aimed towards promoting inclusion, learning for everyone, avoiding exclusion, marginalization, and discrimination.

These attributes, resulting from the research in this field, offer the elements to operationalize the concept of "teacher leadership." Therefore, these attributes help us establish the links with other discourses in public policies that mention these same components without necessarily addressing the concept of "teacher leadership."

## Reflexivity as an Essential Element of Teacher Leadership in Highly Complex Contexts

Exercising teacher leadership in the daily life of schools requires implementing specific strategies. Gaynor (2018) and King (2017) stated that reflexivity is a key component of teacher leadership:

*Leadership is an area closely linked to reflection, and this course has emphasized the importance of being a leader figure and taking the initiative and the risks. From trying new methods and strategies, we then need to reflect and see what went well and what could be improved (King, 2017, p. 22).*

The function of reflexive practice is to unveil the tacitly assumed routine in the individual and the collective action for teachers to become aware and conscious of such routines. "Critical reflection means to pause consciously, to stop daily routines and to question oneself about one's ideas and actions, and the ideas and actions of others" (Ryan, 2016, p. 127).

Reflexivity consists of "the act of turning and looking inside oneself, by which individuals acknowledge the principles of those operations in which they lose themselves as individuals, with intellectual clarity and moral responsibility" (Ricoeur, 2002, p. 28). Reflexivity further promotes individuals' autonomy concerning their own beliefs, perceptions, conceptions, and behaviors, as well as their relationship with the social mechanisms of power (Giddens, 2006; Schön, 1998).

Teacher reflexivity has deep roots in socio-educational literature on teacher development and adult education (Carr, 1996; Dewey, 1989; Freire, 1969; Gimeno & Perez, 1992; Schön, 1998; Zeichner & Liston, 1990). Reflexivity is based on the modern and contemporary philosophical approaches as well as the sociological approaches (Ponce, 2009). It is considered by Giddens (2006),



Heidegger (1971), and Ricoeur (2002) as an indispensable quality of humankind as a social being, driven by specific subjective intentions.

Van Manen (1997) raises three levels of depth in teacher reflexivity. The first one is related to the technical application of knowledge to achieve a specific purpose; it tends towards the efficiency and effectiveness of the means for particular purposes. The second level seeks to promote “the analysis and clarification of individual and cultural experiences, meanings, perceptions and assumptions, prejudices and presuppositions to guide practical actions” (p. 226). The third level is related to the possibility of reflecting on the moral and ethical implications of teaching practices, in favor of equity, justice, freedom and critical reflection on institutional spaces, and their management of authority and power. This last level is the one that enables a change in the personal positioning of one's professional practice (Fierro & Fortoul, 2017), and thus it needs to be promoted to develop teacher leadership.

### **Reflection and Teacher Development**

In the three countries studied, teacher reflexivity is considered part of teacher development. Consequently, we believe it is vital to include a concise reference to the association between reflexivity and teacher development. An essential element of teacher development is to continue learning; teacher development is not merely about training, but rather life-long learning, which is known as educational formation. Educational formation differs from training as transmission and socialization (Ferry 1997).

The concept of educational formation has been elaborated by philosophers for over five centuries, taking the Latin root of “form” and considering it a process as well as a final result (Gadamer, 1997).

For the past 25 years, reflexivity emerged as a salient topic in teacher development programs, as educators want to be considered and be educated as teaching professionals who are continuously building knowledge around their profession (Hirmas & Banco, 2016). According to Ferry (1997), educational formation needs to focus mainly on generating spaces for reflexivity as well as for the development of critical thinking skills, which are essential to ensure that teachers build their professional paths. Arendt (2009) argued that educational formation is a human activity in which experience and reflection play an important role.

### Methodology

The methodology followed was primarily deductive, drawn from one of the predetermined categories within the ISTL (Webber, 2018): reflexivity. According to the several stages of comparative research, and as proposed by Bereday (1968), this exercise is located in Phase III: Juxtaposition. This phase identifies similarities and differences among diverse cases of study, without altering the logic and internal organization of each of the cases, and it is carried out according to comparable criteria. The phase of juxtaposition allows establishing relationships among data without losing the reference to specific contexts as if such were isolated facts (Schriever, 1993). For that reason, we provide some general information related to each country: Colombia, Mexico, and Spain. We selected key public policy documents related to teacher development:

1) Colombia: (a) The *Colombian System for Teacher development and Policy Guidelines* defines the national conception that governs teachers' professional development and presents the principles, objectives, and particularities of each of the subsystems; (b) the



*Resolution of the Ministry of Education (MEN) of June 30, 2010*, which sets out the characteristics of the expected level of quality of teacher development programs, including the model of a *Teacher Profile*.

2) Mexico: (a) The *National Educational Model* is the document that is currently organizing national curriculum in the pedagogical arena and in every administrative aspect; (b) the *Teacher's Evaluation: Profile, Parameters, and Assessment Indicators* sets the parameters for the access, permanence, and advancement in the teaching profession; (c) the *Curriculum for Basic Education Teacher Training for Primary Education*, provides the guidelines for curriculum development for those educators who teach students ages 6-12.

3) Spain: (a) The *White Paper on the Reform of the Educational System*, presents Spain's Education System and its new configuration, as well as the primary factors and processes that organize it; (b) the *Lines of Action* to address the definition of a professional teaching model; (c) the information recovered from the Eurydice database related to the Higher Education Professional Teacher Development Program, as well as its corresponding elements for management.

Once the documents were identified, all references to "teacher reflexivity" were perused and then categorized according to their content, the targeted individuals, the aspects of the teaching practice subject to reflection, the primary purposes, and the disciplinary frameworks that influence teacher reflection. These aspects were used as the criteria to compare the cases under study. Furthermore, the levels of reflexivity promoted in each instance of the study were inferred according to Van Manen's (1997) approach to the levels of depth in teacher reflexivity, as we presented it previously, and considering the attributes of teacher leadership in highly complex contexts that result from the literature review.

## **Findings**

The study's focus was to identify the aspects of reflexivity referred to as central elements of teaching. In the following Table we present the review of the public policy documents:

### **Disciplinary Frameworks Considered in Teacher Reflexivity**

Table 2 shows that teacher reflexivity is a central element to teacher leadership. All three countries address it from a multidisciplinary perspective related to didactics (reflecting on the objectives, contents, teaching strategies, and evaluation techniques); to sociology (analyzing socio-cultural contexts and matters that need to be taken into account in the classroom); to pedagogy (reflecting on the different types of interactions among the members of the school community); and to psychology (analyzing the psycho-evolutionary and personal characteristics of students). However, there is not a perspective related to philosophy (reflecting on the goals of education, the epistemology, anthropology, or ethics of educational practice) in any of the countries. At the same time, the perspective related to sociology focuses primarily on knowing the context rather than reflecting on how the context affects the educational process, equality, or justice.



Table 2.

*Disciplinary Frameworks Considered in Teacher Reflexivity*

<b>Disciplinary Frameworks for Reflexivity</b>	<b>Colombia</b>	<b>Spain</b>	<b>Mexico</b>
Philosophical			
Didactics	X	X	X
Pedagogical	X	X	X
Sociological	X	X	X
Psychological	X	X	X

**Areas Considered as the Object of Teacher Reflexivity**

Table 3 shows that all three countries refer to teacher reflexivity aimed to analyze what happens within the classrooms, schools, and local communities. They consider key aspects of teacher leadership, acknowledging it as an influence – both inside and outside the classroom – and that it inquires, deliberates, and promotes answers that respond to the local contexts and the need of education for everyone. At the same time, none of the countries contemplates that teachers should be involved in curricular matters such as study plans or programs, evaluation systems, or other related aspects. Moreover, they do not mention that teachers should reflect on the organization nor on structural matters of the educational system.

Table 3.

*Areas Considered as the Object of Teacher Reflexivity*

Area	Colombia	Spain	Mexico
Classroom	X	X	X
School	X	X	X
Local community (social and community environment)	X	X	X
Curriculum			
Educational System			

**Goals for Teacher Reflexivity**

Table 4 shows that teacher reflexivity is a critical element to professionalize teaching practice, in particular, the teaching practice that improves students learning outcomes. It is also considered a much-needed resource for the continuous advancement of teaching performance. In Mexico and Colombia, the discourse on the professionalization of teaching is present since the 1980s (Bolívar, 2010). This discourse presents teacher reflexivity as one of the political-pedagogical strategies that contributes to the recognition of teachers in regard to other professions that are socially consolidated, such as medicine, law, engineering. On the other hand, the three countries refer to reflexivity as a device for teacher education, both in initial and continuing professional development (MEN, 2013; SEP-Ministry of Public Education, 2012, 2017; MEFP-Ministry of Education and Professional Training, 2018). Only Mexico refers to reflexivity as an attribute in the descriptors of the *Teaching Profile* (SEP, 2016).





Table 4.

*Goals for Teaching Reflexivity*

<b>Purposes</b>	<b>Colombia</b>	<b>Spain</b>	<b>Mexico</b>
Component of the Teaching Profile			X
Professionalization	X		X
Teacher development	X	X	X

**Targets for Teacher Reflexivity**

Table 5 shows that teaching practice, students, their learning outcomes, and the socio-economic and cultural contexts of schools are referred to as the objects of teacher reflexivity. Thus, they implicitly recognize teacher leadership, highlighting its orientation in favor of inclusion, education for everyone, and building environments of trust through teaching practice, both inside and outside the classroom.

All three countries recognize the importance of teacher reflexivity rooted within teaching practice. Spain stresses the importance of developing a reflexive practice rather than maintaining a normative orientation in educators' teaching practice (MEFD 2018). Research on teaching practice as an element for improving student learning outcomes is the line of action, which entails recording, analyzing, and explaining teaching practice. Only Colombia will refer to reflexivity as a component to promote the autonomy of teachers (MEN, 2013), and it is connected to matters of inclusion and non-violence. Finally, the documents suggest that reflexivity is an essential element in situated teaching practice. This suggestion allows us to deepen the understanding of educational situations and problems in specific contexts (SEP, 2012) and to interpret the reality

under critical assumptions (MEN, 2013). All of the above describes a reliable reference to the aspects of teacher leadership in highly complex contexts, without necessarily using the specific term of 'leadership.'

Table 5.

*Targets for Teacher Reflexivity*

<b>Individuals and aspects</b>	<b>Colombia</b>	<b>Spain</b>	<b>Mexico</b>
Students	X	X	X
Teachers and their professional identity			X
Teachers and their teaching practice	X	X	X
Teachers and their autonomy	X		
The context where teaching practice is performed	X	X	X

**Levels of Reflexivity Mentioned in Discourse on Teacher Practices and Teacher Development**

We used Van Manen's (1997) classification with its three levels of depth in teacher reflexivity (See Table 6.) In their educational policy, all three countries contemplate clear statements on teacher reflexivity as a resource for good teaching practices. Both at the first level concerning the application of knowledge to specific situations and populations, as well as at a deeper level, of identifying and valuing their own beliefs, assumptions, and prejudices – among other aspects – to assess and adjust their teaching practice.

These two levels of reflexivity refer to the elements of a deliberate exercise to identify improvements in teaching practices marked by inclusion and focused on learning, as well as in the influence of individual and collective work. Only Colombia addresses



the third level, noting the importance of promoting the ethical-political reflection of teachers based on the criteria of equity and justice. In terms of teacher leadership, this entails a recognition that teachers are fundamental actors who are capable of influencing and leading in schools, and in the processes for peace in a context of a country marked by an internal armed conflict:

*Today more than ever, education in the human condition is called for as the first field for healthy coexistence and peace. It entails reflecting on the recognition of differences, educational inclusion, the demands for the understanding of interculturality, the diversity of ways of living, and being in the world... as essential foundations for peaceful coexistence. (MEN, 2013, p. 90)*

Table 6.

*Levels of Reflexivity in the Discourse on Teacher Practices and Teacher Development*

Levels of reflection (Van Manen, 1997)	Colombia	Spain	Mexico
1 Application of knowledge for specific achievements	X	X	X
2 Analysis clarification on beliefs to guide the actions of teaching practice	X	X	X
3 Ethical-political reflection on teaching practice concerning equity and justice	X		

### Elements of Teacher Leadership in Highly Complex Contexts

Finally, in Table 7 we summarize the elements of teacher leadership in highly complex contexts, as found in public policy documents in these three countries. We found that 6 of the 7 elements of teacher leadership we inferred have a reference in such materials: the influence resulting of the teaching practice, in the individual or collective level, inside or outside the classroom; the expertise in

contents and pedagogical management; an intentional exercise of teaching practice improvement which is aimed towards inclusion and education for everyone. Only Spanish documents mention the element of building learning communities related to reflection.

**Table 7.**

*Elements of Teacher Leadership in Highly Complex Contexts*

Elements of teacher leadership	Colombia	Spain	Mexico
1. Influence in the actions and beliefs	X	X	X
2. Credibility of their teaching practice	X	X	X
3. Reflection is the fundamental tool for developing teacher leadership in order to adjust teaching practice to the needs of each specific learning context and developing adequate answers	X	X	X
4. The influence can be present in an individual or collective level, formally or informally, inside and outside the classroom	X	X	X
5. The primary purpose is the improvement or transformation of teaching practices	X	X	X
6. The influence exerted it is oriented to encouraging a learning professional community in an environment of trust	X		
7. The promotion of inclusion and education for everyone avoiding exclusion, marginalization, and discrimination.	X	X	X

### Discussion and Implications

The results show that reflection is an appropriate category to explore the association between the international discourse on teacher leadership and the discourse in these three countries on teacher development, without making any reference to the concept of teacher leadership. The educational policy in Spain, Mexico, and



Colombia concurs in granting an essential place to teacher reflection, directly linked to 6 of the 7 elements considered in the literature that were analyzed regarding teacher leadership (Bolívar & Murillo, 2017; Harris, 2017). (Refer to Table 7). In this sense, the information suggests that if one of the features reported in teacher leadership literature is related to reflexivity, then, Spain, Mexico, and Colombia share this fundamental aspect broadly, whilst not correlating it directly, with the concept of teacher leadership.

We have stated that reflection facilitates intellectual clarity and moral responsibility (Ricoeur, 2002), which become an essential element in teaching as a profession. Reflexivity allows setting routines apart to be able to change tradition through innovation (Ryan, 2016;). Being conscious of the thought behind the practice supports individual autonomy with respect to their own beliefs, perceptions, and behaviors, as well as with the social mechanism of power (Giddens, 2006; Schön 1998). Moreover, promoting critical skills favors the development of one's identity model of being a teacher (Ferry, 1997). Therefore, reflection is the engine that moves self-development in a practice that needs to reinvent itself constantly because of its relational character, its complexity, and the fact that many times it takes place in highly complex environments (Fierro & Fortoul, 2017). Thus, reflecting is a resource without which a teacher may never truly achieve an authentic professional performance (Bolívar, 2010, Poggi, 2013, 2018).

The above allows us to affirm that teacher leadership requires reflection as a primary tool. An additional argument is the recognition of the individuals as actors and main characters of an educational change, which is not thoroughly achieved by prescriptions or control systems (Hopkins, 2017; Weinstein & Muñoz,

2017), but by the inquiry in action theory involved in the teaching practice (Robinson, 2016).

However, although all three countries studied have fixed importance to teacher reflexivity, they do so with different emphases and a discourse that is not homogeneous. Following Bereday (1968) and Schriever (1993), regarding the comparative research methodology, we are in the phase of juxtaposition, where we try to find similarities and differences resulting from the comparative analysis, considering the particularities of each of the study cases. Some circumstances in each country might help us explain the differences found in public policies related to teacher reflexivity and teacher leadership. For example, there is little pedagogical discourse in the case of Spain. It is rather an executive discourse, which is understood in the context of the country's political organization through autonomous communities that have education as one of their responsibilities (Barrón & García, 2018).

In contrast, Colombia presents a discourse in critical pedagogy and emancipation. Teacher reflexivity is an essential element that makes teacher autonomy salient and possible, a matter that is not referred to in any of the other countries. Leadership is highlighted in the pedagogical and social levels, within the classroom and the school, as the teacher is considered a social agent (MEN, 2013; 2015), given the context of inequality in Colombia, which is even greater than that of Mexico. All references to teacher reflexivity as a situated practice, which is contextual and focused on the attention of vulnerable sectors explains why reflexivity can be considered as an element of teacher leadership (see Table 4; MEN, 2013).

Mexico prioritizes the pedagogical aspects of teacher leadership, such as content expertise, classroom management, and the capability



of teachers to identify and address students' needs. This position can be understood by the fact that Mexico's educational system has not achieved a "regular minimum performance", especially in regard to the existence and distribution of resources, regular attendance, punctuality of teachers and students, the effective use of instructional time in the classroom, and student participation (Fierro & Fortoul, 2019; SEP, 2017). The expectation is that teachers are capable of discerning the school curriculum taking into consideration the diversity of their students, and that their teaching practice acknowledges interculturality and promotes inclusion (SEP, 2017).

### **Conclusion**

The results allow us to assert that reflexivity is an essential attribute of teacher leadership, especially in highly complex contexts. Recognizing the undertakings of working in highly complex contexts favors a dialogue between the studies that might be developed in Latin America with that of research produced in other regions around the world. Such dialogue expects an understanding of the diversity in contexts and the particular economic, political, and social dynamics which generate different expressions in exercising leadership. It also highlights the priority of elements such as inclusion, education for everyone, the avoidance of every form of exclusion, marginalization, and discrimination, as essential elements in teacher leadership. These elements are a particular contribution from research developed in Latin America, in relation to the Western studies on leadership.

Bringing some elements of the discourse into a dialogue among different disciplines and academic traditions, as a theoretical exercise in teacher leadership and education formation, suggests that both the

English and Spanish-speaking world literature has been enriched by the contributions of the studies on reflexivity and educational formation. The literature on educational formation is rooted in philosophical and socio-anthropological foundations that collect long-standing traditions of thought; it gives great importance to the understanding of the phenomenon whereby a teacher may develop pedagogical trajectories on the path of teacher leadership. This is a phenomenon in which reflexivity represents an essential device: it offers direction about the scope, approaches, and moments for development of teacher leaders.

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## Exploring the Concept of Teacher Leadership through a Document Analysis in the Australian Context

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### Abstract

*This paper focuses on a document analysis for an Australian case study, which contributes to a larger international study on teacher leadership. The aim of this paper is to ascertain how teacher leadership is understood and conceptualised from an Australian documentary perspective spanning the national, state, regional, and local education administrative levels. A document analysis framework stipulated by the larger study identified the attributes of teacher leadership. Twenty-one documents were analysed and the attributes in relation to five considerations impacting teacher leadership are discussed. Results indicated differences of dominant attributes across each of the levels: however, accountability and advocacy are consistently represented. Accountability filters through all four levels. The system is beginning to advocate and acknowledge pathways to leadership. At the state level, teacher leadership is strengthened through professional and collaborative practices. However, this paper suggests this is not consistently evident at the regional and local levels due to a number of pertinent organisational issues.*

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### **Introduction**

The importance of leadership in schools is recognised as a critical factor positively impacting student learning (Harris & Jones, 2015; Hattie, 2015; Robinson, 2008). Additionally, teacher leadership is instrumental in school reform whereby teachers' roles in collaborative decision making ultimately influence the success of students (Campbell et al., 2015). Beyond school reform and improving student outcomes, Coggins and McGovern (2014) emphasized that teacher leadership is also crucial to extending the professional growth of teachers who wish to remain in the classroom. Furthermore, they stated that teacher practice is positively impacted by teacher leaders who influence their colleagues to take a lead in policy making decision.

However, the definition of what constitutes teacher leadership and how this manifest across school settings remains ambiguous. Although it is clear that many teachers serve as leaders, schools have traditionally relied on a hierarchical system where leadership responsibilities appear to be clearly demarcated and reinforce the idea of the top-down approach (Harris, 2003). This is contrary to the idea that teachers serve a pivotal role as agents of change through collaborative, informed decision making.

## Context of the Study<sup>1</sup>

Teacher leadership is not a new phenomenon. Past research has highlighted the legitimacy of teacher leadership worldwide and is often viewed as teachers undertaking various formal and informal leadership roles within their schools (Crowther et al., 2009; Frost, 2011; Lieberman, 2015; Wenner & Campbell, 2017). However, it is unclear how the construct of teacher leadership is conceptualised across countries. Whilst in some countries there is evidence of initiatives to develop teacher leadership for promoting school reform (Frost, 2011), Pineda-Báez et al. (2019) noted that research on the conceptualisation of teacher leadership across different countries is sparse.

Over the past decade in Australia, there has been significant investment in improving the quality of school leadership at both the government and school system level (Wyatt, 2018). Increased system expectations for schools and school leaders demand that leaders are upholding an education that is accessible and tailored to each student's needs (Robinson, 2011). Whilst this presents many challenges, it reaffirms that quality leadership counts. Therefore, this paper aims to understand how teacher leadership is defined and stated from a documentary perspective through four administrative levels (See Figure 1).

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<sup>1</sup> This report is based on research done as part of the International Study of Teacher Leadership conducted in Australia, Canada, China, Colombia, Mexico, Romania, South Africa, Spain, Tanzania, and Turkey. The multi-stage study commenced in 2018. For more information, see the study website: [www.mru.ca/istl](http://www.mru.ca/istl).

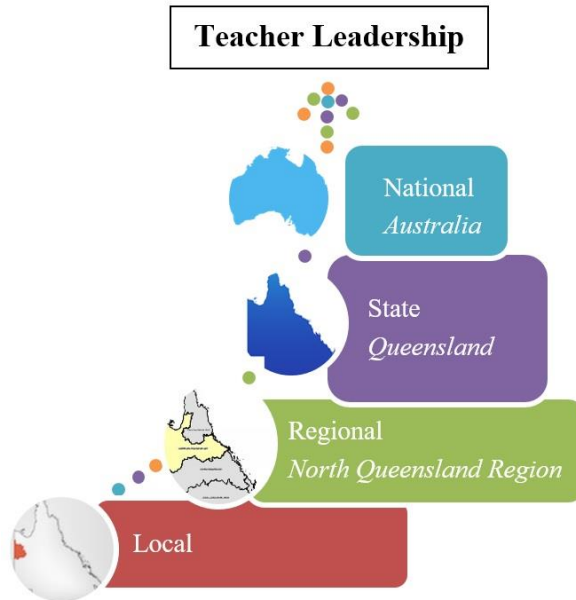


Figure 1.

*The Four Administrative Levels*

First considered is the national level, then Queensland as one of the states of Australia, followed by the regional level of North Queensland as one of seven educational regions in the state, and finally, one local state primary school within that region of North Queensland.

**Rationale**

Whilst there have been many different initiatives across school systems worldwide, leadership is constructed from various perspectives, such as the context and teacher capacity for leadership. Results from the Teaching and Learning International Survey (The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2009) found that the prevalence of instructional leadership practices

varies across countries with countries such as Brazil, Poland, and Slovenia demonstrating higher evidence than countries such as Estonia and Spain. In a cross-country study by Pineda-Báez et al. (2019), significant differences of the impact of teacher leadership were found in a comparison of three countries. Although the ultimate goal of all three countries was positive student impact, it found that empowerment of teacher leadership through collaboration was more evident in the Canadian and Australian case studies than the third case study in Colombia. Consequently, there were deliberate structures and processes established in the Canadian and Australian cases to facilitate teacher leadership, whereas the processes in Colombia were informally actioned by teachers.

Within Australia, the importance and role of teacher leadership has been at the forefront of government and teaching union agendas. The establishment of the Highly Accomplished and Lead Teacher classification (Queensland Teacher's Union [QTU], 2018b) driven by enterprise bargaining with the Queensland Government, realises remuneration among the highest professional teacher salaries in Australia. These classifications recognise lead teachers as teachers who are "recognised and respected exemplary teachers. They initiate and lead activities/projects focused on improving outcomes for students. They support colleagues to expand teaching practice" (QTU, 2018b, p. 1). However, Danielson (2006) stated that these types of classifications and formal teacher leadership roles differ from leadership that emerges spontaneously from teachers. These roles are considered complementary to administrative decision making or leadership distribution. Danielson (2006) argues that true teacher leaders are those who spontaneously collaborate with colleagues in



response to a school need. Thus, the varying definition of teacher leadership and how it is conceptualised in different contexts remains.

This paper focuses specifically on how teacher leadership is conceptualised and understood in the Australian school context at a national to a local administrative level. The study uses a document analysis and is intended as an addition to the data compiled in a larger Australian case study to address a gap in understanding of teacher leadership and ultimately will contribute to a broader understanding of teacher leadership as explored in the International Study of Teacher Leadership ([www.mru.ca/istl](http://www.mru.ca/istl)) project.

### **Conceptual Framework**

Wenner and Campbell (2017) referred to teacher leadership as an umbrella term representing innumerable roles and titles. The Queensland Department of Education (DoE, 2019b) referred to a number of teacher filled positions including instructional coach, coordinator, representative, mentor, master teacher, senior teacher, experienced senior teacher, highly accomplished teacher, and lead teacher. These titles may also differ across schools. However, existing literature has identified a lack of clarity around the definitions of teacher leadership (Campbell et al., 2015; Pangan & Lupton, 2015) even though numerous key attributes of teacher leadership and teacher leaders appear consistently across the literature. Ultimately, these attributes represent teachers leading learning in some way and this is recognised worldwide as a current area of change through professional development, school improvement, school culture, and leadership formality (Conway, 2015; Crowther, 2015; Sterrett, 2015).

Table 1 summarizes 11 emerging attributes from the literature on teacher leadership identified in a review by Webber (2018).

Further, Webber (2018) suggested a number of considerations also emerged from the literature. These included, for example, context, leadership capacity, group dynamics, evidence-based, and political beliefs. The relationship between attributes and considerations represents the framework that was subsequently used in this study for the data collection and analysis as stipulated by the research design for the international study by Webber (2018).

Table 1.

*Attributes Underlying Teacher Leadership*

Attribute	Assumptions	Authors
Accountability	Take responsibility for outcomes	Boone, 2015
	Evaluation and progress monitoring provide focus	Owens, 2015
		Webber & Scott, 2012
Advocacy	Focus on Student learning needs	Bauman, 2015
	Teacher leadership has an activist dimension	Conway, 2015
		Lambert, 2003
Cultural responsiveness	Curricula and pedagogy should include students identities have been insufficiently considered	Nieto, 2015
Inclusiveness	Teachers should be part of decision making	Bauman, 2014
	Career stages are considered	Pangan & Lupton, 2015
		Steffy et al., 2000
Openness to change	Go beyond enculturation to build capacity for transformation	Pangan & Lupton, 2015
Professionalism	Teaching is an ethical activity	Davis et al., 2015
	Teachers are the single largest influence on students' academic achievement	Lambert, 2003
		Nieto, 2015
Reflection	Reflective practice should be ongoing	Carr, 2015
Risk-taking	Safety and trust are important	Lambert, 2003
Shared vision	Alignment of goals and mission are valued	Bond, 2015
		Boone, 2015



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Stability	Practices should be sustainable	Conway, 2015
	Professional learning	Conway, 2015
Teamwork	communities provide a venue for collaboration	Jackson et al., 2010

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*Adapted from "A rationale and proposed design for researching teacher leadership", by C. F. Webber, 2018. Paper presented at the International Research Conference, Faculty of Education at Guangxi Normal University, Guilin, China, May 26-27, 2018.*

### **Related Literature**

#### **Why Teacher Leadership?**

The list of challenges in Australian school education are numerous and extensive. Masters (2016) highlighted that the literacy and numeracy levels of Australian students are steadily declining and there is an obvious and increasing disparity in educational outcomes for students from differing socioeconomic backgrounds. Many of these students are failing to meet minimum standards of year level expectations. In response to these increasing pressures and challenges, Hattie (2015) commenting on Australian based research, noted that high-impact instructional leaders through seeking collegial agreement about which evidence-based practices have the most impact on student learning are able to maximise outcomes. However, he does not explicitly state the term teacher leadership.

Traditional models of school leadership have relied on a hierarchical system where the roles and responsibilities of the administrative leaders are clearly defined (Harris, 2003). However, educational leadership that addresses current challenges is beyond the scope of the administrative leaders alone (Danielson, 2006). Thus, there is gradual acknowledgement of the untapped potential of teacher leadership in addressing these 21st century challenges (Crowther et al., 2009).



There are numerous examples reported in the literature of teacher leadership. Margolis and Huggins (2012) and Safir (2018) affirmed that administrative leaders promoted teacher leadership as distributed leadership where teachers work alongside administrative staff for school improvement. Furthermore, Nguyen and Hunter (2018) suggested that teachers are well versed as catalysts of school reform due to the contextually specific knowledge and skills that are acquired through day-to-day teaching experiences. Such studies provide evidence that formal leaders are dependent on teachers who unofficially and often voluntarily lead school reform (Conway & Andrews, 2016; Danielson, 2006).

Further, Cosenza (2015) affirmed several positive outcomes of successful teacher leadership beyond school reform, including staff retention and increased student attainment. York-Barr and Duke (2004) identified the recognition, incentives, and opportunities for advancement that accompany teacher leadership titles as beneficial to recruiting and retaining teachers. Additionally, Dawson (2014) suggested that opportunities for teacher leadership can rekindle commitment and passion in teachers who are considered stagnant in their careers.

### **Definitions and Attributes of Teacher Leadership**

Consistent changes in educational reform have seen teachers become the driving force behind school reform (Boone, 2015). Countries including Australia, Canada, New Zealand, England, and Singapore have begun to take a proactive approach to developing teacher leaders who are collectively responsible for school improvement through recruitment and selection, increased remuneration and incentives, and professional development (Campbell et al., 2015). Furthermore, a vested political agenda has led



to the development of teacher standards and frameworks in numerous countries to ensure accountability for student outcomes (Wenner & Campbell, 2017). Several studies have recognised teachers as advocates for school improvement through collective responsibility and parallel leadership (Bauman, 2015; Conway, 2015).

Whilst many studies focus on teacher leadership as a means of improving student outcomes through collaborative efforts, Nieto (2015) argued that teacher leadership is demonstrated through teachers who are also culturally responsive to the needs of their students. He stated that the intense focus on curriculum and pedagogy has shrouded opportunities to engage students by building on the students' identities and experiences. Further, Steffy et al. (2000) suggested that teachers who are capable of collaboration and leadership and are responsive to student needs do so in a continuous cycle of professional development as they progress through various career stages. In support of this, Pangan and Lupton (2015) argued that early career teachers provide fresh and innovative approaches to pedagogical practice that can have a positive effect on school culture. Thus, teacher preparation programs and opportunities for experiences and mentorship are necessary to develop the leadership capacity of early career teachers and to alter the perception that the capacity for transformation is limited to just veteran teachers.

Teaching has a professional and ethical dimension. Teachers can have either a positive or a negative effect on their students through their actions, attitudes, and practices (Nieto, 2015). The OECD (2013) stated that "teachers are an essential resource for learning; the quality of a school system cannot exceed the quality of its teachers" (p. 96). Bradley-Levine (2018) acknowledged teachers who unite practices of pedagogy and leadership do so through their

advocacy for students. Collaborative leadership involves teachers intentionally leading and engaging in mutual decision making that is guided by moral and ethical standards, resulting in positive outcomes for students (Woods & Roberts, 2019). Davis et al. (2015) described teacher leadership demonstrated through experienced teachers mentoring beginning teachers and collaborating with others.

Hattie (2015) noted that improving student outcomes requires collaboration between all staff alongside committed reflection of whether practices are successful. Campbell et al. (2015) suggested that teachers who self-reflect and de-privatise their practice through collaboration are better able to lead the professional development of their colleagues through an intentional and explicit approach to sharing their knowledge. However, a strong sense of relational trust is needed (Bryk & Schneider, 2003) if teachers who are empowered to be leaders are more willing to take risks with new ideas (Dawson, 2014). Furthermore, the development of collaborative relationships built on trust ensures a productive working environment that is conducive to teacher leadership (Demir, 2015). Further, the principal has a central role in this building of trust, resulting in the development of leadership capacity in schools (Crowther et al., 2009; Lambert, 2003).

Sterrett (2015) asserted the demonstration of teacher leadership is through reflection, collaboration, and a shared desire to accomplish school goals. A shared vision encompasses a distributed leadership model where teachers and school leaders work collaboratively by implementing effective pedagogy, evaluating student data, and making decisions that move the school to achieving its shared goals (Boone, 2015). Additionally, through teachers leading effective professional learning communities, all stakeholders within a school



can sustain learning and school improvement practices (Conway, 2015).

A considerable quantity of literature previously defined teacher leadership as those appointed to administrative duties (Goldstein, 2004; Leithwood, 2007). Crowther (2015) argued that the perception that all teachers are leaders is misguided and detracts from the true meaning and significance of teacher leadership. Whilst strongly advocating for teacher leaders to be acknowledged, he argued that there is a marked difference between teacher leaders and expert teachers. Current research and literature validates that the teacher as a leader is an emerging construct and while some Australian studies have presented findings of evidence, successes and challenges of teacher leadership, there is limited evidence as to whether teacher leadership and associated attributes are consistently represented in documentation from a national to a local level.

## **Methodology**

### **Research Questions**

The purpose of the research as presented in this paper was to analyse key documents and discuss how the construct of teacher leadership is understood and manifested within the Australian school context. Research question 1 was used as a basis to collect data:

1. What documentary evidence emerges in exploration around teacher leadership?

And, research question 2 guided the analysis and interpretation:

2. How is the construct of teacher leadership understood and manifested in the Australian school context using a document analysis?

### Data Collection and Instrument

A document analysis was used as the method for collecting and analysing the evidence of teacher leadership in the available documentation. This was deemed a suitable method for the data collection due to the various definitions of teacher leadership that were either explicitly stated or implied in the documentation. The data were obtained from a range of available national, state, regional, and local sources through government, departmental, and organisational websites. In total, 21 documents were used for data collection and analysis from nine education administrative sources. Table 2 outlines the sources of data collected for the document analysis, as well as the instrument and analysis methods used to answer the proposed research questions.

Figure 2 illustrates an example of how the data from each document were collected using the Webber (2018) framework and presented in a table format. Excerpts of text suggesting evidence of teacher leadership were copied from the documents and added to the table under the relevant attributes. Evidence of teacher leadership was considered to be explicitly stated through words such as *leadership, leading others, modelling, or leadership capabilities* or implied through examples such as *building capacity of others, working collaboratively, exemplary teachers, or lifting professional practice*.



Table 2.  
*Sources of Data, Instrument, and Analysis Method Used to Answer Research Questions*

Research Questions	Sources of Data	Instrument for Analysis	Methods of Analysis
A. What documentary evidence emerges in exploration around teacher leadership?	National level: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Standards documents</li> <li>National curriculum documents</li> <li>Government and organisational web materials</li> </ul>	Document analysis framework (Webber, 2018).	Content analysis used to organise the information from the documents into categories pertaining to the 11 key attributes identified in the literature
B. How is the construct of teacher leadership understood and manifested in the Australian school context using a document analysis?	State level: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Accreditation requirements</li> <li>Standards documents</li> <li>Professional publications</li> <li>Departmental policies</li> <li>Union position statements</li> <li>Teacher education curricula</li> </ul> Regional and local level: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>School policies and frameworks</li> <li>Role descriptions</li> <li>Regional initiatives and programs</li> </ul>		resulting in the analysis framework. A secondary analysis enabled interpretation of the key attributes in relation to the five considerations identified as impacting teacher leadership

Excerpts of text often indicated more than one attribute of teacher leadership and thus were included under multiple attributes. The source of the data was noted in the first column entitled 'Organisation'. The data from the documents were organised into the four administrative levels from the national perspective to the local perspective. A 'Notes' section under each of the documents collected was used to track interpretation of the data by making links to previous research to further support the analysis process.

### **Data Analysis**

Content analysis was a suitable method for analysis of the documents as it provided a comprehensive understanding of teacher leadership within the various educational levels (Allen, 2017). The identified themes provided an overall picture of how teacher leadership is defined and conceptualised in the various contexts. Through analysis, the organised content from the documents was coded into themes or categories (Duffy, 2014). These categories for analysis were predetermined in the document analysis framework (Webber, 2018). An analysis through the four levels of educational administration was conducted as well as an analysis across the attributes at each level. At the first level of analysis, the excerpts of text were analysed in respect to the attributes of teacher leadership. The explicit wording and implied meanings were considered in relation to the definitions of the attributes listed in Table 1. This process of content analysis involved categorising and deliberating the meanings of the words, phrases and sentences in the text excerpts to align to the attributes of teacher leadership as defined in the international study by Webber (2018).

ORGANIZATION	Accountability	Advocacy	Cultural Responsiveness	Inclusiveness	Openness to Change	Professionalism
<b>AITSL</b> Document #1 Document #2 Notes	7 Formal recognition of <b>exemplary teachers</b> can make an important contribution to the quality of teaching and leadership in schools.	1 Lead teacher: <b>lead activities</b> that focus on improving educational opportunities for all students.		1 <b>Leadership is developed, shared</b> and spread through the school.		2 Highly Accomplished teachers <b>contribute to their colleagues' learning</b> . They may also take on roles that <b>guide, advise or lead others</b> .
Notes	1 Drive to improve student outcomes through (O'Brien) (Reflection) – registration, performance, accountability, how the document is utilised across different systems 2 Evidence Base Teachers are the single largest influence on students' academic achievement – link to research by Hattie/Robinson? (Professionalism) 7 It is implied that part of being an excellent practitioner is one who leads (colleagues). There is an element of professionalism, advocacy and ultimately accountability linked to the certification process – resulting directly in improving student outcomes					
<b>QCT</b> Document #1	2 Preservice teachers... <b>under the direct supervision and guidance of experienced, registered teachers</b>					1 The Dr John Dwyer award recognise teachers who have taken a <b>leading role</b> in enhancing teaching and learning in their school.

Figure 2.

*Example of Data Collection Using the Document Analysis Framework*

The analytic strategies used to identify and classify the information into the categories (Creswell, 2012) included writing reflective passages in the 'Notes' section whilst reading the documents as illustrated in Figure 2. The excerpts were analysed for consistency in the literal and implied language, intention, and interpretation of teacher leadership. Additionally, the frequency of the attributes within each level was noted and used to consider the similarities and differences throughout the levels and across the attributes (Creswell, 2012). For the secondary analysis, the excerpts of



text were then considered in relation to the five issues of teacher leadership identified in the literature including context, leadership capacity, group dynamics, evidence base, and political beliefs as outlined in Webber’s framework (2018).

**Findings**

An analysis of the frequency of attributes throughout the four levels of educational administration as displayed in Table 3 presented notable similarities between the four levels as well as some differences. In addition, Figure 3 provides a visual representation of the weightings of each administrative level.

Table 3.

*Frequency of Attributes in the Four Levels of Educational Administration*

Attribute	National	State	Regional	Local
Accountability	2	5	4	3
Advocacy	2	5	2	3
Cultural	0	0	0	0
Inclusiveness	1	1	3	3
Openness to Change	1	2	2	1
Professionalism	2	9	2	2
Reflection	1	4	0	1
Risk-taking	0	1	0	0
Shared Vision	2	3	0	3
Stability	2	4	3	0
Teamwork	2	9	1	3

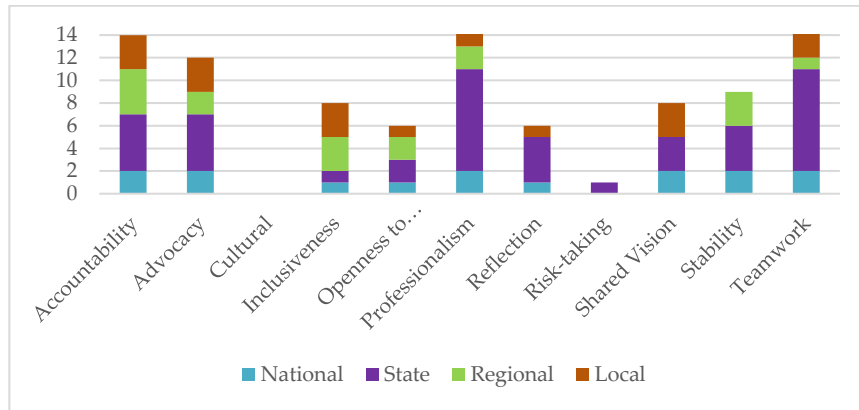


Figure 3.

*Frequency of Attributes Across the Four Levels of Educational Administration*

### Documents at the National Level

At the national level, evidence of teacher leadership was examined in the independent statutory authority, the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA, 2016) as well as the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL, 2017a), the body responsible for the development of the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers. There was an even spread of the attributes of teacher leadership with all attributes represented in the identified documents except for the *cultural* and *risk-taking* attributes. Individual excerpts of text alluded to multiple attributes of teacher leadership. In the national curriculum documentation that was considered, it was acknowledged that first “leadership is developed, shared and spread through the school . . . [and second, the principal of schools is recognised as] . . . the leader of leaders” (Hay Group, 2010, p. 8).

Therefore, it is understood that the principal is responsible for distributing leadership, indicating the attributes of *teamwork* and *inclusiveness*. However, the principal leads the process to ensure *stability* and the value of a *shared vision*. Numerous references to teacher leadership were identified in documentation when referring to the Professional Standards. *Advocacy, accountability, openness to change, and professionalism* were noted where the “standards guide professional learning, practice and engagement, facilitate the improvement of teacher quality and contribute positively to the public standing of the profession” (AITSL, 2017b; AITSL, 2018, p. 2). Furthermore, *reflection of practice* was emphasised in the exploration of how “teachers and school leaders are working across both the Teacher Standards and the Principal Standard to develop leadership skills” (AITSL, 2017c, para. 2).

### **Documents at the State Level**

At the state level, evidence of teacher leadership was examined through the Queensland Education Leadership Institute (QELi, n.d.-a) programs, together with various documentation from the Queensland Department of Education (DoE, 2019b), the teacher registration body Queensland College of Teachers (QCT, n.d.), and the Queensland Teacher’s Union (QTU, 2019a). At the state level, all attributes excluding the *cultural* attribute were represented in the documents. However, of note at this level was the consistent frequency of *professionalism* and *teamwork* as the suggested dominant attributes underlying teacher leadership. QELi highlighted these attributes in their Leadership for Teachers program that proclaims “a teacher leader’s primary responsibility is to lead learning to positively impact on student outcomes” (QELi, n.d.-b, para. 2). Furthermore, “the effectiveness of teacher leaders to lead and to



create a culture that is conducive to shared leadership is contingent upon the ability to create a culture of collaboration” (QELi, 2019, para. 1). Whilst highlighting the attributes of professionalism and teamwork, these excerpts also reaffirm *accountability* and *advocacy* of the profession.

Leadership is not just those in formal management positions. “The evolution of school leadership theory and practice supports this decentralised perspective, with teachers, mentors, and administrative staff being asked to take a more participative role in leadership responsibilities across all levels of the school environment” (QELi, 2019, para. 3) thus ensuring stability of practice and collaborative teamwork. The Department of Education and teaching registration body also recognise the role of teachers supporting pre-service and early career teachers. A Senior Teacher commits to “teaching excellence and a leadership role amongst classroom teachers by performing higher level duties” (DoE, 2018e, p. 23). Additionally, the Mentoring Beginning Teachers program requires teaching mentors who support teachers by encouraging “reflection on practice, engaging in professional and coaching conversations, observing lessons . . . [and] . . . providing feedback on practice” (DoE, 2019a, p. 1). Pre-service teachers “demonstrate their teaching capabilities under the direct supervision and guidance of experienced, registered teachers” (QCT, 2015, p. 3). Thus, these supervising teachers should be “exemplary classroom teachers with demonstrated skills” (QCT, 2015, p. 4).

Additionally, the teaching registration body draws attention to the notion of advocacy of teacher leadership and professionalism through recognition of merit. The John Dwyer Excellent Leadership in Teaching and Learning Award recognises “classroom teachers or

school administrators who have taken a leading role in enhancing teaching and learning in their school” (QCT, 2019, para. 4). Furthermore, the teaching unions welcomed the national and state implementation of a certification process for Highly Accomplished and Lead Teachers stating that it “provides a genuine choice, enabling classroom teachers to achieve a higher salary by staying in the classroom, rather than applying for promotion” (QTU, 2018a, p. 5). This recognition includes teachers at all stages in their careers.

### **Documents at One Regional Level**

At the regional level, evidence of teacher leadership was examined from two documentary sources in one education region of the state: The Rural and Remote Centre for Learning and Wellbeing known as the CLaW; and the role description of the Head of Curriculum Early Years Coach. At the regional level, most of the attributes were represented with the exception of the *cultural*, *reflection*, and *risk-taking* attributes. *Accountability* was the most commonly represented attribute of teacher leadership at the regional level. The Department of Education ensures accountability by providing funding for the appointment of regionally-based pedagogical coaches. The Head of Curriculum Early Years Coach role description states the appointed coach will work across the region to “model effective age-appropriate pedagogies and their accompanying practices and strategies in classrooms. . . [and] . . . provide coaching and advice to teachers in planning and using the evidence-based tools”. (DoE, 2018a, p. 1) In addition, the key capabilities that are demonstrated by the coach include a “capacity to lead and manage curriculum reform. . . [as well as the] . . . capacity for leading and managing change within the school environment” (DoE, 2018c, p. 1). Regional level findings also indicated the attribute



of *stability*. The CLaW promotes sustainability of teacher leadership by providing “mentoring and coaching of beginning school leaders” (DoE, 2017, p. 3) and “coaching mid-career and experienced teachers” (DoE, 2019d, p. 3). This is provided through services that facilitate “the Take the Lead program for aspiring school leaders. . . [and] . . . the Mentoring Beginning Teachers (MBT) program” (DoE, 2018b, p. 1).

### **Documents at One Local Level**

At the local level, documentation of a position as an Instructional Coach at a local state primary school in the North Queensland region was considered in relation to teacher leadership. This role is defined as a “classroom teacher with added responsibilities” (Local State School, 2018, p. 7). The local level displayed a similar pattern to the regional level affirming *accountability, advocacy, inclusiveness, openness to change, professionalism, and teamwork* as the common attributes underlying teacher leadership. The attributes of *accountability, inclusiveness, professionalism, and teamwork* were noted in an excerpt that stated “in collaboration with the leadership team. . . [the teacher delivers] . . . professional learning and coaching to teachers” (Local State School, 2018, p. 7) suggesting collaborative practices for positive student outcomes and school improvement. Additionally, it was found that *reflection* and the *shared vision* attribute occurred at the local level. This is in contrast to the regional level, which instead suggested the importance of *stability*. The Instructional Coach’s role is to “analyse student data and identify areas for improvement” (Local State School, 2018, p. 7). Furthermore, the coach provides “fundamental knowledge and advice to school leadership teams and teachers to drive improvement in child and student outcomes in the early years”

(Local State School, 2018, p. 7). This suggests the ongoing value of the teacher's reflections and contributions to the school's goals.

In summary, when considering the distribution of the attributes across all levels of educational administration, the attributes of accountability, advocacy, inclusiveness, openness to change, professionalism, and teamwork were represented. However, accountability and advocacy were most consistently represented. Reflection, a shared vision, and stability were represented throughout most of the levels. The cultural and risk-taking attributes were not consistently represented in the four levels.

### **Discussion and Implications**

This paper has revealed the documentary evidence of teacher leadership and how the construct of teacher leadership is understood and manifested in the documents of the Australian school context from national to local levels. Three areas emerged from the findings. First, accountability and advocacy for teacher leaders in the profession filters through the four levels. Second, the state level acknowledges that teacher leaders drive school improvement and student achievement through professionalism and teamwork. Finally, the regional level emphasises the need for stability and inclusiveness of teacher leaders but is not evident at the local level due to a number of pertinent organisational issues.

#### **Accountability and Advocacy of the Teaching Profession**

Whilst formal leadership may invoke the notion of hierarchy, the Australian education system has seen formal acknowledgement of teacher leadership through the development of a national certification process for teachers who lead. The Australian



Professional Standards for Teachers, which are regulated and supported by state bodies, allows teachers to be recognised and remunerated for their leadership work. The standards are explicit statements that define teacher quality and signify how high quality teaching results in improved educational student outcomes (AITSL, 2018). Thus, it is implied that an excellent teacher is one who leads their colleagues and as such promotes professionalism and advocacy of the profession whilst maintaining accountability.

At the state level, the role of a teacher as a leader for remuneration purposes is articulated across the documentation. The Department of Education (2018d, 2018e) developed a classification structure for career progression. Senior teachers and experienced senior teachers are recognised and remunerated for duties that are considered above and beyond those of a regular teacher. As an additional incentive, teachers in each state can apply for certification as a highly accomplished or lead teacher, which provides an income comparable to an administration leader and surpasses the years of service required to attain experienced teacher status. Strongly supported by the teaching union, this has provided a choice for outstanding teachers to remain in the classroom rather than seek an increased income through administrative leadership (QTU, 2018a).

Both the union and teacher registration body's documentation consistently stated that these classifications involve teachers leading others with curriculum, pedagogy, and practices such as mentoring or coaching as well as advocacy for the profession. From a regional perspective, driven by state government agenda, teacher leadership is recognised through administrative roles and strategies that focus on improving teaching quality and student outcomes. State funded centres facilitate the Mentoring Beginning Teacher program, Early



Years Coaches, and the Take the Lead program for aspiring regional school leaders to build the capacity of new and experienced staff in rural and remote areas (DoE, 2019d). At the local level, some schools are allocating expenditure for instructional coach positions that are filled by classroom teachers (Local State School, 2018). In these various roles, teacher leaders have the potential to have an impact on teaching practice as well as on student outcomes.

Across the documentation at all levels, it is implied that teachers are advocates for the profession and take on a variety of leadership roles. At a state level, it is expected that experienced teachers will guide and supervise pre-service students. Additionally, principals and school leaders are accountable to ensuring the development of teacher leaders and fulfilling departmental obligations (DoE, 2019c). Questions are raised on whether teachers should be paid for the leadership work that is considered beyond their regular duties when their role is not a promotional position or if the teacher has not achieved certification. Furthermore, in regional and remote areas, there is often a shortage of experienced teachers and predominance of early career teachers, often calling on those experienced teachers that are in the context to mentor early career teachers.

The Professional Standards have been developed for accreditation and quality assurance purposes and to facilitate teacher reflection due to its evidence-based impact on student achievement (Hattie, 2015). Whilst it is agreed that the standards provide a common and shared language for practice and are important for measuring quality of performance in teacher graduates, various authors argued (Clarke & Moore, 2013; O'Brien, 2015) that this force of standardisation, measurement, transparency, and accountability is



counterproductive to what is at the heart of teaching. The document analysis within this project did not find evidence of the attribute of cultural responsiveness. Therefore, it is argued that whilst the government advocates for the use of a standards framework to improve teacher quality, it disregards the equally important consideration of the culturally relational aspects of teaching. Other studies have found the inability of professional standards to measure teacher disposition and that the standards did not well articulate the importance of relationality and cultural responsiveness in teaching (Nieto, 2015; Taylor, 2016).

### **Professionalism and Teamwork – the State Agenda**

State policy has driven opportunities for professional development and expectations of professionalism and teamwork. Teachers who lead collaboratively and commit to improving their practice through ongoing professional development have a positive impact on student outcomes (Hattie, 2015; Skourdoumbis, 2014) and are recognised for their efforts. This is evident at the state level, through the commitment to the certification process of highly accomplished and lead teachers as well as through awards. Ultimately, these teachers are the single largest influence on student achievement.

The state government further calls attention to the value of collaboration to improve teacher practice. The Mentoring Beginning Teachers program is founded on the premise that experienced teachers will provide support for early career teachers (DoE, 2019a), however, success depends on mentees being receptive to that support. Whilst there is an assumption that the relationships between the mentor and mentee teacher are based on safety and trust, the risk-taking attribute of teacher leadership was not consistently presented

in the documents analysed. The importance of safety and trust as an attribute of teacher leadership is well researched in the literature, often citing the willingness to take risks depends on the contextual factors (Berg, 2018; Demir, 2015).

### **Inclusiveness and Stability at the Regional and Local Level**

The distinction between a formal organisational leader and teacher leader has been discussed widely in the literature. Whilst the hierarchical organisational structure of school systems is a given, there is much value in the role of a teacher as leader. From the national perspective, it is affirmed that principals are the leaders of leaders and that leadership is shared throughout a school (Hay Group, 2010). This implies that leadership is not reliant on one individual and state bodies support the notion of distributed leadership enabling teachers to share leadership responsibilities.

Whilst the attributes of inclusiveness and stability were apparent throughout most levels of educational administration, they were represented three times greater at the regional level. From a regional perspective, formal administrative roles have been created as a result of the state and national agenda for improving teaching and learning and to support principals in their role as facilitators of teacher leadership. Furthermore, regional centres aim to provide career pathways and retain aspiring school leaders. At the local level, it is implied through the establishment of job roles such as instructional coaches, that teacher leadership is valued and warranted.

Many efforts are made to develop and sustain teacher leadership. One example is the establishment of Professional Learning Communities in schools, which utilise teachers to be the



driving force behind pedagogical change. However, retention of staff often impacts on the ability for these types of practices to be sustainable. Furthermore, teachers must be willing to lead for distributed leadership to be successful (Robinson, 2008). Increasing workloads of teachers has become a contentious issue and consequently, workload was a key focus area of the most recent teaching union's Enterprise Bargaining Agreement (QTU, 2019b). It is difficult to collaborate with staff who already have full time teaching loads and timetabled sessions in the school day are not provided. Excessive workloads and time constraints inhibit teacher leadership opportunities (Wenner & Campbell, 2017).

Whilst teacher leadership is empowering, it does require a culture of trust, collaboration, and a shared vision to result in improved student outcomes. In addition, as many of these positions do not attract additional remuneration, they are often viewed by colleagues as promotional, and therefore have resulted in some resistance to collaboration with staff. Similar challenges were reported by Williams (2013) and Struyve et al. (2014) who noted resistance from teachers to work with teacher leaders. The micro-politics of the school's culture often diminishes the acceptability of those who are capable to lead (Dawson, 2014).

Consequently, the principal's role is paramount to developing a positive culture of distributed leadership that encompasses teachers as leaders. The quality of teaching and learning in schools is influenced by the processes and resources that are implemented by school leaders (Wenner & Campbell, 2017). Whilst much of the research supports the notion and impact of distributed leadership, the professional standards for principals imply that all efforts for distributed leadership and collaboration are diminished by validation

that the principal ultimately holds the power of decision making (Cunningham, 2014). However, the teacher standards state that “effective leadership is distributed and collaborative with teams led by the principal working together to accomplish the vision and aims of the school” (AITSL, 2014, p. 6). Consequently, the wording and implied intention of leadership and teacher leadership continues to be open to interpretation.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

This research study found that within the documents, accountability and advocacy were the attributes consistently attributed to teacher leadership. The implementation of national standards is being used as an instrument to advocate teacher leadership, which filters through the levels and provides both recognition and a process for remunerated certification of teacher leaders. However, political agenda and the limitations of professional standards accurately reflecting the culturally relational aspects of teaching are noted. The system is beginning to advocate and acknowledge pathways to leadership for teachers and the practicality of distributed leadership at the regional and local level that are in contrast to a conventional hierarchical system. However, this study noted that whilst these attributes were evident in documentation at the local level, this was not consistently evident in practice.

### **Limitations and Future Research**

This paper reports on a small-scale study. Therefore, it is recommended these findings be considered as one contribution to conceptualising teacher leadership and suggests that similar studies may be replicated in other regions or systems. Also noted is that staff



resistance to teacher leader promotional positions has had a significant impact in practice. Thus, further research could consider how administrative leaders ensure the development and sustainability of teacher leadership by addressing organisational barriers.

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## A Study of Teacher Leadership Concept in Institutional Documents in Spain

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Abstract	Article Info
<p><i>Although there is interest on educational leadership in Spain, research has focused on principal leadership and little has been investigated about teacher leadership. In the context of the International Study on Teacher Leadership (ISTL), this study aims to develop understanding of the concept of teacher leadership in institutional documents in Spain and to explore and analyze the dominant values and assumptions that can be identified. The review of the documents revealed a limited understanding of the critical importance of teacher leadership. Findings identified some aspects in the teacher leadership literature reviewed such as teamwork, accountability, openness to change, reflection, and advocacy, whereas inclusiveness, risk-taking, shared vision, and stability are scarcely identified. The increasing emphasis on teacher leadership dimensions in recent institutional documents note the need to go further with support for teachers' secondary roles as a consequence of the required modernization of the teaching profession.</i></p>	<p><b>Article History:</b>  <i>Received</i>                      February 10, 2020   <i>Accepted</i>                      September 20, 2020</p> <hr style="width: 50%; margin: 10px auto;"/> <p><b>Keywords:</b>  <i>Teacher leadership, Institutional documents, Teachers' competencies, Content analysis, Attributes, Spain.</i></p>

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## **Introduction**

Great economic, political and social changes in our societies are instigating increasing demands on teachers of the XXI century. On one hand, educational systems are required to ensure that people have the skills required for the labor market (OECD, 2016). On the other hand, globalization is pressing the European Union to align the educational policies to facilitate students and staff mobility. Moreover, changes in social values have increased the expectations of the role of education in solving social problems (Darling-Hammond & Lieberman, 2013; Hargreaves, 1994; Schleicher, 2018). Given this fact, teachers need some professional skills, including leadership, that will enable them to meet the new educational context and improve the quality of education. Teachers Matter report (OECD, 2005) reminded us of the important role that teachers play and their leadership. Research on educational leadership highlights the influence of principals in successful student achievement (Leithwood et al., 2004). More recently, academics are paying attention to teacher leadership (TL) as an important aspect of educational leadership since teachers are the ones able to promote change in schools because they deal with "the complexities involved in teaching" (Wenner & Campbell, 2017, p. 134).

## **Context of the Study**

Spain is a country with a population of 46.7 million and is organized in seventeen Autonomous Communities (AC) which are given powers to legislate by the Spanish Constitution of 1978. This means that each AC has the power to establish its own education regulations based on the national education law enacted by the central government. In the last 39 years, Spain has had 7 national



education laws. The existing Education Act (LOMCE, 2013) is now being questioned by the majority of the political parties. A law focusing on teacher identity, functions and professional development has been long required but it is still pending.

The Spanish education system comprises pre-primary, primary, secondary and higher education levels. Basic education is compulsory and tuition-free from 6 to 16 years (6 years at the primary level and 4 years in the compulsory secondary level). By the end of the fourth secondary year, students may choose to continue with secondary education and pursue university degrees or opt for basic vocational training.

Students can choose to attend a public school (67.3% of the total population of pre-primary, primary and secondary education), a partially government-funded independent school (25.9% of the total) or a private school (6.9% of the total) (MECD, 2018). For teachers, their access to the teaching profession varies depending on the type of school; in public schools, they are required to pass professional entrance exams and then they can get a position and become public servants. Principals play no role in teacher recruitment and selection; they simply do the best that they can with the teachers they are assigned by the central administration. There are some formal leadership roles that can be assigned to teachers in schools such as the head of studies, department chair, educational level chair, or class chair. Teachers are involved in decision-making processes through their delegates in the school council where strategic plans, annual objectives, and budget are approved.

## **Rationale**

This article will contribute to a better understanding of the concept of educational leadership, from teachers' perspective in the Spanish context. Based on an analysis of institutional documents, we will focus on (1) how teachers are expected to influence student achievement, school culture, decision-making process, and educational community; (2) explore the assumptions about teacher leadership identified in university programs and professional development and, (3) analyze the dominant values and assumptions that can be identified in those documents.

## **Conceptual Framework**

The acknowledgement of education as a crucial factor for the socio-economic development of our societies has influenced educational policymaking, which is increasingly receiving advice by organizations such as the EU, the World Bank, and UNESCO to focus on the competitive perspective in a global arena (Bangs & Frost, 2012). Therefore, international comparison is becoming an important issue. Educational leadership has long been researched because "leadership is second only to classroom instruction among all school-related factors that contribute to what students learn at school" (Leithwood et al., 2004, p.5).

Nevertheless, research on school leadership has tended "to strip away the 'context specificity' needed to help practitioners understand how to apply findings in different schools" (Hallinger, 2018, p.8). According to Hallinger (2018), the institutional context does not only refer to the role definition and behavior of principals but also of teachers. And yet, as York-Barr and Duke (2004, p. 288) stated, "intentional and systematic efforts to support the capacity of teachers



and principals to share in school leadership functions appear to be severely lacking." The focus on teacher leadership is viewed as an opportunity to facilitate teacher participation, improve the professional work environment, promote schools' growth, and provide benefits for the students (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Moreover, it is important to know how school contexts may influence leadership practices, and since school contexts are also influenced by culture and legislation, we need to know more about the understanding of TL in context.

Since institutional structures do indeed shape the role definition and behavior of principals (Lee & Hallinger, 2012) as well as the existence of a clear demarcation of roles and responsibilities in schools, the idea of teachers as leaders is easily misunderstood (Harris, 2003). New and different challenges compel teachers to participate and assume greater leadership responsibilities. Some of them opt to become administrators, but some of them wish to continue working in the classroom. These are the ones for whom teacher leadership may be a solution to fulfil their aspirations. Also, teacher leadership has become "an increasingly popular topic among educational policymakers and influential educational organizations as an important component of school reform" (Wenner & Campbell, 2017, p. 135). Educational transformation is more than accountability, standardization, and testing, as "evidence is showing that the 'pull' of teachers leading innovation and change can be more powerful than the 'push' of many top-down reform agendas (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012)" as cited by Harris (2015, editorial).

Nevertheless, the little consensus and the lack of clarity about what teacher leadership is have been highlighted by researchers (Margolis & Huggins, 2012; Neumerski, 2012). As Harris (2014)

stated, "the idea of teacher leadership is based on the simple but powerful idea that everyday teachers lead their classroom, lead other colleagues and lead in the community" (Harris, 2014, p. 65). Moreover, Levin and Schrum (2017) insisted on the idea that every teacher can be a leader in various formal and informal ways as a manifestation of distributed leadership. Therefore, TL means moving beyond instructional leadership to expanded roles which include the evaluation of educational initiatives and the facilitation of professional learning communities, breaking the isolated culture of teaching (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001). TL offers the possibility of a distributed leadership in action (Muijs & Harris, 2003). Crowther, Ferguson and Hann (2009) understood TL in relation to the construct of parallel leadership which focuses on the alignment of the school vision and classroom practices to sustain school revitalization, through the engagement of both teacher leaders and their principals in collective action.

TL definitions are scarcely stated by researchers who usually describe what teacher leaders do (Nguyen et al., 2019; Wenner & Campbell, 2017; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). In their literature review, York-Barr and Duke (2004) synthesized the characteristics of TL and described it as leading with colleagues, focusing on instructional practices, and working at the organizational level to align resources for teaching and learning improvement. Wenner and Campbell (2017) added that teacher leadership (1) goes beyond the classroom walls, (2) supports professional learning in their schools, (3) involves teachers in policy and /or decision making, (4) improves student learning and success and, (5) aims towards improvement and change for the whole school organization. Teacher leaders are seen as having the capability to influence the entire school, community, and profession. Nguyen et al. (2019), in a more recent and broader



literature review, described TL as influence and reciprocal collaboration and trust.

In a review of how teacher leadership is conceptualized and enacted in Spain Tintoré et al. (2019) identified 24 articles drawn from four databases. Research that expressly refers to teacher leadership in Spain continues to be scarce, but such studies have rapidly increased over the last decade. Now and then, teacher leadership is described as distributed leadership, leadership for social justice, or leadership for learning.

A clearer definition of teacher leadership in Spain is needed since only a few authors define the construct. Coronel Llamas (2005) explained that teachers' leadership "consists of the social distribution of leadership" (p. 474). Bernal and Ibarrola (2015) established relationships between teacher leadership and other kinds of leadership, such as instructional leadership and distributed leadership. These reports highlight that school leadership does not belong exclusively to the principal, and that teacher agency is needed if we aspire to develop leadership for learning. Arbués and Ibarrola (2014) added that teacher leadership recognizes the participation of teachers as crucial to achieving improvements in the conditions of teaching and learning. Balduzzi (2015) developed a definition of teacher leadership by stating that,

*"in true educational leadership, teachers participate actively and relevantly in the process of defining school goals and contribute through their classes to carry out and develop the values with which the school is identified, as well as managing and harmonizing the complex and multiple interpersonal relationships inside and outside the classroom" (p.145).*

## Methodology

In the context of the International Study of Teacher Leadership (ISTL)<sup>1</sup>, "a rationale for researching teacher leadership is presented based on the need to provide clarity to the definition of the concept and to understand better how to facilitate teacher leadership development" (Webber, 2018, p. 1). First, an analysis framework was established based on key concepts and considerations found in the relevant literature, which were named as attributes and indicators. The attributes identified include accountability, advocacy, cultural responsiveness, inclusiveness, openness to change, professionalism, reflection, risk-taking, shared vision, stability, and teamwork (Webber, 2018, p. 4).

As an early stage of the ISTL research project, document analysis was used as an analytical method to examine and interpret data "in order to elicit meaning, gain understanding and develop empirical knowledge" (Bowen, 2009, p. 27). We aimed to provide context and data, in order to understand the historical roots of teacher leadership and to track the changes and development of this concept; therefore, the use of document analysis seemed pertinent (Bowen, 2009).

Then, we proceeded to identify relevant document sources such as ministry policy documents, teacher education program

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<sup>1</sup> This report is based on research done as part of the International Study of Teacher Leadership conducted in Australia, Canada, China, Colombia, Mexico, Romania, South Africa, Spain, Tanzania, and Turkey. The multi-stage study commenced in 2018. For more information, contact Charles Webber at [cfwebber@mtroyal.ca](mailto:cfwebber@mtroyal.ca) and see the study website: [mru.ca/istl](http://mru.ca/istl)





descriptions, teacher union documents, teacher certification or teacher standards documents, and accreditation requirements for teacher education providers. Due to the fact that Spanish education regulations are diversified depending on the different AC, we decided to choose national documents and focus on the Madrid Autonomous Community, and on primary teaching.

The documents identified and their characteristics (authorship, year of publication, objectives, public addressed) were the ones included in Table 1.

Table 1.

*Relation of Institutional Documents: Authorship, Year of Publication and Objectives*

Document	Authorship	Year of publication	Objectives
Teaching work assessment report	Madrid Autonomous Community Department of Education (CAM)	2001	Set the competencies of teachers
White paper about teaching degrees	Quality accreditation agency for universities (ANECA)	2005	State the requirements to be accomplished by Initial Training Education degrees in Spanish Universities
Organic Law of Education 2/2006 (LOE)	Spanish government (Ministry of Education)	2006	Regulate Spanish education system, school organization, curricula and teachers' accreditations to teach in each educational level
ORDEN ECI/3857/2007	Spanish government (Ministry of Education)	2007	To establish requirements for Initial Training Education to be allowed to teach in the Spanish education system
Social support for	Report authored by	2008	To inform about respect for

the teaching profession (COFAPA)	university teachers coordinated by COFAPA (Confederation of Parents' Association)		teachers and their prestige in the educational community
Competencies of primary teaching degree	University Complutense of Madrid (UCM)	2009	To establish the competencies to be accomplished by graduates in primary teaching degree programs
Deontological ethics of the teaching profession	Professional Association of Doctors and Graduates (CDL)	2010	Ethics code to be respected by teachers in the profession
Organic Law of education for the improvement of the quality of education 8/2013 (LOMCE)	Spanish government (Ministry of Education)	2013	A revision of the previous education law (LOE): regulate the Spanish education system, school organization, curricula and teachers' accreditations to teach within each educational level
White paper about the teaching profession and its school environment	Marina et al.	2015	Report requested by the Ministry of Education about the need to improve teacher training and professional development
Proposal about the access to the teaching profession	Conference of Deans from Spanish Education Faculties	2017	Proposal to the Ministry of Education on the need to improve teacher training and access to teaching degrees

These institutional documents were studied through a reflexive iterative process (Srivastava & Hopwood, 2009) which started with a content analysis of the documents (Klenke, 2008) and the identification and organization of components of documents related to the attributes in the analysis framework. The characteristics and



indicators for each attribute (see Table 2), were used as a code template to organize raw data (Boyatzis, 1998).

Table 2.

*Attributes and Indicators Underlying Teacher Leadership and Excerpts from Institutional Documents*

Attributes	Indicators	Excerpts
Accountability	Take responsibility for outcomes Evaluation and progress monitoring Provide focus	Design, plan and evaluate the teaching-learning process within the framework of the school as an educational organization (UCM, 2009, p. 7)
Advocacy	Student learning needs provide focus Teacher leadership has an activist dimension	The heterogeneity of students, from diverse backgrounds and social contexts, with different cultures, interests, abilities, skills and expectations, requires teachers to face increasingly diversified educational demands and greater demand for individualization (LOMCE, p. 107)
Cultural responsiveness	Curricula and pedagogy should include students whose identities have been insufficiently considered	Equity, which guarantees equal opportunities for the full development of personality through education, educational inclusion, equal rights and opportunities that help overcome discrimination and guarantee universal access to education, acts as a compensatory element for personal, cultural, economic and social inequalities, with special attention to those arising from any type of disability (LOE, 2006, p. 14)
Inclusiveness	Teachers should be part of the decision-making Career stage considerations are important	Participation of the educational community in the organization, governance, and operation of schools (LOE, 2006, p. 15)

Openness to change	Go beyond enculturation to build capacity for transformation	Promote the democratic education of citizenship and the practice of critical social thinking (UCM, 2009, p. 7)
Professionalism	Teaching is always an ethical activity Teachers are the single largest influence on students' academic achievement	Enable greater autonomy to the teaching function, in a way that responds to the demands of greater personalization of education, taking into account the principle of teacher specialization (LOE, 2006, p. 8)
Reflection	Reflective practice should be ongoing	Acquisition of knowledge and skills that support the psychosocial pedagogical dimensions of teaching (ANECA, 2004, p. 194)
Risk-taking	Safety and trust are important	Guarantee adequate training to face the challenges of the educational system and adapt teaching to the new learning needs (LOE, 2006, p. 63)
Shared vision	Alignment of goals and mission are valued	Every teacher must participate in the management of the school, and in helping it become a "school that learns" (Marina et al., 2015, p. 15)
Stability	Practices should be sustainable	Value individual and collective responsibility in achieving a sustainable future (ECI, 2007, p. 53748)
Teamwork	Professional learning communities provide a venue for collaboration	Teacher training as a responsible professional, with the capacity to make innovative decisions through teamwork in the school (ANECA, 2004, p. 194)

Furthermore, a thematic analysis was also performed as it was important to identify emergent attributes from our specific context (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). Therefore, inductive codes were assigned to quotations that described these emergent attributes. To



provide rigor and increase the credibility of the study, the team used researcher triangulation. Firstly, researchers identified segments in the text of one document, and classified them in the attributes column in the table. Thus, coder training consisted of manually coding one document by the three researchers to have a clear understanding of the attributes and codes being used. Then, each researcher did the same with the documents assigned to each one. For intercoder reliability, the researchers independently proceeded to review all the fragments selected from all the documents for each attribute, as well as the ones for emergent attributes, that went beyond those considered in the initial analysis framework.

Results were compared and helped to contrast the coding procedures, in order to confirm findings and to bring different perspectives to the analysis (Denzin, 1978). Consequently, the document with all the fragments manually coded was computerized using the atlas ti 7.0 software. Taking into account the team discussions, some segments were recoded. The data reduction process (Miles et al., 2014) was done holistically (both within and across attribute columns), sorting and reassembling data in new significant ways once the initial coding was finished (Creswell, 1998). This axial coding allowed the connections among the different attributes identified by the team of researchers (Charmaz, 2006). Data was constantly compared and recoded to better organize ideas and pinpoint concepts that seemed to cluster. Possible connections that emerged from this analysis were displayed in charts and graphs, which were discussed and completed by the researchers in light of the data and their reflections about them. At the final stage of data conclusion and verification (Miles & Huberman, 1994), central themes were selected to better depict the concept of teacher leadership drawn from the institutional documents.

## Findings

The first result from the search of the documents was the realization that there were no documents disseminated by teacher unions or patronal institutions. A study financed by a Confederation of Parents' Association (COFAPA) was found. Moreover, there was not a single document with a title directly related to our research (such as teacher standards or teacher competencies). Teacher competencies were highlighted in general in educational laws, or when talking about initial teacher education, respect for teachers or professional development. In fact, from the ten documents reviewed, three of them referred to requirements for initial teacher education; another three were published by the Ministry of Education (the two educational laws -LOE and LOMCE-), and one by the Department of Education of the Madrid Autonomous Community. Another one emerged from the professional association of teachers (a non-union professional graduates organization to represent and help teacher graduates in their professional lives). Another was a study report done by a confederation of students' parents, and the last two are recent proposals to modify initial formation and professional development of teachers (a draft for a "teacher statute", still pending).

A quantitative analysis of the institutional documents started with frequency counts of the word "leadership", "leader", "lead\*" which could give us an idea of the importance given to this concept in the documents under study. Results showed that the word leadership or lead\* appeared in the following documents: ANECA (19 times), UCM teacher degree competencies (twice), LOMCE (once), and the report for the Ministry of Education (26 times).



Results indicated the limited use of the word leadership, leader, lead\* in the documents, with few exceptions such as the documents from the quality accreditation agency (ANECA), the teacher education program descriptions, and the report written for the Ministry of Education (2015).

After the first coding of the documents, new attributes emerged and new codes were established: teaching prestige, professional identity, families, school coexistence, teachers' professional responsibility, social values, and citizenship. Moreover, some fragments coded in the accountability attribute required two new subcodes which were added: personalized education and students' holistic formation. After this process, codes and subcodes were counted to identify the frequency of all of them and the documents from which they emerged (see Table 3).

Table 3.

*Frequency Counts for TL Attributes in the Institutional Documents*

Year publication	ORDEN								Report for	Conference of	TOTAL
	CAM	ANECA	LOE	ECI	COFAPA	UCM	CDL	LOMCE	Ministry of Education	Deans	
	2001	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2013	2015	2017	
Teamwork	1	1	5	3	2	3	2	2	6	5	30
Citizenship			7	5		4	2		1		19
Personalized education		3	5	2		1		2	2	1	16
Advocacy	3		1	4		1	1	3	1	2	16
Openness to change		2	3	3	1	4	1		2		16
Values			4	3	1	1	3		4		16
Teacher social responsibility		1	4	3		2	1		3	1	15
Professionalism	1	3	4			2	3		1	1	15
Accountability	1	2	1	4	1	1	2		1	1	14
School coexistence			3	2		3	2	1	3		14
Reflection	1	2	2	1		2			1	4	13
Families	1		1	3	1	2	2	1	2		13
Professional identity		2		1		1			3		7
Shared vision			1		2				4		7
Teaching prestige			2				1		2	2	7
Inclusiveness			1	1				1	1	1	5
Cultural responsiveness			1	1		1	1		1		5
Holistic formation			2				1				3
Risk-taking			1								1
Stability									1		1
	8	16	48	36	8	28	22	10	39	18	233





As shown in Table 3, the attributes which appeared the most in the institutional documents were: teamwork, personalized education, citizenship education, student diversity (advocacy), professional responsibility, reflection, and accountability. It was interesting to highlight that Webber's (2018) attributes clearly identified in the Spanish institutional documents in the following order of relevance: teamwork, accountability, openness to change, reflection, and advocacy. Inclusiveness, risk-taking, shared vision, and stability were categories scarcely identified in the document analysis. As for cultural responsiveness and professionalism, other meanings emerged from the study of the documents. Cultural responsiveness was always linked to tolerance and respect concerning multicultural and gender issues. Professionalism was identified with characteristics related to professional development. The aspects that were associated with the ethical consideration of the teaching profession were coded as teachers' social responsibility.

Then we started looking for the attributes that could be clearly identified based on Webber's (2018) selection and discussed those that could be clustered, taking into account the co-occurrence of the codes and going back and forth from codes to data. The connections made with the attributes enabled us to use graphs to better represent the themes that expressed the underlying meaning of teacher leadership in the relevant institutional documents. Once the graphs were displayed, we could distinguish three entirely different perspectives of teacher leadership depicted from the documents studied: student-teacher, community-teacher, and school-teacher relationships.

### **Community-Teacher Relationship**

This perspective was the most distinctly emphasized, with 94 citations out of a total of 233 (40% of the total). This approach included two clearly identified topics: social justice and teacher social responsibility (see Figure 1). Social justice emphasized aspects such as citizenship, democratic social skills, and social values (e.g.; respect, tolerance, and sustainability). Teacher social responsibility encompassed different subcategories mostly related to teacher identity and teaching prestige. The theme of openness to change, also understood as the capacity for transformation, may be recognized as being the cause of the other two previously stated. The topics were evident in almost all the documents studied, with the exception of the proposal from the Conference de Deans (2017) (which only reflects the teacher prestige and teacher social responsibility).

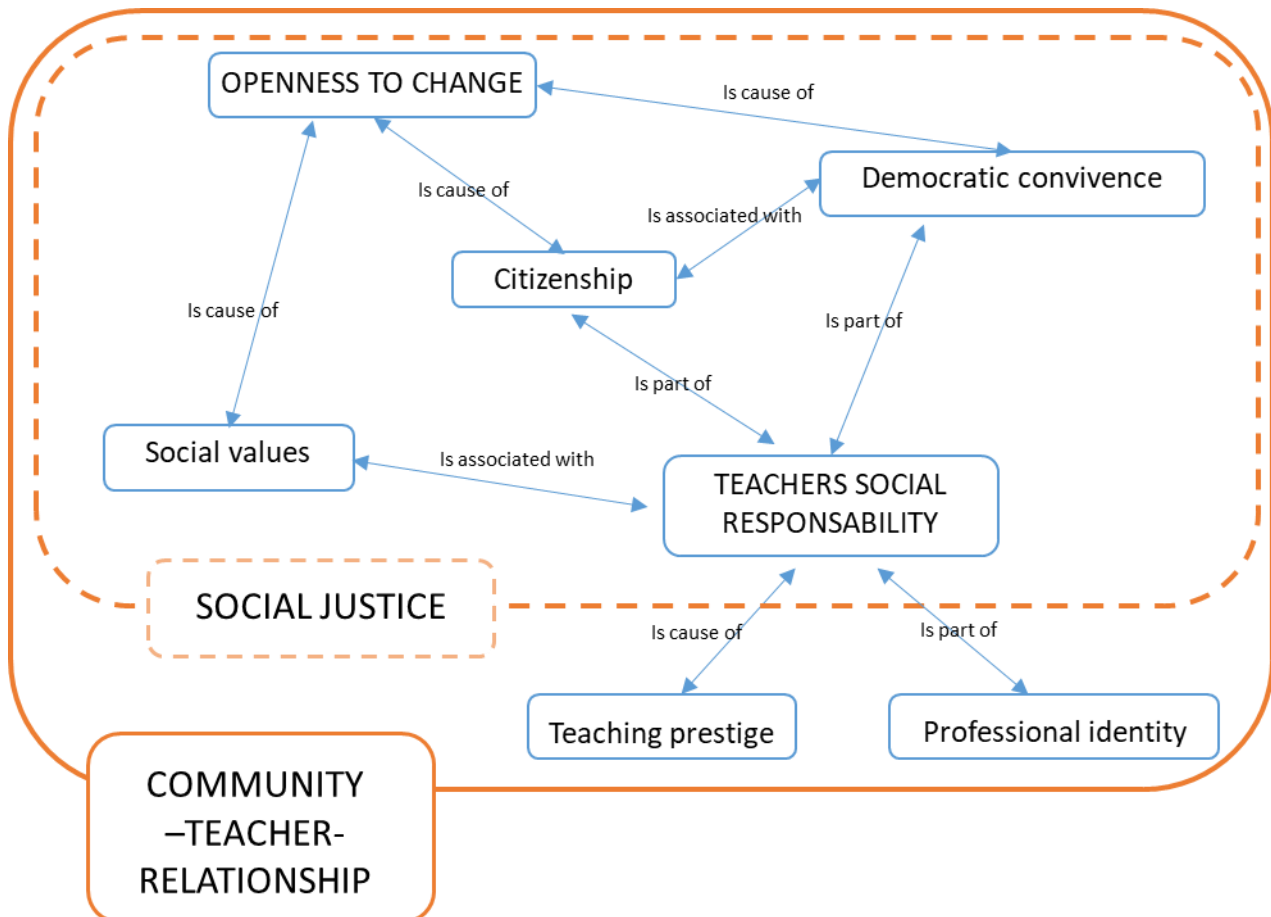


Figure 1.  
*Connections between TL Attributes Related to Community-Teacher Relationship*

**Student-Teacher Relationship**

This perspective was the second most distinctly emphasized in all documents analyzed (29% of all citations). As illustrated in Figure 2. It specifically included the category of accountability with the subcategories of holistic formation and personalized education, with

a strong connection to students’ learning needs (as a part of advocacy). In the Spanish context, aspects referring to students whose identities could have been insufficiently considered raised topics such as immigration, multiculturalism, gender, and respect for different religious beliefs. It was remarkable that all documents -except for ANECA (2004) and the one from the Conference of Deans (2017)- pinpointed families as a category related to accountability, and students’ holistic formation, in two ways: the necessary communication between family and school to follow students’ achievement as well as their implication to attain it.

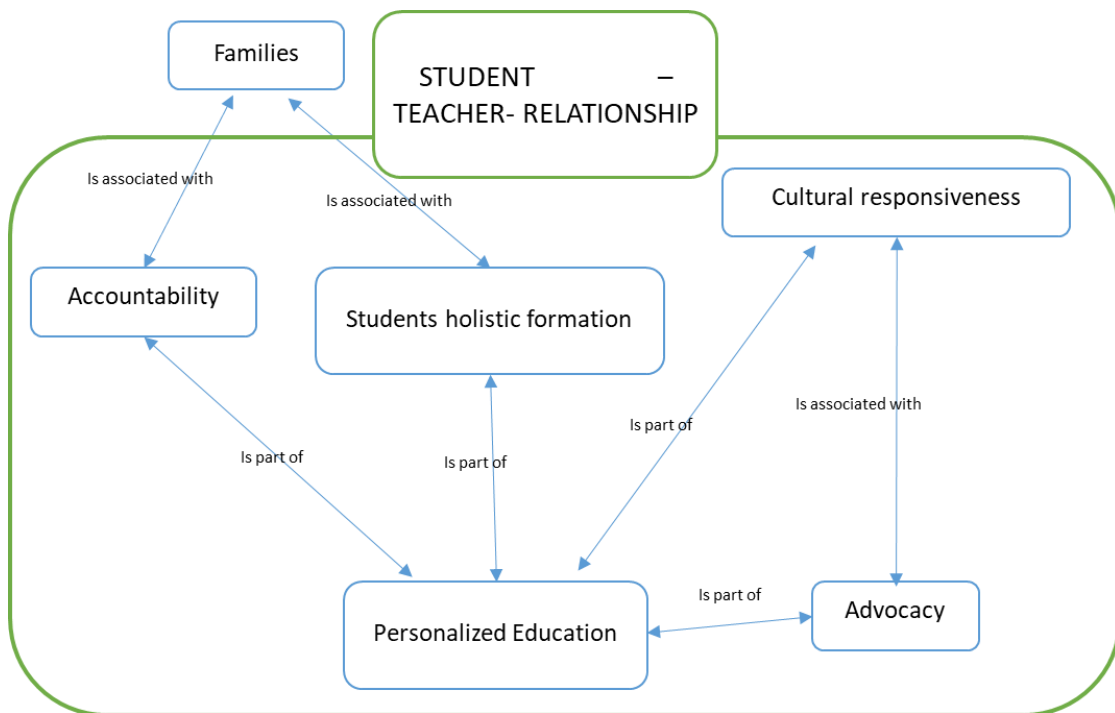


Figure 2.

*Connections between TL Attributes Related to Student-Teacher Relationship*

### School-Teacher Relationship

This dimension was the one with fewer references in the institutional documents studied (only 6% of all). As depicted in Figure 3, it comprised aspects that had more to do with teacher commitment and participation in the school such as sharing a common vision, taking part in decision-making (inclusiveness), and the consequences of this, such as risk-taking and stability. These last two attributes were almost absent from all documents. The few references to these aspects were stated in the laws -LOE (2006) and LOMCE (2013)- and in the recent report for the Ministry of Education (Marina et al., 2015) as well as in the study conducted by COFAPA (2008).

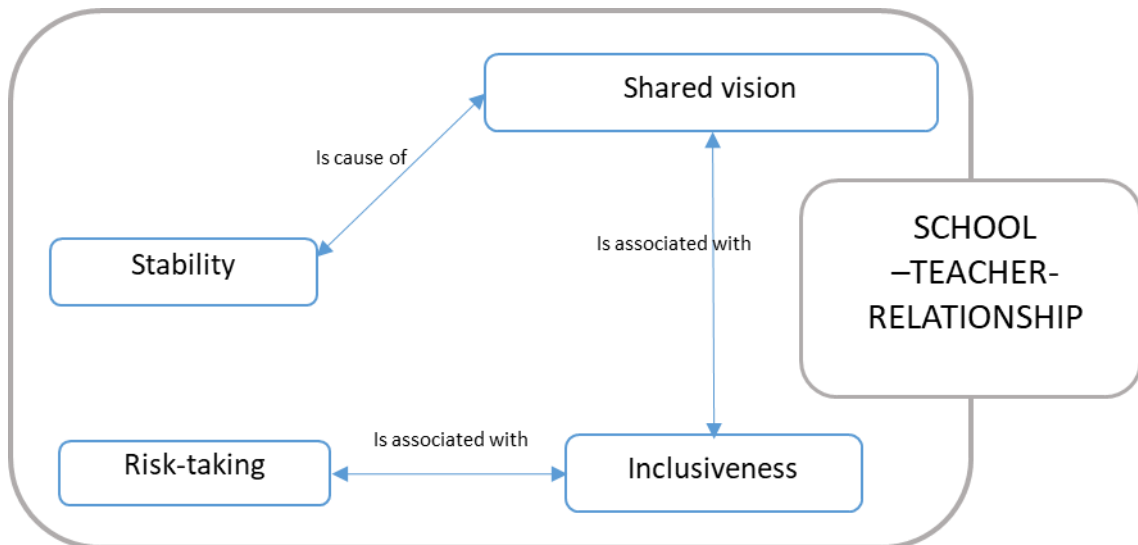


Figure 3.

*Connections between TL Attributes Related to School-Teacher Relationship*

### Transversal Attributes of Teacher Leadership

There are some attributes present in the documents that seemed to connect the perspectives previously described. They represented 25% of the codification. These categories were teamwork, reflection, and professionalism (see Figure 4). Professionalism was depicted as the need to keep updated through professional development with methodologies that better meet students' attitudes and interests, especially with the aid of technology.

The first one, teamwork was the attribute with the most number of citations (30) coming from all the documents studied. The other two attributes were equally important. Reflection was highlighted in almost every document, excluding the COFAPA study. As for professionalism, it was also reflected in almost all of them, except for the COFAPA (2008), ORDEN ECI 3857 (2007), and LOMCE (2013).

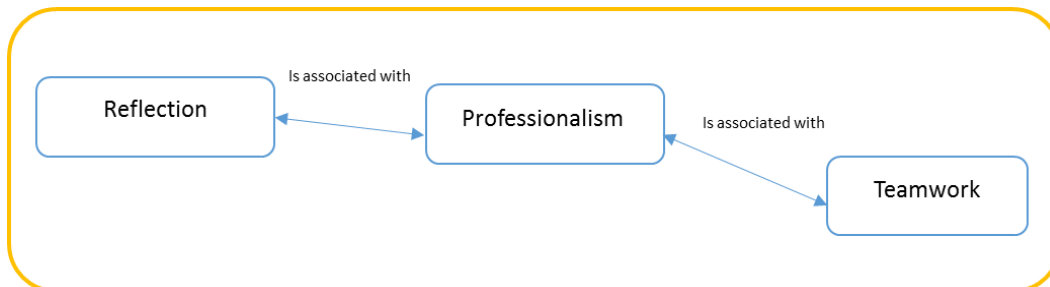
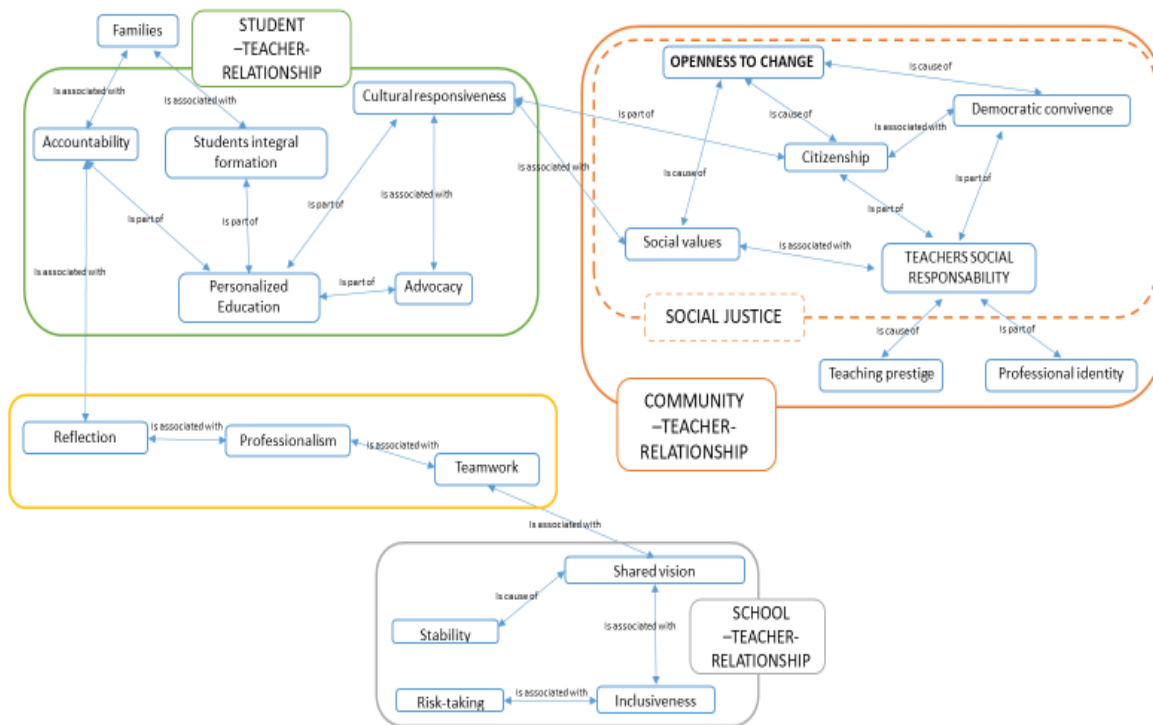


Figure 4.  
*Connections between TL Transversal Attributes*

We further realized that the attribute openness to change played a role as a connector among the three perspectives. It gave sense to the teachers' function to go beyond their classroom and empower them to go further in school influence, in order to promote the social values that society needs. In the Figure 5, all of the connections between TL attributes are represented.



Graph 5.  
Connections between TL Attributes According to Institutional Documents

## **Discussion and Implications**

Results from the study of a sample of the institutional documents in Spain confirm the fact that TL is a topic that basically appears in government laws, requirements for teacher training and proposals for its improvement. It is interesting to note the absence of documents enacted by teacher unions that represent teachers' voice, which highlights their lack of involvement in educational policy-making. The document analysis incorporates the main issues highlighted in the educational arena: social justice, citizenship, and democratic education, new social values such as sustainability or environmental education, and the culture of accountability. At the same time, they reflect the social changes that affect education and how the roles of the State, teachers, and families are changing.

On one hand, the growth in expectations that education can contribute to solving social problems (Darling-Hammond & Lieberman 2013; Hargreaves 1994) increases pressure on States to take responsibility for their citizens' education. This implies asking teachers to expand their functions and to take charge of aspects of education that families have been doing for generations. Therefore, it is reasonable to note the attributes of citizenship, peaceful coexistence, social values, and accountability in the educational laws and the documents related to teacher training. The role of families on students' achievement is important, although scarcely stated.

On the other hand, social changes that are having a great impact in recent years, such as the increase in immigrants arriving in Spain, increase student diversity and cultural and social inequity. Therefore, teachers are required to know how to facilitate the participation of diverse learners in their own learning process, to lead the development of personalized learning in education; and to encourage





all students to maximize their learning by addressing personal, cultural, economic and social inequalities, as well as supporting students with disabilities. However, standardization and bureaucratic pressure have been put forward due to the culture of accountability. In a certain way, there is a contradiction between the need to enhance teachers' identity and professionalization through the enlargement of their autonomy and, at the same time, a sense of mistrust of teachers and their competencies, which may explain the lack of teaching prestige in Spain.

Although the importance of teamwork is critical, the reality of teachers' work is characterized by a culture of isolation and a lack of professional feedback from mentors, peers, and principals (TALIS, 2018). Nevertheless, it is interesting to note that literature on TL in the Spanish context insists on professional learning communities as well as on the importance of sharing best practices (Tintoré et al., 2019). Furthermore, associations of employers are contributing to teachers' professional development through the dissemination of best practices and the promotion of innovation -e.g.; the program developed by *Escuelas Católicas* known as Movement for educative innovation (2015)-. Although reflection is also identified as an important aspect of TL, the lack of time, the heavy workload, and the absence of a culture of self-evaluation constitute serious obstacles to ongoing reflection.

The fact that teachers face difficulties inherent to their work, such as the loss of authority, bullying, attending to students' diversity and lack of family involvement, highlights the importance of adequately preparing committed teachers who can face these challenges (Pedró et al. 2008; Sarramona 2005). It is clear there is a need -present in the documents analyzed- to know how to address

conflicts and coexistence problems and to help students learn how to solve them.

For both formal and informal TL, the lack of a stable workforce, especially in public schools where a big percentage of teachers are in temporary positions, is a condition that makes more challenging the nurture of stability and shared vision attributes.

In summary, the documents studied stated that teachers have to be able to prepare their classes very well, making use of effective methodologies, teamwork, and cooperate, in an interdisciplinary way, within their classrooms. But at the same time, they have to be able to participate in the school community and to influence educational community outside their classrooms.

### **Conclusion**

This study aimed to contribute to a better understand of the concept of educational leadership, from the teacher perspective in the Spanish context. The analysis of the documents identified revealed a limited understanding of the crucial importance of TL. Most of the TL attributes that Webber (2018) categorized through his study of relevant literature on this topic are present in the Spanish institutional documents. Teamwork, accountability, openness to change, reflection, and advocacy, are the most frequently stated, whereas inclusiveness, risk-taking, shared vision, and stability are scarcely identified. There was little evidence of reference to the many challenges that policy documents are now emphasizing for future schooling agendas (Schleicher, 2018), such as the need to prepare students to face uncertain futures more holistically.

The documents place importance on aspects related to community, school and the student, and on what teachers are



expected to accomplish in these three areas. Nevertheless, few connections between them are evident. In some ways, the documents can be understood as a desire of what institutions would like teachers to do. Somehow, there is not a connection between principal and teacher leadership. Empowering teachers without the support and awareness of principals is almost impossible as noted by Crowther et al (2009). We know that the first key element in students' achievement is teacher quality (OECD, 2005); but we also know that the second more important factor for quality in education is principal leadership (Leithwood et al., 2004). The connection between them is well explained by Bangs and Frost (2012, p. 6) who stated that "a more helpful interpretation of distributed leadership is one where the school principal engineers the professional culture so that the capacity of teachers to lead is enhanced."

Enhancing TL requires that "initial teacher education programs have to prepare new teachers to play an active role in the design and running of education, rather than just following standardized practices" (OECD, 2011, p. 13). It also means there is a need to professionalize the teaching career "for an increase in the status and recognition of teachers to better attract and retain talented candidates, promotion of professional development and effective educational practices as well as teacher participation in decision making about classroom and organizational issues" (York-Barr & Duke, 2004, p. 256).

We observed that the most recent documents, especially the proposals for an improvement of the teaching profession (Marina et al., 2015; Comunidad de Madrid, 2019) include the full dimensions of TL. This fact is aligned with the functions teachers reported in OECD documents (OECD, 2005; OECD, 2013) which encompass

responsibilities for each student, the classroom, the school, parents and the whole community (Vara & Gómez, 2019). The increasing emphasis on TL dimensions in recent institutional documents in Spain note the need to go further with support for teachers' secondary roles as a consequence of the required modernization of the teaching profession (Scheerens, 2010). Enhancing TL in Spain could help to improve the quality of education because research has reported that this type of educational leadership "aims to improve instructional quality, school effectiveness and student learning" (Nguyen et al., 2019, p. 67).

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## Sustainable Teacher Leadership<sup>12</sup>

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Abstract	Article Info
<p><i>This report describes how teacher leadership is represented in the official documentation of key educational stakeholders in Alberta, Canada. Six themes emerged from the researchers' document analysis: foundational understandings; student diversity; innovative curriculum and student engagement; community engagement; 21<sup>st</sup> century competencies; and reflection and professional learning. Analysis of the idealized themes resulted in the identification of issues that may challenge teacher leaders. It is unlikely that teacher leaders can demonstrate competence in every theme area. Teacher leaders must necessarily prioritize some professional commitments in order to work sustainably. Several considerations were derived from the inherent tensions. The considerations were used to derive a composite profile of teacher leaders with the capacity to serve, influence, and thrive.</i></p>	<p><b>Article History:</b> <i>Received</i> January 31, 2020  <i>Accepted</i> September 27, 2020</p> <hr/> <p><b>Keywords:</b> <i>Teacher leaders, Document analysis, Professional tensions, Professional influence, Professional service.</i></p>

<sup>1</sup> This report is based on research done as part of the *International Study of Teacher Leadership* conducted in Australia, Canada, China, Colombia, Mexico, Romania, South Africa, Spain, Tanzania, and Turkey. The multi-stage study commenced in 2018. For more information, see the study website: [www.mru.ca/istl](http://www.mru.ca/istl).

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**Introduction**

Definitions of teacher leadership continue to evolve. One description is that it is the school-wide influence that can be exercised by teachers, not in formal leadership roles (Harris & Jones, 2019) who engage with school restructuring and interdisciplinary curriculum planning (Little, 1995). Another is that teacher leadership is the result of the shifting of power and control to teachers who are supported by principals so that leadership is reciprocal and inclusive of all adults in a school (Lambert 2003, 2007). Harris (2003) suggested that teacher leadership can be viewed as distributed leadership that allows school staffs to share a sense of agency and purpose. York-Barr and Duke (2004) described teacher leadership as the influence of teachers on members of school communities to enhance teaching and learning with the goal of improved student learning and achievement. More recently, Wenner and Campbell (2017) described teacher leaders as teachers who continue with classroom-based responsibilities while also fulfilling leadership responsibilities in the larger school community.

The International Study of Teacher Leadership ([www.mru.ca/istl](http://www.mru.ca/istl)) is a multi-stage, mixed-methods study that is being conducted in ten countries. The research team seeks to contribute to the wider understanding of teacher leadership and of how professional development and university programs might contribute to teacher leadership knowledge and skill development. The primary research question for the study is *How is teacher*



*leadership conceptualized and enacted, and what are the implications for educational stakeholders?* This report summarizes how teacher leadership is represented in the official documentation of key educational stakeholders in Alberta, Canada, and it highlights the tensions and key considerations inherent in the diverse perspectives represented in a sample of stakeholder documents.

### **Study Relevance**

Multiple researchers share the understanding that teachers are a key factor in school improvement (Andrews & Conway, 2018; Campbell, Lieberman, & Yashkima, 2015). Even though there may be a dearth of evidence linking teacher leadership directly with student engagement (Mulford, 2008; Scott Williams, Lakin, & Kensler, 2015), we know that teachers' capacity to influence educational improvement is enhanced through professional collaboration and open communication among members of school communities (Smylie & Eckert, 2018). Indeed, it is clear that school-wide alignment of educational goals, community support, and classroom practices depends upon teachers and principals taking shared responsibility for pedagogical development and implementation (Conway & Andrews, 2016). Unfortunately, the lack of clarity about the theoretical base of teacher leadership, its actual meaning, and how it is enacted may limit its utility (Margolis & Huggins, 2004).

### **Related Literature**

The challenges facing schools underscore the importance of principals and teachers collaborating effectively. However, successful collaboration is dependent upon the capacity of principals to

disengage from managerial approaches to their leadership and upon leadership development opportunities for classroom teachers.

### **Principal Considerations**

A frequent observation about teacher leadership development is that it cannot be particularly effective without principal support which can be eroded in the context of a hierarchical school culture (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Principals may need their own forms of professional development in order to become more collaborative and confident in nurturing teacher leadership (Andrews & Conway, 2018; Smylie & Eckert, 2018). As Fullan (2014) emphasized, principals need to learn how to facilitate leadership by teachers.

Andrews and Conway (2018) described the leadership-focused relationship between principals and teachers as parallel leadership. This is a process involving principals and teachers in collective action to support school-wide capacity building (Conway & Andrews, 2016; Crowther, Kaagan, Ferguson, & Hann, 2002). Andrews and Conway (2018) stated that parallel leadership is characterized by mutualism—shared trust and respect—between formal leaders and teacher leaders, and by a shared purpose and substantive amounts of freedom for individual expression and action. Conway and Andrews (2016) also noted how parallel leadership can become the foundation for school-wide pedagogical development and implementation.

### **Cautionary Considerations**

The education literature is replete with descriptions of what Fullan (2014) called the “wrong drivers” for managing change. He listed the negative features as “accountability, individualistic solutions, technology, and fragmented strategies” (Fullan, 2014, p. 25). Stoll, Brown, Spence-Thomas and Taylor (2015) suggested that



accountability frameworks may constitute a challenge to school improvement. Holloway, Nielsen, and Saltmarsh (2018) shared a host of cautions related to their examination of distributed leadership. For instance, they described the focus of teacher leaders on accountability-related tasks rather than meaningful relationships. They highlighted the time limitations that curtailed teacher leadership initiatives and cautioned that mandated distributed leadership was perhaps founded on a managerialist mentality unsuitable for school contexts. In addition, they described the lack of appropriate professional development opportunities for teacher leaders and how teacher leaders felt undervalued and overloaded.

Formal and informal leaders in education are right to deploy every possible strategy to ameliorate the challenges facing schools. As Angelle and DeHart (2016) stated, multiple reform policies have altered important dimensions of the education system. They suggested that teacher leadership is but one mechanism that can be utilized to address educational change. Further, they noted that the attributes of teacher leadership, such as collaboration and shared leadership, can produce positive benefits for members of school communities.

### **Teachers and Teacher Leadership Development**

Before teachers can take full advantage of their unique role in shaping meaning for the children and adult members of school communities, they need to engage in professional learning with their colleagues (Andrews & Conway, 2018; Stoll, Brown, Spence-Thomas, & Taylor, 2015). Teacher leaders should be able to participate in formal and informal teacher development activities (Campbell, Lieberman, & Yashkina, 2015) that develop their capacity to collaborate, exercise inventiveness, and become improvement



oriented (Smylie & Eckert, 2018). In fact, Angelle & DeHart (2016) called for pre-service teachers to be exposed to leadership training prior to their first appointments in schools, while Smylie and Eckert (2018) suggested that teacher leadership development initiatives be differentiated according to “intellectual, social and emotional, and psychological maturity” (p. 560), so that leadership can be nurtured at all career stages.

It is worth noting that providing opportunities for teacher leadership development does not mean that teachers necessarily will engage (Smylie & Eckert, 2018). In fact, as York-Barr and Duke (2004) observed, there are numerous inhibitors on teachers’ engagement in leadership development. These include the traditional individualism of the teaching profession and active discouragement from peers when teachers emerge as significant influencers within their school communities. Even the usual shortage of time available outside of class to participate in formal and informal leadership development activities can discourage teachers at all career stages.

### **Method and Analyses**

“Content analysis has been defined as a family of procedures for studying the contents of written or transcribed texts which enables the researcher to include large amounts of textual information and systematically identify its properties...” (Klenke, 2016, p. 94). To conduct the document analysis reported here, the researchers created tables using the attributes of teacher leadership identified in an earlier review of literature (Webber, 2018).

Then, a sample of public documents shared by some of the significant educational stakeholders in the province of Alberta was accessed. As each source document was reviewed, the researchers



pasted key quotes into the table under the relevant teacher leadership attribute. Nineteen documents or web pages were reviewed (see appendix), selected to profile the perspectives of some of the main educational partners in Alberta.

Applying coding strategies suggested by Saldana (2009), the researchers selected 335 direct quotations that they grouped under the teacher leadership attributes. The 335 direct quotations were summarized as 148 descriptive data points. The researchers sorted the 148 data points into common groupings, arriving at six emergent themes. In turn, the themes were divided into sub themes.

## Findings

Six themes emerged from the researchers' analysis of documents that expressed the views of key educational partners in relation to the attributes of teacher leadership. The themes offer a complex composite profile of teacher leadership expectations in the Alberta context.

### Foundational Understandings

The *foundational understandings* theme was comprised of five subthemes inherent in provincial educational organizations' stated views about all teachers with an implicit stronger emphasis for teacher leaders.

One subtheme was the *professional* component of teacher leadership that included, for example, respecting the legitimate authority structure in a school community: "The teacher criticizes the professional competence or professional reputation of another teacher only in confidence to proper officials and after the other teacher has been informed of the criticism, subject only to section 24

of the Teaching Profession Act” (Alberta Teachers’ Association, 2019a, para 14). Further the Code of Professional Conduct reminds teachers that they “may not accept pay for tutoring a pupil in any subjects in which the teacher is responsible for giving classroom instruction to that pupil” (Alberta Teachers’ Association, 2019a, para 7).

The *legal* dimension of teacher leadership was central to the foundational theme. Examples of legal responsibilities for teacher leaders are the expectations that: “The teacher may not divulge information about a pupil received in confidence or in the course of professional duties except as required by law or where, in the judgment of the teacher, to do so is in the best interest of the pupil (Alberta Teachers’ Association, 2019a, para 6).

There also is a *skills* subtheme apparent in educational organizations’ public documents. For instance, teacher education students are required to demonstrate success within higher education—significant because of the university-based venue for Bachelor of Education programs in Alberta. For example, teacher candidates at the University of Calgary (2020b, 2020c) learn to integrate STEM concepts and design-based thinking in curricular planning and teacher candidates at Mount Royal University (2020a, 2020b) engage in a school-based professional inquiry in their final capstone course.

A *values* subtheme also was evident. That is, an understanding emerged that teacher leaders should communicate high expectations for all students (Alberta Government, 2020) while concurrently believing that “all children can learn and reach their full potential given opportunity, effective teaching and appropriate resources” (Alberta Learning, 2004, p.1). Further, teacher leaders “collaborate



with the school community to create and implement a shared vision for student success, engagement, learning and well-being” (Alberta Education, 2018a, p. 5).

Finally, there is a strong expectation that teacher leaders will have a rich grounding in their teachable subjects and in pedagogy (Mount Royal University, 2020a; University of Calgary, 2020a, 2020c). Examples of other areas that fall within the *knowledge* subtheme are “brain development training to help staff understand how brain development influences learning and to inform best practices” (Calgary Catholic School District, 2019, p. 15) and knowledge related to First Nations, Metis, and Inuit communities (Alberta Teachers’ Association, 2019b).

### **Student Diversity**

Teachers in Alberta are expected to demonstrate the capacity to function effectively with a high level of *student diversity* (Alberta Education, 2019a). Teacher leaders are those who manifest a skill and knowledge set that inspires and influences their colleagues in unusually productive ways. For instance, teacher leaders will help to “determine the most enabling placement in a manner consistent with provincial special education policies, in consultation with parents, and based on current assessment data” (Alberta Learning, 2004, p. 10) for students with special needs.

A second dimension of the student diversity theme is student *mental health and wellness*. The understanding that the mental health and wellness of students is a priority is demonstrated at the ministry level (Alberta Government, 2018) in documents such as *Creating Welcoming, Caring, Respectful & Safe Learning Environments* and in the strategies of school districts such as the Calgary Catholic School

District (2019, p. 14) which details its *Student Wellness: Mental Health and Resiliency Strategy*.

*Foundational knowledge of First Nations, Metis, and Inuit* is a focus in the Alberta education system. This component of student diversity is reflected in the policy documents and goals statements disseminated by school districts (e.g., Foothills School Division, 2019), and the teachers' union (Alberta Teachers' Association, 2019b). Most teacher preparation programs in the province have a mandatory course to prepare new teachers to meet the competency identified in the Teaching Quality Standard: "A teacher develops and applies foundational knowledge about First Nations, Metis, and Inuit for the benefit of all students" (Alberta Education, 2018b, p. 6).

There is strong evidence of a common focus on *cultural diversity* in the public documentation of provincial education organizations. For instance, cultural diversity is prominent in the professional standard that teachers must meet (Alberta Education, 2018b) with indicators that requires "honouring cultural diversity and promoting intercultural understanding" (p. 4) and "incorporating students' personal and cultural strengths into teaching and learning" (p. 6).

The Programs of Study (Alberta Education, 2019b), the curriculum framework that all Alberta schools must follow, require teachers to facilitate intercultural awareness among their students. For example, the English Language Arts Program of Studies (Alberta Learning, 2000) lists a general outcome: "respect others and strengthen community" with specific outcomes including "appreciate diversity...relate texts to culture...use language to show respect" (p. 86).

Alberta Education (2016) articulates school protocols relating to *sexual and gender diversity* in *Guidelines for best practices: Creating*



*learning environments that respect diverse sexual orientations, gender identities and gender expression.* This document details the responsibility of schools to respect “students and staff who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, two-spirit, queer, questioning, and/or gender-diverse” (p. 2). Best practices include respecting an individual’s right to self-identification, respecting privacy and confidentiality, minimizing gender-segregated activities, providing safe access to washroom facilities, ensuring dress codes respect gender identity and expressions, and fostering healthy school relationships to nurture belonging.

### **21<sup>st</sup> Century Competencies**

The public documents examined in this study emphasized three critical areas for teachers to address as *21<sup>st</sup> century competencies*.

First, there is a strong need for teachers who can facilitate *engaged citizenship*. The Programs of Study (Alberta Education, 2019b) state clearly that the purposes of schooling include exploration of political and social issues that will lead to the development of responsible, contributing citizens who are life-long learners.

Other goals statements in the documents that were reviewed implied that facilitating an engaged citizenry depends upon the development of specific *student competencies*. For instance, Alberta Education (2019c) stated that competencies are “combinations of attitudes, skills and knowledge that students develop and apply for successful learning, living and working” (para 1) including:

- Critical Thinking
- Problem Solving
- Managing Information
- Creativity and Innovation

- Communication
- Collaboration
- Cultural and Global Citizenship
- Personal Growth and Well-Being

The Programs of Study (Alberta Education, 2019b) also call on teachers to facilitate student perseverance and risk taking in the context of an *uncertain future*. This is a skill set that Alberta teacher education programs also seek to develop in prospectiv teachers. The Rocky View School District (2019) aspires to “engage students as co-designers of their learning, empowering them to follow their passions and challenging them to new heights, ...mov(ing) beyond classroom walls to the natural world, building sites, farms, engineering firms, hospitals, zoos, museums and theatres” (para. 14-15).

### **Innovative Curriculum and Student Engagement**

According to the Alberta educational stakeholders whose public documents were reviewed, teacher leadership has strong curriculum and student engagement components. While all teachers are expected to plan for and engage students, teacher leaders engage in collaboration to invite innovative curriculum and student engagement beyond their own classrooms.

The Teaching Quality Standard (Alberta Education, 2018b) calls on teachers to “build student capacity for collaboration” and to design learning experiences that are “varied, engaging, and relevant to students” (p. 5). The Programs of Study (Alberta Education, 2019b) ask teachers to attend to children’s curiosity and to facilitate student teamwork. Collectively, these documents suggest that teacher leaders have an enhanced capacity to facilitate *innovation and engagement*.



Teachers who develop and lead inventive pedagogies will employ a range of *non-traditional instructional strategies*. They will use digital technology appropriately and stay abreast of emerging technologies with the potential to enhance knowledge and skill development (Alberta Education, 2018b). Innovative teachers also will expand students' understanding of literacy beyond text to include viewing and representing to "understand the ways in which images and language may be used to convey ideas, values and beliefs" (Alberta Learning, 2000, p. 3).

A key element of innovation and student engagement is teachers' responsibility for monitoring student progress frequently and accurately in order to "engage students to reflect on their learning" (Alberta Assessment Consortium, 2017). That includes involving students and parents in assessment strategies and communicating effectively with relevant members of the school community (Alberta Education, 2004).

### **Community Engagement**

A central element in teacher leaders' influence is engagement with community members and organizations in a manner that goes far beyond the classroom. The influence of teacher leaders is evident in their collaboration with *community agencies*.

School districts in the Calgary area collaborate with a number of community agencies. For example, the Foothills School Division (2019) and Calgary Catholic School District (2017a, 2017b) involve school students of various ages in extensive partnerships with community organizations, as do Rocky View Schools (2019). For example, the Rocky View Schools (2020) *Building Futures* program connects high school students with homebuilders. Clearly, successful



community engagement depends upon robust inter-agency *relationships* that are predicated on collaboration among parents, teachers, administrators, and community members.

### **Reflection and Professional Learning**

The significance of *personal reflection* for teachers and, even more so, for teacher leaders is evident in a number of stakeholder documents. The Teaching Quality Standard (Alberta Education, 2018b) emphasizes teachers' responsibility to engage in career-long learning and critical reflection. The Alberta Teachers' Association Code of Professional Conduct (2019a) calls on teachers to hold themselves and their schools to a high professional standard.

An impetus for personal reflection can be the constructive *feedback and evaluation* that teachers receive as part of performance reviews. "Teachers have the right to fair and reasonable evaluation of professional performance and have the responsibility to give sincere consideration to any suggestions for improvement" (Alberta Teachers' Association, 2018b). Further, all teachers are required to use the Teaching Quality Standard (Alberta Education (2018b) as the basis for their annual professional growth plan (Alberta Teachers Association, 2020).

It was evident in the documents reviewed for this study that *ongoing professional development* is a fundamental responsibility of teachers generally and teacher leaders especially. The Leadership Quality Standard (Alberta Education (2018a) offered the view that teacher leaders should be supported by formal leaders as they engage in improving leadership, teaching, and learning. The Alberta Teachers' Association's Annual Report (2018a) described a wide range of professional development opportunities that teachers are



encouraged to access. The opportunities included Alberta Teachers' Association library materials, international exchange programs, teachers' conventions (required of all teachers), and subject area specialist councils. School districts such as Rocky View Schools (2019) support teacher development through school and district communities of practice that involve face-to-face meetings and online sharing and reflection. The University of Calgary (2020d) offers a host of professional undergraduate and graduate programs in face-to-face and online formats so that ongoing professional development is eminently accessible to teaching professionals.

### **Discussion**

The document analysis findings reflect the views of teacher leadership that are explicitly and implicitly communicated in the public documents of key educational partners in Alberta. When the profile of teacher leadership portrayed in official documents was examined carefully, several issues emerged that may challenge teacher leaders to consistently demonstrate the attributes of teacher leadership.

#### **Professional Tensions**

Teacher leaders play an important role in upholding professional expectations and responsibilities. However, parents may be skeptical of educational initiatives such as inquiry-based learning or be reluctant to examine their personal views regarding gender diversity; teacher leaders must balance those community expectations with their professional judgments. In addition, teacher leaders may feel the need to express strong views during staff decision-making discussions and perhaps feel conflicted when they need to respect the

decisions of principals and other administrators, or counter the dominant views held by other teachers.

Other tensions may emerge in relation to influencing colleagues whose competence may compromise student learning, resulting in strained relations with both teachers and administrators or even damage to the teacher leader's acceptance and credibility within the school. Similarly, teacher leaders may experience uncertainty and conflict in relation to their professional role and their personal role as parents if their own children encounter questionable teaching at school. In those circumstances, teacher leaders may grapple with conflicts related to their personal views, confidentiality, and professional codes of conduct.

### **Curricular Tensions**

The expectation that teacher leaders will facilitate innovative approaches to curriculum that optimize student engagement and learning requires them to navigate several challenges. For instance, teacher leaders who seek to implement a pedagogy that builds on student curiosity may perceive themselves to be impeded by the mandated provincial program of studies. At other times, teacher leaders' possible focus on student collaboration and teamwork may conflict with the learning and achievement goals held by individual students and their parents.

Colleagues with whom teacher leaders wish to collaborate may not have the skills needed to implement an innovative pedagogy nor the motivation to develop the necessary skills. Large class sizes and complex learners may demand more teacher time than is available to meet learner needs successfully. Digital tools that teacher leaders believe are necessary for preparing students for the 21<sup>st</sup> century may



not be sufficiently accessible. A focus on interdisciplinary learning has many benefits, especially fostering the ability to see interconnections among topics, but can limit the acquisition of key disciplinary concepts.

### **Community Tensions**

The reality of schools in Alberta, particularly those in urban centers, is one of significant cultural diversity. As a result, teacher leaders may find it difficult to maintain a focus on the collective welfare of learners and on the implementation of the mandated curriculum that can be perceived to conflict with student and parent expectations, e.g., the role of women in society which is more conservative in some traditional societies. Learners with special needs of varying complexity may overwhelm the capacity of teacher leaders and their colleagues in terms of demands on their time and expertise.

Classrooms may be comprised of large proportions of students with several linguistic backgrounds, all working to gain proficiency in verbal and written English or French, resulting in teachers with little or no time and energy to attend to issues affecting the broader school community. Teacher leaders may struggle with their own or colleagues' access to the cultural knowledge that will enable them to meet the Teaching Quality Standard that requires them to develop and apply basic knowledge about First Nations, Metis, and Inuit cultures in their schools.

Teacher leaders who strive to establish and maintain safe and respectful learning environments will be impacted by the variation in student wellness manifested in Alberta schools. Some students who are struggling with a range of mental health and trauma issues may exhibit behaviors that create discomfort and discord among students

and their families. As a result, teacher leaders need to find ways to help community members who may not understand mental health challenges or may fear for the welfare of their own children if they are alarmed by classmates' threatening or violent conduct.

### **Political Tensions**

Within the findings of the document analyses is a host of implicit political tensions. For instance, concurrent with calls for educators to prepare students for 21<sup>st</sup> century living is the recognition that rapid change within Alberta—social, political, economic, technological, environmental—has led to levels of uncertainty and ambiguity that challenge teacher leaders' intentions to plan carefully and nurture stability. Issues such as school choice—characterized in Alberta by a range of schooling formats such as public, private, Catholic, charter, and home—may cause teacher leaders to engage in the defense of their preferred educational infrastructures and to attack perceived competitors. Ongoing power struggles between provincial policy makers and the teachers' union in areas such as salaries, revisions to the Alberta Program of Studies, disciplinary actions in instances of teachers' unprofessional conduct, and standardized assessment programs highlight the critical need for teacher leaders with enough social and political acumen to collaborate effectively with local and provincial educational partners.

### **Personal Tensions**

An obligation to serve students, schools, and the profession is stated explicitly and implicitly in the documents reviewed for this study. Professionalism is key to meeting the formal and informal expectations of teachers in Alberta. However, there are tensions that teacher leaders must personally consider.



For example, maintaining the highest priority on students and their learning is at the forefront of the obligations of all teachers. While teacher leaders should aim to stay professionally current, there are limits to what is feasible within the time constraints of a classroom teacher's daily work. As well, teachers have a professional duty to reserve time to reflect on their work and to engage in life-long learning. Additionally, teacher leaders should take time to nurture their career trajectories.

Demands also are placed on teacher leaders' time because of their participation in community affairs. Their time also is required by family and personal commitments. Teacher leaders must find a way to handle the time and energy demands that exceed the professional service of most classroom teachers.

### **Professional Learning Tensions**

Finally, teacher leaders are expected to be champions for career-long learning, deep reflection, and seeking feedback to improve their practice. However, there is an ongoing debate about the value of mandated professional development over self-directed goal-setting and learning. Limited time, access, pressure to obtain credentials, and struggling to collaborate with resistant colleagues are all factors that can constrain the professional development choices that teacher leaders can make.

### **Achieving a Balance**

The descriptions of teacher leadership shared in this report are idealized statements that vary according to the organizations that produced them and all have significant inherent inhibitors. What was obvious, however, was the low likelihood of any teacher leader

demonstrating notable competence in all of the theme areas. Thus, teacher leaders must necessarily seek a sustainable balance in their commitment to the multiple educational priorities that compete for their attention.

Table 1 portrays teacher leader considerations in relation to each of the six themes found in the documents that were analyzed for this study. The list is a summary of how teacher leaders may choose to navigate the tensions associated with their roles.

Table 1.



### *Teacher Leader Considerations*

Foundational Dimensions	Serving as an influencer, not an authority
	Manifesting enhanced social and political acumen
	Communicating skillfully
	Being a reliable confidante
Innovative Curriculum & Student Engagement	Planning teaching and learning that is provocative
	Building collaborative teams
	Creating nurturing organizational cultures
	Breaking boundaries
Cultural Diversity and Student Learning Needs	Maintaining an influential teaching presence
	Respecting human dignity
	Finding knowledgeable cultural guides
21 <sup>st</sup> Century Competencies	Navigating change
	Focusing on competencies while content changes
	Embracing ambiguity
Community Engagement	Prioritizing learning
	Fostering critical thought
	Balancing formal and informal learning
	Expecting turbulence
Reflection and Professional Learning	Anticipating career stage variation
	Regulating the flow of professional development
	Working mainly with adopters, not resisters
	Accessing atypical professional learning opportunities

### **Composite Teacher Leader Profile**

The considerations in Table 2 were used to derive (infer) a composite profile of teachers with the capacity to serve, influence, and thrive as teacher leaders.

### **Service**



A commitment to principled service to the school communities is a guiding force for teacher leaders. They attend first to their primary roles as teachers who strive to nurture learning for all students. They prioritize learning for their students and also for their colleagues and themselves. They expect career-stage variation in their capacity to serve and they trust the process of ongoing professional growth during the ebb and flow of service that occurs throughout their professional and personal lives. Rather than engage in unsustainable overload at certain points in their careers, they are able to achieve a sustainable, longitudinal balance of school, community, and personal commitments. They judge their professional contributions by the magnitude of career-long influence rather than on episodic metrics.

### **Influence**

Teacher leaders understand the value and impact of informal influence versus formal leadership. They embrace the role of influencer over that of an authority, and accept the ambiguity related to that positioning. As an influencer, teacher leaders can function as reliable confidantes who sustain a caring professional culture. They foster critical thought and serve as collaborative team builders, both of which are critical contributions to professional learning communities. Further, teacher leaders are lifelong learners who appreciate the importance of self-regulating the flow of professional development. Teacher leaders are enthusiastic in their engagement with traditional professional learning offered by schools, universities, and professional organizations. However, they also demonstrate astuteness in their ability to perceive, take advantage of, and plan atypical professional learning opportunities that are life- and career-changing.



## **Leadership**

Teacher leaders are portrayed in the research literature primarily as informal leaders rather than individuals who occupy formal leadership positions in schools. However, the documents reviewed for this study contained multiple descriptions of leadership that could be and often are used in both of the educational leadership and the teacher leadership literature. The interpretation offered here is that the descriptions of leadership shared in the literature related to teacher leadership and to educational leadership are significantly different in tone and nuance. For example, both teacher leaders and formal leaders are described as skilled communicators but even a cursory interrogation of that term suggests that communication by a formal leader is infused with the authority of title and position while communication by informal teacher leaders relies more on the impact of influence and service.

## **Informal Power**

Teacher leaders rely heavily upon social and political acumen to achieve influence. They are adroit at navigating change without the type of (and perhaps the burden of) power associated with formal leadership. They work almost exclusively with willing participants during curricular and organizational change. Possibly because of their informal leadership roles, teacher leaders can serve as boundary breakers who can navigate relatively smoothly within and across school and community groups. They possibly are more free than formal leaders to push the boundaries of curriculum and pedagogy because they are less constrained by perhaps more stringent community expectations for principals. Notably, teacher leaders have the potential to be perceived as more respectful of human dignity than formal leaders due to not being associated with the wielding of

the formal power of position that may be understood to be challenging or intimidating.

### Conclusion

This report of is intended to highlight what stakeholder organizations say they think teacher leadership should be. It is an early report from the *International Study of Teacher Leadership* that indicates how teacher leadership is conceptualized in formal organizational statements. It also identifies a set of tensions that teacher leaders in Alberta are likely to encounter. Finally, it offers a general profile of teacher leaders who wish to function effectively and sustainably in Alberta.

Future reports will add depth and breadth based on additional data that are being gathered in a sequence of interviews, questionnaires, case studies, and oral histories. The intent is to juxtapose (1) what educational organizations *say* in their public documents, with (2) what teacher leaders *will share in private* conversations and questionnaires, with (3) what they *actually do* in schools, with (4) how they *reflect* on being a teacher leader near or after retirement. The overall goal is to contribute to the understanding of teacher leadership and to offer a thick, rich description of the lived experience of teacher leaders.

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## The Key Role of Administrators in Supporting Teacher Leadership and Professionalism in Southern Mexico

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Abstract	Article Info
<p><i>This work uses the results of three research studies conducted in southeastern Mexico to identify critical issues for teacher leadership and professionalism. The results indicate that educational reforms during more than twenty years have not always considered the sociocultural and economic context of the schools, nor the preparation needs of the main actors at the school level. Likewise, the traditional power structure in schools has influenced the success of educational reforms promoting teacher participation and leadership. It was also found that, although there are challenges and limited resources, it is necessary to improve the preparation of school administrators and supervisors, since they have a high influence on the training of in-service teachers, as well as on the implementation of new educational practices and policies. It is also necessary to improve the preparation of in-service teachers, to increase their possibilities for teacher leadership. Moreover, findings from the study identified important aspects that can facilitate teacher leadership and professionalism in effective secondary schools: a sense of ownership among stakeholders at the school level, leadership that supports change, strong discipline policies, emphasis on student success, not only in academics but also in music and sports, teacher professional development focused not only on improving</i></p>	<p><b>Article History:</b>  <i>Received</i>                      April 30, 2020    <i>Accepted</i>                      September 9, 2020</p> <hr style="border: 0.5px solid black; margin: 10px 0;"/> <p><b>Keywords:</b>  <i>Teacher leadership,                      Educational administrators,                      School supervisor,                      International studies.</i></p>

*teaching and learning, but also on how to support student personal development. Lessons from the three studies indicate the important role of the context as well as the key role of authorities, administrators and school supervisors in facilitating or inhibiting teacher leadership and professionalism.*

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### **Introduction**

Mexico, like other Latin American countries, faces challenges due to the low academic achievement of its students in standardized academic tests. Research from the Latin American Laboratory for the Evaluation of Quality of Education [LLECE], in thirteen countries in the area found that achievement in language in the region is considerably low. The results in mathematics were generally even lower than those of Language, apart from Cuba (LLECE, 2000). In the case of Mexico, as the National Plan for Development 2019-2024 (Mexican Government, 2019) states, 48% of Mexican students underperform in reading, 42% in science and 57% underperform in mathematics when compared with their pairs from other countries.

According to the National Plan for the Evaluation of Learning (PLANEAL), the results of a national student performance evaluation show that 49.1% of Mexican sixth-grade students reached the level of insufficient in Language and Communication in 2018. In Mathematics, the proportion of students with insufficient level was 59.1% in the same year. Performance results were higher in Mexico City and in the state of Aguascalientes in relation to other states. The





lowest results were found in the southern states of the country: Guerrero, Chiapas, Campeche, Oaxaca, Quintana Roo, Tabasco, Veracruz, and Yucatan.

In response to all these results, the Mexican government through his Department of Education, implemented different educational reforms in the last decades. The Educational Modernization Reform (SHCP-FCE, 1994) took place during the government of Carlos Salinas de Gortari (1988-1994). This reform established the decentralization of education, the integration of preschool, elementary, and secondary education as basic education, curricular and pedagogical changes, and greater production of educational materials for basic education. An important aspect regarding the preparation of teachers in Mexico was to require teachers to have a bachelor's degree. A national teacher professional development program was also created. Various strategies were also implemented to recognize teachers' work, by increasing teachers' salaries and creating economic stimuli to reward teacher merit.

The educational goals set by this reform continued during the presidential terms of Presidents Zedillo (1994-2000) and Fox (2000-2006). During these years, changes were made in the bachelors degrees at the Normal Schools in secondary education, preschool education, special education, indigenous education, artistic education, physical education, and preschool education.

Other educational reform in Mexico took place during the government of President Peña Nieto (Mexican Government, 2013). This reform focused mainly on the evaluation of teachers by the National Institute for the Evaluation of Education (INEE, 2013), as well as the creation of full-time schools, the autonomy of school

management, and the creation of an educational information system (López, 2013).

The reforms stressed the key role of teachers for improving education. From the National Program for Modernizing the country in 1993, to the latest teacher preparation policies and evaluation reforms, as well as the creation of school support programs, such as *Schools for Quality (Escuelas de Calidad, Secretaría de Educación Pública, 2015)*, Mexico placed more responsibilities on teachers for improving the quality of education in the schools.

Studies of teaching professionalism in Mexico and Latin America are still scarce. Although the few publications in this regard allow us to perceive elements typical of the region that can affect the development of professionalism such as trade unionism (Avalos, 2010), the articles approach professionalism from an evaluative point of view of education and the performance of teachers (Sisto, 2011; Martínez & Lavín, 2017), and the resulting challenge of understanding new forms of professionalism (Sisto, 2011; Baloco, 2020). However, these studies are approached from purely theoretical perspectives, and lack empirical data to explore this phenomenon, which is why a systematic study of teacher leadership and professionalism is needed.

Among the few empirical studies of factors influencing teacher leadership, there was a study in central Mexico that focused on the role of the school principal, and its relationship to the low quality of students' education, especially in rural contexts (Schmelkes, 1997). Other research conducted by INEE (2003) and Martínez (2011) found that the lack of pedagogical preparation and leadership of teachers and principals could be the main factors negatively influencing the quality of education at the school level. It has also been pointed out



than a factor affecting the quality of education was the need for improving teachers' preparation and development (INEE, 2003).

There is a need for more research on teacher leadership in México and other Latin American countries, given the socioeconomic and cultural differences in the region, and that most educational research on the topic has been conducted in western nations.

### **Context of the Study**

This article analyzes research conducted in Yucatán, one of the nineteen Mexican states, located in the southeast of Mexico to identify critical issues for teacher leadership and professionalism. Yucatan is divided into 106 municipalities, nine geographic regions, or seven economic regions (Gobierno de Yucatán, 2020). The state population has been increasing in the last thirty years, according to the 2010 census there were 1,955,577 inhabitants living in this state. Currently the state population is of 2,102,259, about 43.5% of all state population lives in the capital city of Mérida.

The main language spoken in the Yucatan is Spanish, but people also speak the Mayan language. Indeed, after Oaxaca, Yucatan is the state with more than a third of its population speaking an Indigenous language. Data from the National Council for the Evaluation of Social Development (CONEVAL, 2019) show that 40.8% of the state population lives in poverty. The council defines poverty when a person has at least one social deprivation (among the six indicators of educational backwardness, access to health services, access to social security, quality and spaces of housing, basic services in housing and access to food) and their income is insufficient to acquire the goods and services that they require to satisfy their food and non-food needs.

In Yucatan, 34.1 % of the population lives in moderate poverty and the 6.7% in extreme poverty. People are in extreme poverty when they have three or more deficiencies, out of six possible, within the social deprivation index, and have such a low income that even if they were to use all their income to acquire food, they would not be able to acquire the necessary nutrients for a healthy life. A person is in moderate poverty when not extremely poor. The incidence of moderate poverty is obtained by calculating the difference between the incidence of the population in poverty minus that of the population in extreme poverty (CONEVAL, 2019).

Most of the population from Yucatan has completed basic education. Data from the last census (2010) indicates that in Yucatan 141, 753 people older than 8 years old (6.7% of the population) are illiterate, 66% had completed basic education, while 19% have completed upper-secondary education and only 18.2% have completed higher education (INEGI, 2015).

Students from Yucatan are among those with the lowest academic performance in standardized tests at the national level. They are ranked in the lower sixth position, behind the academic performance of their peers at the national level (Yucatan Plan for Development 2018-2024, 2019). Indeed, 20.6% of the students from Yucatan are below the national average of 17.4% in those tests. This position has remained the same since 2008. According to the Mexican National Institute for the Evaluation of Education (INEE, 2018), in 2018, 45.9% of sixth grade students obtained an insufficient level of achievement in language and communication, and 58.9% also obtained an insufficient level of achievement in mathematics.



## Background

This paper analyzed the results from three studies conducted in southern Mexico during 2007, 2011 and 2018 to identify important issues for teacher leadership and professionalism. The first study *Teaching of sciences in southern Mexico: Critical issues for improving teaching and learning* (Cisneros-Cohernour, López & Canto, 2007), examined the conditions for teaching science and the evaluation of student learning in science, the challenges faced by teachers attempting to improve teaching and its evaluation, and possible alternatives for improving science education in Yucatan Mexico.

The second study *The evaluation of the program Schools for Quality: A site base-management initiative* (Cisneros-Cohernour, 2011), focused on determining the main contributions of a Site-Based Management program in special education schools in Yucatan. It clarified the concept of quality used by different stakeholders at different schools and determined the ways the program contributed to improving school needs.

The third study on *Teacher preparation and practice in effective secondary schools in southern Mexico* (Cisneros-Cohernour, Canto & Patrón, 2018), focused on identifying the common characteristics of effective schools and for determining if teacher professional development at these schools was related to its effectiveness

## Literature Review

Empirical studies on the factors that can promote or inhibit teacher's professionalism have been approached from both qualitative and quantitative perspectives (Bartholdsson, 2020; Joo, 2020; Khasanah, Kristiawan, & Tobari, 2019; Nolan & Molla, 2019;

Purwantiningsih & Suharso, 2019; Toh, Diong, Boo, & Chia, 1996). All of them have consistent results that establish that teacher professionalism is a complex phenomenon.

Legrottaglie & Ligorio (2017) found that development of teacher professionalism is a dynamic process that is nuanced by the professional experiences of teachers, as well as by their attitudes about their role as teachers, both in their student stage and as teachers (Rodríguez et al., 2019; Suyatno *et al.*, 2019). For example, second career teachers (teachers who were initially trained in a profession other than education), take advantage of their experiences in their first profession to have a positive effect in their schools (Nielsen, 2016; Ro, 2019). Other studies indicated that teacher training plays a more important role than years of experience, with independent learning, cooperative learning, and in-service learning having a positive and relatively similar effect on teacher professionalism (Toh et al., 1996). Thus, for example, it has been found that teachers' digital competence, defined as a "confident, critical, and creative of ICT use to reach the goal that related to the work" also directly influences teacher professionalism (Mangiri *et al.*, 2019; p. 1729), while other studies pointed out the importance of mentoring programs so that teachers can make lesson plans suitable for the needs of the 21st century (Alimah *et al.*, 2018).

Furthermore, staff management is a relevant variable to consider in the analysis of teaching professionalism (Wong, 2017). For example, when the rules, procedures, and communication are clearly defined and written they facilitate greater teaching professionalism (Cheng, 1996). However, the use of manual-based programs, that is programs that are carried out in accordance with specific administration guidelines, maximizing the possibility that the



intervention will be carried out consistently in all settings, with scientific evidence for teacher professionalization could be seen as a devaluation and subordination of teachers (Bartholdsson, 2020). This contrasts with current trends in certain countries, like Sweden, that seek to prescribe standards and practices for teaching work (Kirsten & Wermke, 2017). The autonomy of the school and teachers has also been seen to play an important role. Studies in contexts where schools enjoy greater autonomy (general and curricular) and empowerment indicate that they encourage the development of teaching professionalism in such a way that it responds to the needs of the immediate context (Gobby et al., 2018; Pearson & Moomaw, 2005)

Meanwhile, other studies have pointed out the effect that the dynamics of interpersonal relationships with their co-workers have on their professionalism. For example, some studies have found that distributed leadership hurts teacher professionalism, possibly under the assumption that they can perceive an increase in their functions without necessarily being reflected in an increase in their authority (Joo, 2020). However, some elements of distributed leadership, such as collegial work and collaboration among teachers have also been seen to have a positive effect on teacher professionalism (Gobby et al., 2018; Wiyono & Triwiyanto, 2018), mostly because it has an effect that improves trust in their co-workers.

However, perhaps one of the most studied and noted school factors is the role of principals in teacher leadership development. For example, principal supervision that provides orientation to teacher, has been seen to have a positive effect on teacher professionalism (Cheng, 1996; Dimyati *et al.*, 2019; Tschannen-Moran, 2009). It has also found that the administrative skills of the principals, and the

organizational climate affect the teachers' professionalism, with the administrative skills of the principals being the variable that usually contributes more to this effect (Bianome et al., 2016). This is related to other study that have indicated that a human and symbolic leadership of school principals is positively associated with professionalism (Cheng, 1996).

Finally, other factors such as teacher evaluation can also affect teacher professionalism. For example, it has been found that external teacher evaluations, evaluations started mainly from levels above the local school and with a control approach, tend to have a negative effect on teachers and their professionalism, creating an environment in which mistrust is perceived towards the evaluation (Hult & Edström, 2016). This is consistent with literature that indicates that teacher professionalism is positively related to trust toward the principal, colleagues, and the school community.

## **Methodology**

### **Design and Methods**

The three studies were qualitative and used an interpretive design involving multiple sources and methods of data collection (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The main research questions and methods of data collection in each study follow:

Study 1. Teaching of sciences in southern Mexico: Critical Issues for Improving Teaching and Learning (2007). The main research questions were:

- What are the goals of science education and how are they interpreted and implemented by the main actors at the school level?





- What are the conditions and main challenges affecting science education and its evaluation?
- What are the possible solutions for improving science education from the perspective of the main actors?

The main sources of data collection involved content analysis of school documents and records, semi-structured and focus group interviews, as well as on site-observations at schools

Study 2. The evaluation of the program schools for quality: A site Base-Management Initiative (2011). The main research questions were:

- What are the main contributions of the program, particularly for the improvement of school management and its link with student achievement in special education schools in Yucatan?
- What is the concept of educational quality from the schools' perspective? To what extent does the program contribute to improving the needs of the participating schools?

This evaluation study used two qualitative designs: appreciative inquiry (Coghlan, Preskill & Tzavaras Catsambas, 2003; Preskill & Catzambas, 2006; Watkins & Mort, 2002; Webb & Preskill, 2005) and the Stake Responsive Evaluation model (Stake & Schwandt, 2006).

The main sources of data collection were document analyses, interviews, surveys, and seven case studies involving focus-groups, interviews, and on-site observations. The use of multiple sources and methods of data collection increased the strength of the evaluation design and provided valuable information for program improvement (Brandon & Fukonaga, 2014; Cousins, 2000; Patton, 2010).

Study 3. Teacher Preparation and Practice in Effective Secondary Schools in Southern Mexico (2018). The main research questions were:

- Do schools share similar characteristics?
- What aspects characterize the role (s) of teachers at the schools?
- What elements characterize teacher training and professional career?
- Who supervises and evaluates teaching work?

The research used a case study design including multiple sources of data collection, such as content analyses of school documents, semi-structured interviews with principals and teachers, and on-site observations

The first and third study were conducted in secondary schools for students between 12-15 years old. The second study was conducted in special education schools for students with disabilities.

### **Participants**

In the teaching of sciences in southern Mexico: Critical Issues for Improving Teaching and Learning (2007) study, the researchers conducted document analysis of curriculum and educational reform documents. In this study participants included two officials from the state Department of Education, 27 school principals, and 216 teachers of Mathematics, Physics, Biology and Chemistry teachers from 27 secondary schools. The schools were representative of the type of schools attended by different ethnic groups in the region.

In The evaluation of the program Schools for Quality: A Site Base-Management Initiative study (2011), researchers also analyzed



policy documents. The participants included Department of Education Officials (2), teachers (263), Special Education staff (54), and parents (270) from 27 special education centers.

In the Teacher preparation and practice in effective secondary schools in southern Mexico study (2018), researchers analyzed school and policy documents. The participants were two Department of Education officials, four principals, and 50 teachers.

### **Data Analysis**

All qualitative data from the three studies obtained from interviews, focus group interviews and on-site observations were transcribed, and classified in categories, and then themes, patterns, and relationships were summarized.

The quantitative data of the survey from *the evaluation of the program Schools for Quality: A Site Base-Management Initiative* study, were analyzed using the software SPSS version 24. The analysis included descriptive statistics of teachers' responses according to the three main aspects of the program: pedagogical practice, management, and social participation.

### **Results**

Findings of *Teaching of sciences in southern Mexico: Critical Issues for Improving Teaching and Learning* indicated that there were four main factors influencing the implementation of the educational reforms in secondary schools: curriculum, student related factors, assessment policies and teacher preparation and professionalism.

Teacher preparation and professionalism were identified as related to teacher motivation for innovation and to work effectively with adolescents. According to the results of the study, there were

factors negatively influencing professional development in schools. One of these factors was related to the type of policies for teacher hiring and for the assignment or working hours of teachers at the secondary schools. Most science teachers were hired by the hour and when there were vacancies in the school, administrators preferred to hire other teachers by the hour instead of increasing the number of working hours of teachers who were already teaching other science courses at the school. The situation resulted in teachers having limited opportunities to participate in professional development activities, since they needed to work in more than one school to complete their income.

In addition, because the most advanced teacher professional development programs were limited to part-time and full-time teachers, this left most secondary school teachers with few opportunities to improve their teacher preparation. This situation was aggravated by teachers limited mastery of the content knowledge and pedagogical competencies. Teachers stated that there was also a poor connection between the professional development activities with their professional needs and their work context. Secondary school teachers stressed their desire to be involved in in the processes of planning, implementing, and evaluating professional development activities., but the policies at the national, central, and local level limited their participation.

School supervisors and principals had a key role, influencing teacher participation in professional development, since they made the decisions for hiring and for implementing professional development initiatives at the school level. Their top-bottom decision-making style did not support teacher autonomy. In addition, because more principals did not have an education background or



preparation for the principalship, this negatively influenced their support for teachers' work and decision making.

Policy makers and state department authorities' implementation of the reform without considering school context and teacher needs for professional development, negatively influenced teacher participation in professional development and reduced the role of teachers in improving student learning.

The study also identified the need for preparing school administrators and local education authorities, as those responsible for teacher training programs.

Results from the study: *Evaluation of the program Schools for Quality: A Site-Based Management Initiative* (2011), indicated that teachers and parents' participation has increased in school activities because of the program. However, case studies provided no evidence that the greater involvement of teachers lead to a democratic management and true collective participation in decisions at the school level. On the contrary, participatory management, an essential element of the model that guides the program, does not apply, and the structure of authority in the schools remains pyramidal. In fact, the top-down leadership style of the principals at the schools was identified as an obstacle for teacher leadership and professionalism.

Although teachers increased their participation in the planning and implementation of the program, the school principal and school supervisor continued to control decision-making. Parents were only involved when required to obtain funds for supporting the program implementation. For many teachers, their school participation in the program also meant more responsibilities, which increased their stress level.

Another limitation of the program was that it did not provide training for teachers and other staff at the school level. When training was available, it did not always correspond to the real needs of teachers. Training was particularly important for schools where teachers were preparing students with multiple disabilities.

During the process of conducting the evaluation, it was evident that an important stakeholder that influenced program implementation and decision making at the school level, were the school supervisors. Their lack of teaching and administrative preparation in some cases, negatively influenced the access to the schools as well as teachers' participation in professional development and innovation. In the Mexican context, a school supervisor is an academic authority figure that is responsible for inspecting, controlling and verifying that schools function and organize themselves accurately, according to the established normativity, in order to provide quality education for all students, and to implement strategies for attending student problems in advancing in their studies, failing or dropping out from school, and situations that affect the rights of students to receive a dignified, equitable and inclusive treatment (Carrillo, 2018).

The *study on teacher preparation and practice in effective secondary schools in southern Mexico* was centered around four secondary schools known as effective because of the good performance of their students in standardized tests and for receiving high recognition from their communities as good schools. The schools represented the four types of secondary schools in the state: federally funded, state funded, rural secondary, and tele-secondary school. The last one is a type of secondary school, intended to students who live in rural regions or have difficult access to education. It provides education through



television broadcasts, as well as videos, audiotexts, model texts, songs, and images), interactive and a media library (Montoya, 1996).

Findings of the study indicated that the four secondary schools shared similar characteristics: a sense of ownership, leadership support for change, a strong discipline policy, emphasis in success not only in academics, but in the arts and sports, and teacher participation in professional development.

In all four schools, schoolteachers, staff, and administrators had a sense of ownership. In the federally funded school, most teachers were former students, including the principal. Teachers created an alumni association that had a key role in decision making. In the tele-secondary school, teachers and parents collaborated to give maintenance and cleaning of the school. They were also proud of their school garden and their student accomplishments. The rural secondary school and the state funded school were also proud of their schools and the accomplishments of their students.

Leadership was a very important element in all schools. The type of leadership, however, varied among the schools. In the federally funded school, the principal involved different actors at the school level and paid special attention to the alumni association. In the rural community, the principal was the leader of the school who involved teachers in searching for extra funding for the school. The state funded school had two principals, one was the official principal, and the associate principal was the political leader. In this school, both worked together and involved teachers and students to obtain financial support for their school. The tele-secondary school had a principal who was also a teacher, but leadership was shared among the three women who worked at the school. They were all graduates from a Master's degree program and two of them were studying for a

doctorate. They invested their own personal resources to help their school and worked extra time to prepare students for academic and non-academic competitions.

All schools shared a strong discipline policy. They had codes of conduct that were shared with parents, students and all the school staff. The discipline code took into consideration the caring for the school resources and infrastructure, the respect of students to their peers and school personnel, as well as other norms regarding acceptable conduct and dress code at the school.

Teachers at the schools worked extra time supporting students' preparation for standardized testing. They also motivated students to participate in music and sports competitions. It was not surprising to find that students from the four schools had been among the winners on several occasions in competitions at the state and national levels, as well as in academic competitions at the local and national level in math and science.

All schools were recognized for the quality of their teaching and shared an interest in the professional development of teachers.

### **Discussion and Implications**

This work identified important issues related to teacher leadership and professionalism. Findings of the three studies provided evidence to support the conclusions of Wong (2017), Cheng, (1996); Gobby et al, (2018); Pearson & Moomaw, (2005) and Sterrett, (2015) in that administrator's leadership style and preparation at the central or at the school level is a variable that influences teacher professionalism and leadership. By maintaining a pyramidal leadership style, authorities of the Department of Education, as well





as principals and supervisors limited teachers' autonomy and motivation for innovation.

The lack of administrator's preparation and skills for their position in the two of the three studies negatively influenced teacher professionalism and leadership, as found in the study of Bianome et al, (2016). However, in this study the lack of preparation in education and leadership was not only for school principals, but also for officials at the Department of Education, and school supervisors.

Findings from the evaluation study, were partially consistent with the work form Joo (2020), since teachers who participated in the implementation of the site-based program felt they have increased their responsibilities, but this not necessarily reflected in their increased authority or income.

However, in the study of teacher preparation and practice in effective secondary schools in southern Mexico, it was found that in spite of all the contextual limitations, schools were effective once teachers became committed and engaged in a learning process aimed to improve their schools.

Teachers hiring and working conditions needed to improve, as well as the preparation programs for future teachers and administrators. Successful educational reforms promoting teacher leadership and professionalism may succeed if policy makers and administrators provide opportunities for teacher growth and improvement. Teachers should also participate in the design and implementation of professional development efforts that really meet their personal and professional needs.

An important factor not evident in prior studies of teacher leadership and professionalism that was found in the three empirical research studies analyzed in this article was the role of policies and

the external context. These factors influenced both administrator and teacher leadership. For example, the decision of hiring many teachers on an hourly basis to substitute a retired teacher, provided job opportunities for many teachers, but also had negative consequences since this decision affected teacher participation in professional development and innovation.

Some recommendations emerged from the studies, that could contribute to improving teacher leadership and professionalism. Government officials at the national and state department of education need to improve teacher preparation and professional development. They need to establish agreements with local universities to improve the opportunities for professional development for teachers and educational administrators.

In addition, policy makers and administrators need to take into consideration the inside and outside context of the schools when designing and implementing educational reforms. This is particularly important when new reforms are going to be implemented in regions with highly diverse and marginalized communities.

Future studies on teacher leadership and professionalism in Mexico could focus on some of the issues stated by Webber (2018), regarding the meaning of teacher leadership and professionalism, on how the design and implementation of current teacher preparation programs promotes teacher leadership, on how different actors (official administrators at the Department of Education, school principals, teachers and parents, define teacher leadership? And what are the challenges faced by teacher leaders trying to lead a sustainable development in their schools?



## Conclusion

The findings from the research examined in this article provide evidence that policies as well as politics play a key role in the selection of educational authorities, including local department of education principals and supervisors. The lack of preparation in education and educational administration of these actors can create obstacles or facilitate teacher leadership and professionalism.

The decision of principals and other administrators to engage with teachers in a learning process of improvement, that can lead to a sense of ownership that could improve the quality of education of the schools.

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**Book Review**

**Reading Educational Research and Policy  
Key Issues in Teaching and Learning**

**By: David Scott**

Routledge Publishing

2000, 156 pages

ISBN: 978-0750709934

*[Translation Editor: Ahmet Aypay]*

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*[2014, 138 pages]*

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**Book Review**

The book “Reading Educational Research and Policy” claims that educational literacy provides individuals with critical thinking and reading, which gives individuals the chance of relocating themselves in the way that arguments, policies, and instructions may not request. Educational literacy allows individuals to improve their



implementation and make their implementations transferable (Lankshear, 1997). As control mechanisms in education -by policies and educational goals- are increasing day by day, the educational literacy of teachers specifically gains importance. It is because educational literacy gives teachers the competence to analyze the structure of educational texts, such as research reports, political texts, newspaper reports, and media, and to place them in historical, social, and literal contexts.

The book suggests that teachers read different types of documents to learn and expertise in relevant fields. It helps them to improve the capacity of acting alternatively and having a critical approach towards teaching. The book which focuses on strategies on how to read political texts in education depicts the political texts as formal texts intending to lead perceptions of the public related to a political agenda. That's why political texts are in the quest of changing practitioners' way of accepting the policies. According to the book, policies can be prescriptive or non- prescriptive, open or concealed ideologically, a single author or multi-authored, large-scaled, or narrow scaled. Moreover, the book suggests that political texts can be placed in one of three political processes. One of those processes is controlled by the center and directive. This political process supports certain values in policies. The second one is the pluralistic process in which various interests are taken into consideration in each step. The last one is not a linear process; the policies are not applied in practice as they are planned at the beginning.

After political processes, the book mentions various ways to read research reports. Researchers carry out studies to comprehend the world better and find appropriate strategies for presenting the findings and making plenty of decisions about methods and strategies. These

decisions are based on certain information bases such as positivism, empiricism, critical theory, and postmodernism. The book suggests its readers to ask questions to understand the relationship between the information bases and the reality that the researcher wants to describe. Functions of written media in the education field are also tackled in the book. Media can adapt and control specific education agendas. National media generally supports the education agenda, as it is stated by the government. The readers should pay attention to the techniques that journalists take benefit from to prepare their articles because news is perceived as different than the truths. Besides, visual media has similar effects on written media; however, the former is stronger in the education area than the latter in terms of thoughts. The book also claims that it is difficult to put a model that identifies a relationship between political texts and media and research reports. The reason for this is that this model will not be able to explain that political texts are already more effective on their own.

The book envisions educationally literate teachers' characteristics, as well. The main point is that teachers should deal with educational texts critically. To do this, they are supposed to perceive the effects of educational texts on them. At this point, the book highlights the importance of symbols, oriented cognitive approach, and active, reflexive, and contextual aspects vis-a-vis learning theories, which explain the process of becoming an educationally literate teacher. The book alleges that policies, media, and reports must be thought indivisible from each other. If teachers want to interpret the educational texts properly, they should be able to notice the underlying principles of news. For instance, all media means use "our" schools, "our" citizens. In this way, people tend to internalize the embedded values in the news. Therefore, teaching and learning how



to read educational research and policy are essential to the authorities in the education field.

Overall, this book can contribute to its audience since it provides valuable information regarding the ways that political texts and media are constructed. It is useful for teachers to analyze which techniques are used in educational texts and to figure out the real purposes and ideologies of those educational texts, policies, or reports. The book helps its audience to interrogate how they interpret the educational texts counting policies, reports, and media. The book also gives real educational texts such as an annual report of a head auditor submitted in 1998, a report published in the Times Educational Supplement, and Chibnall's (1977) positive and negative values which legitimize the media. Hence, as the book gives the status quo with new perspectives to its readers and with sample texts in practice reinforcing the topics covered in each chapter, it broadens its readers' horizon in terms of reading and analyzing educational texts.

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