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

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Abstract	Article Info
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.	

Introduction

This article[1] 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). 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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[1] 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.

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

Arden & Okoko (2021). Exploring Cross-Cultural Perspectives of Teacher Leadership...

REAL

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 Hofsteder'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

Arden & Okoko (2021). Exploring Cross-Cultural Perspectives of Teacher Leadership...

R E
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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

61

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-constituative 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.

Arden & Okoko (2021). Exploring Cross-Cultural Perspectives of Teacher Leadership...

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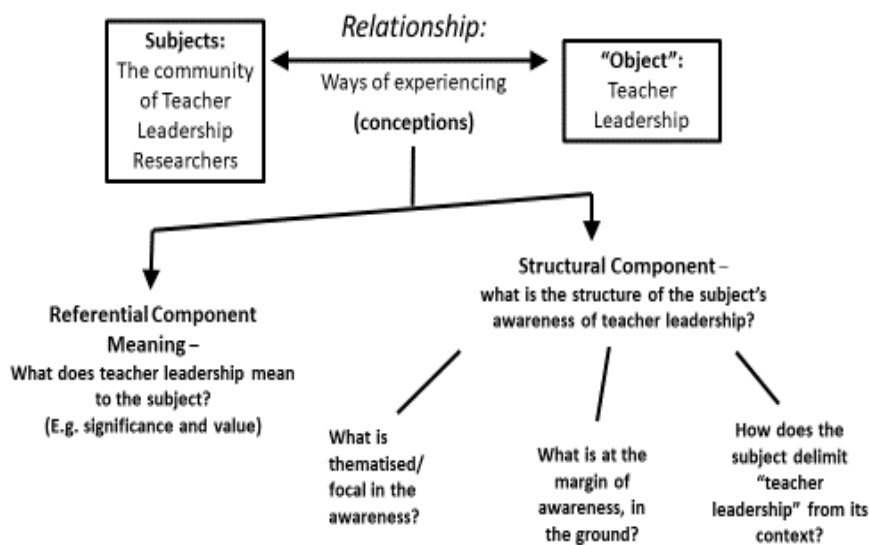## Referential and structural components of awareness

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

63

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

Arden & Okoko (2021). Exploring Cross-Cultural Perspectives of Teacher Leadership...

REAL

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.
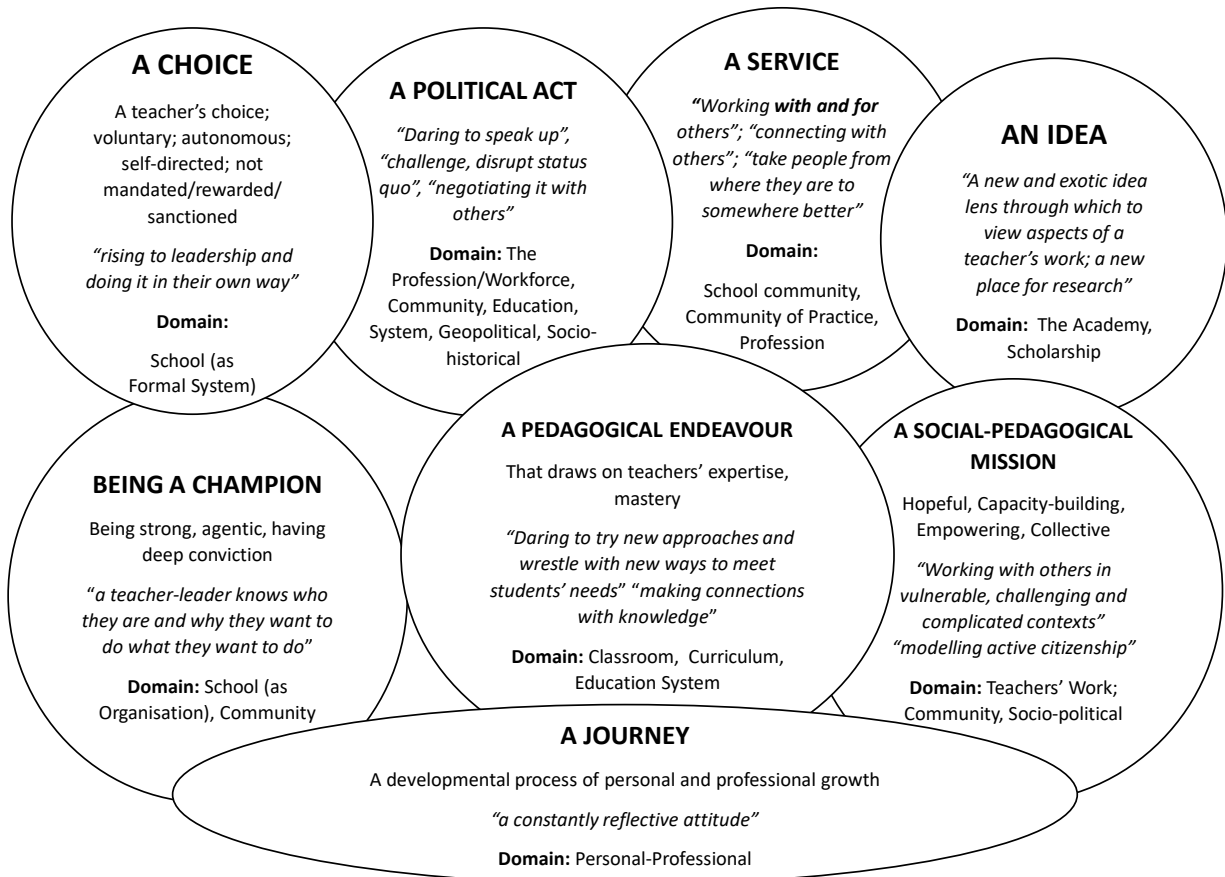

Figure 2.

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

Arden & Okoko (2021). Exploring Cross-Cultural Perspectives of Teacher Leadership...

R E
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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

Arden & Okoko (2021). Exploring Cross-Cultural Perspectives of Teacher Leadership...

R E
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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*

71

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".

73

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:

Arden & Okoko (2021). Exploring Cross-Cultural Perspectives of Teacher Leadership...

R E
A L

"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.

77

Table 3.

Dimensions of Variation in the Collective Experience of Teacher Leadership

	Dimensions of Variation		
Conceptions of Teacher Leadership (TL)	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).
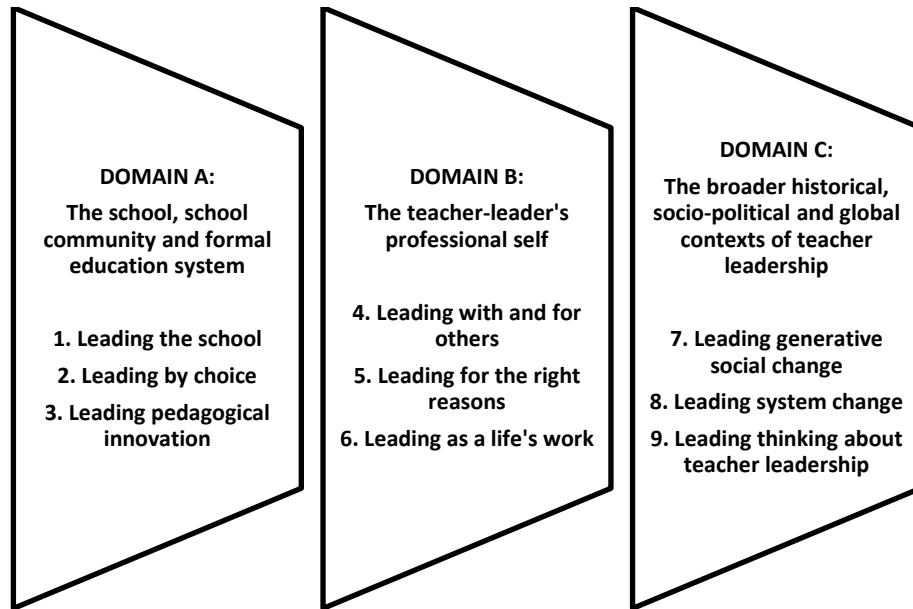
DOMAIN A:

The school, school community and formal education system

1. Leading the school
2. Leading by choice
3. Leading pedagogical innovation

DOMAIN B:

The teacher-leader's professional self

4. Leading with and for others
5. Leading for the right reasons
6. Leading as a life's work

DOMAIN C:

The broader historical, socio-political and global contexts of teacher leadership

7. Leading generative social change
8. Leading system change
9. Leading thinking about teacher leadership

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

Arden & Okoko (2021). Exploring Cross-Cultural Perspectives of Teacher Leadership...

R E
A L

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[2]. 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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[2] 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

Arden & Okoko (2021). Exploring Cross-Cultural Perspectives of Teacher Leadership...

REAL

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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