

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>Article History: <i>Received</i> February 15, 2020 <i>Accepted</i> September 20, 2020</p> <hr/> <p>Keywords: <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 Study¹

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

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.

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.

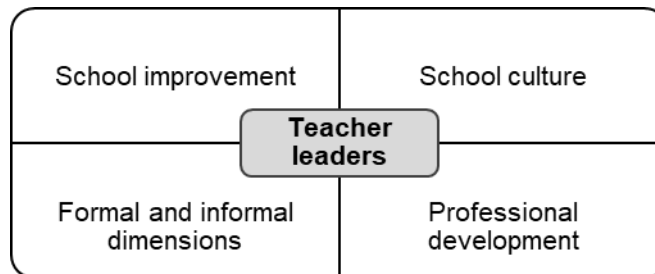


Figure 1.

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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