From Teacher to Teacher Leader: A Conceptual Model

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Conceptions of teacher leadership are trending away from formal titles and positions to embrace a more informal, integrated approach. Moreover, there is growing agreement among scholars that teacher leadership is a stance, or way of thinking and being, rather than a set of behaviors. As a result, understanding how teachers progress from teacher to teacher leader remains unclear. Building on research findings from a previously-conducted study, this article offers a visual model conceptualizing eight teachers' progression from teacher to teacher leader, including the factors and conditions that influenced their progress and their varying self-perceptions as teachers and as leaders. Four developmental stages of teacher leader self-perception are explored: teacher leader, developing teacher leader, situational teacher leader, and classroom teacher leader. Findings of the study indicate that teacher leadership stance precedes the actions of teacher leadership; development of teacher leader self-perception may take longer.

Keywords: teacher self-perceptions, emerging teacher leadership, teacher leader development, teacher leader identity, teacher leadership stance

Introduction

Conceptions of teacher leadership are trending away from formal titles and positions to embrace a more informal, integrated approach. In an analysis of 54 empirical studies of teacher leadership conducted between 2004 and 2013, Wenner and Campbell (2016) defined teacher leaders as "teachers who maintain K-12 classroom-based teaching responsibilities, while also taking on leadership responsibilities outside of the classroom" (p. 7). Collinson (2012) described these teachers as "informal leaders who 'walk ahead', model learning and innovation, and develop relationships and networks to extend their own learning and influence others" (p. 247). Angelle and DeHart (2011) exemplified teacher leadership as sharing knowledge of pedagogy and classroom management with colleagues, willingness to accept leadership opportunities when asked, and routinely stepping beyond required teaching duties to serve students and the school.

Whether teacher leaders hold formal titles and official positions or simply step up when needed, teacher leadership in today's schools is essential. Poekert, Alexandrou, and Shannon (2016) recently asserted that teacher leadership is "one approach with empirical evidence demonstrating its viability as a solution for sustaining systemic teacher quality and school improvement efforts" (p. 310). Wenner and Campbell (2016) called it "an important component of school reform" (p. 2). Even so, the concept of teacher leadership remains elusive. Helterbran (2010) observed, "Despite the many calls for teacher leadership over the years, the message has not reached teachers themselves in any large measure" (p. 363).

One reason teacher leadership remains elusive may be related to growing agreement among scholars that teacher leadership is a stance, or way of thinking and being, rather than a set of behaviors. Poekert et al. (2016) described teacher leadership as "a stance that is responsive to the needs of…students and motivates…colleagues toward improving their performance" (p. 325). Smulyan (2016) articulated that a teacher leadership stance is grounded in three assumptions: a) teaching is a profession, b) teaching is a political act, and c) teaching is a

collaborative process. In this way, teacher leadership stance is comprised of dispositions, or beliefs, attitudes, and values about teaching, learning, and leadership. The notion of teacher leadership as a stance is supported by teachers themselves. Practicing teachers enrolled in a two-year leadership academy described teacher leadership as "neither positional nor role bound, but can be practiced by any teacher, at any time, and in any place – including the classroom." These teachers considered a stance-based view of teacher leadership "liberating as it allowed them to maintain their identity as a teacher while preparing to be leaders" (Carver, 2016, p. 169).

While recognizing teacher leadership as a stance signals a breakthrough in our collective understanding of teacher leadership, understanding how teachers progress from teacher to teacher leader remains unclear. Building on research findings from a previously-conducted study, this article offers a visual model conceptualizing eight teachers' progression from teacher to teacher leader, including the factors and conditions that influenced their progress and their varying self-perceptions as teachers and as leaders.

How Do Teachers Progress from Teacher to Teacher Leader?

Gradual, Recursive Development

The progression from teacher to teacher leader is a gradual, recursive process that occurs over a period of months and years. Smulyan (2016) called this progression "organic rather than imposed" (p. 15). Poekert et al. (2016) described it as "[instances] of emergence" and "organised complexity" (p. 325). The progression is not steady and linear because most teachers do not set out to be leaders. Rather, teacher leaders emerge in a recursive (i.e., one step forward, two steps back) progression over time as they work to fulfill their teaching responsibilities (Furtado & Anderson, 2012; Poekert et al., 2016). Collinson (2012) described the progression as "a continuously evolving process of learning and refining ideals" (p. 264) that begins with developing deep knowledge of content and pedagogy. In other words, teachers first seek to improve their teaching practice, progressing over time to contributing to and influencing their schools, districts, and profession (Collinson, 2012; Nicolaidou, 2010). Often, the progression from teacher to teacher leader occurs implicitly, as part of "an ongoing process integrated in the normal working day" (Nicolaidou, 2010, p. 232). In one study, teacher leaders who participated in a leadership cohort for three consecutive years revealed that their conceptions of teacher leadership evolved over time from a set of behaviors and skills, to a commitment and ongoing process across many contexts, to a way of thinking and positioning oneself within the field of education (Smulyan, 2016).

Expanded Influence over Time

The progression from teacher to teacher leader can be observed as teachers transition from influencing a few people to influencing many people. Huang (2016) asserted that teacher leadership is private when a small group of teachers collaborates toward a common vision; teacher leadership becomes public when "a concrete mission/curriculum is developed, and teaching artefacts are created for more teachers to collaborate institutionally and professionally" (p. 232). Collinson (2012) explained:

As…teachers experiment with innovations to help students, they increasingly find ways to share successful practices with colleagues, usually starting with one colleague at a time before taking the risk to present to groups in a school, a school system or at a conference. (p. 261)

This expanded influence can occur across a variety of contexts. Poekert et al. (2016) found that Florida teachers grew as teachers, as researchers, as leaders, and personally through participation in a professional development initiative between a large, urban school district and the state university system. Furtado and Anderson (2012) noted that California teachers enrolled in a graduate-level action research course over 15 weeks' time increasingly influenced one another by engaging intellectually, reflecting on their teaching practice, and coming to see leading and learning as interrelated processes. Fairman and Mackenzie (2012) reported that Maine teacher leaders "emerged in a somewhat organic or informal way as teachers searched for practical means to tackle issues of concern in the classroom or school" (p. 243).

Opportunities for Discussion, Practice, and Reflection

Informal collaboration, professional development, and graduate studies support the progression from teacher to teacher leader by providing "multiple opportunities for conversation, practice, and reflection" (Smulyan, 2016, p. 15). Thoughtfully examining teaching, learning, and leadership allows teachers to "explore diverse viewpoints and new options for thinking and behaving" (Carver, 2016, p. 162). Through practice, teachers increase their pedagogical knowledge and skills (Coleman, Gallagher, & Job, 2012) and develop leadership skills such as facilitating, mentoring, and presenting (Mongillo, Lawrence, & Hong, 2012). Through reflection, teachers make connections to their own experiences (Aharonian, 2016), refine their self-perceptions of teacher leadership (Smulyan, 2016), and begin acting as leaders. For example, as teachers become leaders, they "find, accept or create ways to help others" and "ignore traditional boundaries and move freely across communities of practice" (Collinson, 2012, p. 264). Carver (2016) found that over the course of a two-year, instructionally-focused seminar series, participating teachers came to view themselves as resources for other teachers, re-conceptualized teacher leadership to include activities both within and beyond the classroom, and came to "embrace a leadership identity" (p. 167).

What Factors and Conditions Influence this Progression?

Knowledge and Skills

The progression from teacher to teacher leader builds from a solid foundation of pedagogical knowledge and skills. Deep knowledge of teaching, learning, and students gives teachers credibility among their peers, which expands their ability to influence others (Carver, 2016; Collinson, 2012; Riveros, Newton, & da Costa, 2013). One study of high school science teachers in Missouri revealed that teachers were most likely to recognize teacher leadership when it occurred through formally-assigned leadership roles and responsibilities (Hanuscin, Rebellow, & Sinha, 2012), but informal and emerging teacher leaders can also exert influence. A study of K-12 (i.e., kindergarten through high school) teachers in Michigan found that both formal and informal teacher leadership efforts, including collaborative planning, instructional coaching, and job-embedded professional development, influenced teaching peers to modify their teaching practices to better meet students' learning needs (Topolinski, 2014).

Dispositions

Although pedagogical knowledge and skills provide an essential foundation for teacher leadership, research suggests that dispositions (i.e., core beliefs, attitudes, and values) comprise a teacher's stance, or way of thinking and being (Collinson, 2012; Huang, 2016; Rogers, 2005). Moreover, personal dispositions are the foundation from which teacher leadership skills develop (Riveros et al., 2013). Marques (2015) named flexibility, care, a sense of community, creativity, inspiration, facilitation, and honesty as critical characteristics of leadership because they foster open communication, approachability, free exchange of ideas, and empowerment. The teachers in Carver's (2016) study also described teacher leadership in terms of dispositions, including professional risk-taking, lifelong learning, being a team player, and having a passion for making a difference. Collinson (2012) added humility as a disposition of teacher leadership:

> Teachers recognize that they can learn from everyone and every experience, that taking risks and making mistakes can be a way to learn, that asking for help is necessary, and that integration and refinement of attitudes and skills is a lifelong process. (p. 263)

These dispositional descriptions help to explain why 75% of the science teachers in Hanuscin et al.'s (2012) study described teacher leadership as a combination of knowledge and skills, plus personal qualities. This triple combination suggests that both nurture (i.e., teaching experience and professional development) and nature (i.e., dispositions) influence the progression from teacher to teacher leader.

Motivation to Support Students and Colleagues

Motivation is a disposition that particularly distinguishes leaders from non-leaders (Rogers, 2005). A study of six award-winning teaching teams in Taiwan found that "key" teacher leaders possess a strong desire to support student welfare and learning, which motivates them to take action on behalf of students. Other teachers are willing to follow, but they rely on key teacher leaders' agency, vision, and encouragement (Huang, 2016). Several studies show that teacher leaders are highly motivated to support student learning and increase student achievement (Helterbran, 2010; Smulyan, 2016; Wenner & Campbell, 2016). For example, Hildebrandt and Eom (2011) found that teachers were motivated to pursue National Board Certification, a credential closely associated with teacher leadership, to improve their teaching practice, earn additional income, increase opportunities for collaboration, self-validate their teaching practice, and receive external validation of their teaching practice.

Teacher leaders are also highly motivated to collaborate with and support their colleagues around issues of teaching and learning (Coleman et al., 2012; Cosenza, 2013). Fairman and Mackenzie (2012) identified nine specific ways that teacher leaders work alone and alongside colleagues to improve student learning: engaging in professional development; experimenting with and reflecting on teaching practices; sharing ideas, supporting, and collaborating with colleagues; re-culturing the school; building organizational capacity; engaging in schoolwide improvement; collaborating with parents and the community; and professionally sharing their work. Teacher leaders' motivation to support both students and colleagues reiterates the notion of a teacher leadership stance. Master of teacher leadership graduates in one online program expressed a preference for "formal leadership that retains the role of teacher within in" (Lowery-Moore, Lattimer, & Villate, 2016, p. 10). Carver (2016) found that teachers "valued roles that allowed them to work with colleagues and also continue teaching full- or part-time" (p. 175).

Taking Action

    Motivation is significant to the progression from teacher to teacher leader because high motivation almost always results in taking action. For one group of motivated California teachers "taking action meant taking personal responsibility for the goals and outcomes of the school and doing something about it…to be proactive beyond their normal duties instead of being passive and taking direction from administrators" (Cosenza, 2015, p. 94). Because taking action frequently involves working with others, strong collegial relationships support teacher leadership efforts. For the teachers in Collinson's (2012) study, relationship building occurred at the school and district levels through peer collaborations and team teaching, and beyond the school and district through community involvement, formal and informal community partnerships, and grant writing. In this way, collegial relationships support taking action, and taking action builds collegial relationships.

    In considering how teachers progress from teacher to teacher leader, it is helpful to conceptualize taking action as a matter of degree. Roby (2009) defined five levels of contribution related to teacher leadership. Non-contributors and part-time contributors are followers all or most of the time; frequent contributors actively engage in school efforts, but sometimes in superficial or negative ways; influential and respected contributors engage proactively, consistently, and constructively; and respected contributors also demonstrate extensive professional knowledge, high self-confidence, and a moral sense of obligation to students, colleagues, and the school. Rogers (2005) distinguished teacher leaders' motivation and action taking as follows:

> Leaders put out more effort than their counterparts who do not venture very far outside the boundaries of their prescribed work assignments. Leaders think beyond the day-to-day 'work in the trenches' and take risks, both emotional and career, by becoming involved, taking stands, seeking to contribute, and speaking up. Leaders make themselves vulnerable to criticism and failure. This extra effort and risk takes energy and presumes that core 'survival' issues, i.e. lower level needs and maintenance factors, are already secure. It is also apparent that leaders are driven predominantly from inside, though there are obvious external rewards for success. (p. 631)

Roby's (2009) varying levels of teacher contribution and Rogers' (2005) comparison of leaders' and non-leaders' motivations and actions reiterate the gradual, recursive progression toward teacher leadership, as well as how teacher leaders' influence expands over time.

Age and Years of Teaching Experience

    Deep knowledge of teaching, learning, and students; dispositions such as approachability, humility, and willingness to take professional risks; and high motivation to support students and colleagues influence the progression from teacher to teacher leader by encouraging teachers to take action. In addition, developmental factors including age and years of teaching experience have been shown to influence both teacher motivations toward leadership and colleague's perceptions of leadership.

In a study of teacher leader perceptions across seven different states, Angelle and DeHart (2011) found that elementary teachers and less experienced teachers were more likely than middle school teachers, high school teachers, and experienced teachers to recognize acts of teacher leadership by their colleagues. Hildebrandt and Eom (2011) reported that teachers in their 30s were more motivated than teachers in other age groups to pursue National Board Certification for financial gain and external validation. Roby (2009) also noted that years of teaching experience or number of years teaching in a particular school may affect teachers' perceptions of leadership. One influential contributor (second highest level) in his study reflected, "Involved in community and district, but because of number of years teaching; I am still not a respected contributor." Similarly, a respected contributor (highest level) wrote, "Years of experience at my school is the primary factor in leadership contribution" (Discussion, para. 3). Smulyan (2016) observed that around the third year of teaching, or once tenured, teachers become "eager for opportunities to deepen their understanding of teaching and learning and to take on responsibilities beyond the confines of their own classrooms" (p. 11).

These studies suggest that younger, less experienced teachers and elementary-level teachers are more likely to be motivated toward teacher leadership; but older, more experienced teachers are more likely to be recognized as teacher leaders by their colleagues. This dichotomy presents one obstacle emerging teacher leaders might face during the progression from teacher to teacher leader. The next section explores obstacles hindering the progression from teacher to teacher leader in greater detail.

Obstacles to Teacher Leader Progression

Wilson (2016) wrote, "The school culture entails not only how things are done (systems, processes, and procedures), but also the mindset behind why things are done" (p. 57). Poekert et al. (2016) observed that teacher leader development is dependent on interaction between individual teachers and "the responsiveness of their work setting to the enactment of distributive leadership" (p. 315); and Wenner and Campbell (2016) identified change-resistant school climates as a condition that can inhibit teacher leadership. In sum, both overly rigid and overly loose school cultures can discourage teachers from progressing toward leadership.

Overly Rigid School Culture

Overly rigid school cultures, characterized by centralized policies and top-down decision-making, discourage teacher leadership by restricting teacher professionalism. In a study of teacher leadership within a highly-centralized school system in Cyprus, Nicolaidou (2010) found that teachers' participation in productive learning communities was limited by system-wide rules, which discouraged teachers' pursuit of instructional innovations and kept them from developing leadership skills and stances. Nicolaidou (2010) also observed that head teachers (similar to department chairs) were selected based on years of teaching experience, as opposed to quality of preparation or demonstrated leadership effectiveness, which further hindered collaboration, creativity, and empowerment among teachers. Overly rigid school cultures disempower teachers by limiting or removing their ability to exercise professional judgment (Coleman et al., 2012; Wilson, 2016). Over time, such professional restrictions increase teachers' frustration levels and decrease their teaching effectiveness (Reason & Reason, 2007). Ingersoll (2007) elaborated:

> Too much organizational control may deny teachers the very power and flexibility they need to do the job effectively, undermine their motivation, and squander a valuable human resource – the high degree of commitment of those who enter the teaching occupation. (p. 25)

For these reasons, overly rigid school cultures make it less likely that teachers will progress toward leadership within an environment of support and encouragement.

Overly Loose School Culture

At the other extreme, overly loose school cultures discourage teacher leadership as a result of too little structure and standardization. Vague expectations, poor communication, and unclear definitions are common characteristics of loose school culture (Nicolaidou, 2010; Wenner & Campbell, 2016). For example, one school district's implementation of a literacy coach in every school was undermined when no evaluation tool specific to the new teacher leadership role was developed. Because the literacy coaches were evaluated using the classroom teacher evaluation tool, they were sometimes viewed and treated as classroom teachers instead of being recognized as teacher leaders serving in specialized roles (Camburn, Kimball, & Lowenhaupt, 2008). In another study, communication between administrators, teacher leaders, and classroom teachers was limited in four of five school districts studied because participants were reluctant to build trusting relationships, concerned about autonomy at the school and teacher leader levels, and unclear about teacher leader roles and responsibilities (Mangin, 2008).

When teacher leader roles and responsibilities are not explicit, confusion, stress, and limited progress toward desired outcomes is likely (Margolis & Huggins, 2012; Nicolaidou, 2010). Moller and Pankake (2006) asserted:

> It is essential to provide clarity early on regarding the definition of teacher leaders in terms of who they are, what their responsibilities and authority will include, and how their work aligns with and is not in conflict with the administrative team." (pp. 54-55)

Moreover, when parameters, communication, and definitions are loosely constructed and operationalized, a school climate of perpetual stress can result. In Mangin's (2008) study of teacher leadership across five school districts, relationships between administrators and teachers were strained because teacher leaders were not provided adequate time during the school day to complete their leadership tasks (Mangin, 2008). For these reasons, loose school cultures make it less likely that teachers will progress toward leadership with clarity and confidence. To effectively support and encourage the progression from teacher to teacher leader, a school culture that balances both fidelity and flexibility is needed (Coleman et al., 2012).

Unsupportive Building Principal

Regardless of whether a school culture is rigid, loose, or balanced, research emphasizes that the building principal plays a highly influential role in the progression from teacher to teacher leader. Intentionally or inadvertently, building principals can obstruct the progression from teacher to teacher leader by playing favorites, failing to delegate leadership responsibilities, or delegating leadership responsibilities without support. Angelle and DeHart (2011) identified willingness of the building principal to share leadership opportunities with all or most teachers as an environmental factor essential to teacher leadership. Their multi-state study revealed that

teachers who held formal leadership positions believed their principals generously shared leadership opportunities, whereas teachers who did not hold leadership positions believed that their principals usually reserved such duties for a select few. By creating "in-groups and out-groups" (p. 155), this building principal obstructed the progression toward teacher leadership for many teachers in the school.

Even when teachers prepare and position themselves to lead, the building principal may present obstacles. Helterbran (2010) explained:

> It is certainly possible for teachers to engage in professional learning, be collegial, and work in ways to strengthen practice, but if the principal is resistant or unwilling to share leadership, it is highly unlikely the strivings of individual teachers will reach the critical mass necessary to impact the school as a whole. (p. 367)

When the building principal is not supportive of teacher leadership, teachers have difficulty fulfilling their leadership roles and responsibilities because structures and resources are not provided to assist them and the principal does not give them the autonomy and authority to complete their work (Wenner & Campbell, 2016; Wilson, 2016). As a result, teacher leaders do not feel appreciated or recognized, and colleagues do not feel obligated to comply.

Resistant Colleagues

Even when the building principal is supportive, resistant colleagues can present an obstacle to the progression from teacher to teacher leader. Although teachers who exercise leadership generally report increased feelings of confidence, empowerment, and professional satisfaction, they also report increased stress, often due to changing relationships with colleagues (Kilinc, Cemalaglu, & Savas, 2015; Wenner & Campbell, 2016). York-Barr and Duke (2004) explained, "Teachers who lead tend to feel conflict and isolation as the nature of their collegial relationships shifts from primarily horizontal to somewhat hierarchical" (p. 288).

Traditional school norms protecting egalitarianism, autonomy, and seniority can cause teachers to resist the efforts of formal teacher leaders (Danielson, 2006; Johnson & Donaldson, 2007), especially those who are younger or newer to the profession or school. Johnson and Donaldson (2007) found that teacher leaders with four to ten years of teaching experience often met with resistance from their more experienced colleagues. Teacher leaders in another study reported that "their colleagues with more years of experience often looked down on their work" (Nicolaidou, 2010, p. 231).

Danielson (2006) explained teachers' tendency to minimize others' leadership contributions as an instinctive response to "'tall poppy syndrome,' in which poppies that grow too tall get cut off so they are the same height as the others" (p. 130). Such resistant responses from colleagues may explain why teachers in a third study even considered it risky to refer to themselves as teacher leaders (Lieberman & Friedrich, 2007). Moller and Pankake (2006) observed, "Teachers are, in most cases, not encouraged to lead, especially by their peers. To lead may be viewed as being the 'boss,' and this would not help these teachers maintain relationships with their colleagues" (p. 53). This form of professional peer pressure can discourage teachers from accepting or seeking teacher leadership roles and responsibilities and prevent them from viewing themselves as leaders, even when they are doing leadership work.

Teachers Themselves

In addition to principals and colleagues, teachers themselves can create obstacles that prevent them from progressing toward teacher leadership. For example, teachers may decline leadership opportunities because they believe they are not the right fit (Wade & Ferriter, 2007). Teachers may be reluctant to assume leadership positions because they lack appropriate support (Johnson & Donaldson, 2007; Wade & Ferriter, 2007). Teachers may avoid leading because they feel uncomfortable engaging in open-ended, collaborative inquiry with colleagues (Lattimer, 2007). Teachers may lack self-confidence, recall disappointing leadership experiences, or fail to see connections to their personal and professional priorities (Moller & Pankake, 2006).

While each of these reasons may justify a teacher's decision not to lead, the underlying issue is often lack of a teacher leader self-perception. Research suggests that not all teachers believe they have the potential to become leaders (Huang, 2016; Moller & Pankake, 2006), a stance Helterbran (2010) referred to as "I am just a teacher syndrome" (p. 363). Huang (2016) explained, "Some teachers tend to have strong visions (e.g., key leaders), some develop during their teaching practice (e.g., core members) and some might never develop a vision in their life" (p. 235).

Even when teachers are prepared for leadership, they sometimes have difficulty viewing themselves as leaders. One study of 24 practicing teachers who had recently completed master's degrees in reading instruction reported that about two-thirds considered themselves literacy leaders in their schools while the remaining one-third did not (Mongillo et al., 2012). Wenner and Campbell (2016) noted that teacher leaders who lack teacher leader dispositions such as self-confidence and assertiveness tend to lose credibility among their colleagues and struggle to convincingly advocate for teacher leadership work. These findings suggest that when teachers themselves decline opportunities to lead, entire school systems may suffer.

Equipped with a research-based understanding that teacher leadership is a stance, or way of thinking and being, rather than a set of behaviors; and acknowledging that teacher self-perceptions are difficult to track or measure, a visual model conceptualizing how teachers progress from teacher to teacher leader is needed. Toward this end, the next section builds on research findings from a previously-conducted study to present a visual model of eight teachers' progression from teacher to teacher leader, including the factors and conditions that influenced their progression and their varying self-perceptions as teachers and as leaders.

Research Methods

The purpose of this qualitative study was to provide a visual model conceptualizing how teachers progress from teacher to teacher leader, including factors and conditions that influence this progression. The research design combined multiple case study and hermeneutic phenomenological analysis, as well as a grounded theory approach. Case study allows for deep exploration of one or more individuals' lived experiences (Stake, 2000). Hermeneutic phenomenological analysis explores individuals' lived experiences and the meanings they construct about their experiences (Laverty, 2003; Loftus & Higgs, 2010). Together, multiple case study and hermeneutic phenomenological analysis offer deep and broad exploration of a phenomenon by analyzing individuals' descriptions and interpretations of their experiences across a variety of perspectives (Kvale, 1996; Stake, 2000).

Grounded theory involves the discovery of emerging patterns in data, which allows for the generation of theories and models that are based, or grounded, in data (Walsh, Holton, Lotte, Fernandez, Levina, & Glaser, 2015). Theories offer "a set of ideas that provide an explanation to a phenomenon" (Difference Between, 2015, para. 5), whereas models offer "a structural representation of the phenomenon" (para. 2). In this study, a grounded theory approach was used to create a visual model that conceptualized how eight teachers progressed from teacher to teacher leader, including factors and conditions that influenced their progression, based on their self-reported experiences and the meanings they constructed about their experiences.

Research Participants

Ten practicing, elementary, middle, and high school teachers within two months of graduating from a Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) education master's program at a private, Midwestern university were invited to participate in the study. All ten were considered emerging teacher leaders because a) state requirements for the teacher leader endorsement were built in to the STEM education master's program, b) all had been encouraged to pursue teacher leadership roles and responsibilities throughout the two-year program, c) all had recently completed the program's advanced teacher leadership course, and d) all had earned a score of 100% on the course's culminating teacher leadership project, called the Teacher Leader Portfolio (TLP).

The purpose of the TLP was to engage teachers in self-assessment and reflection of their professional growth toward teacher leadership since beginning the STEM education master's program. Teachers were required to compile artifacts that demonstrated pre/post evidence of professional growth for components 4d, 4e, and 4f of Danielson's (2007) framework for teaching (see Figure 1).
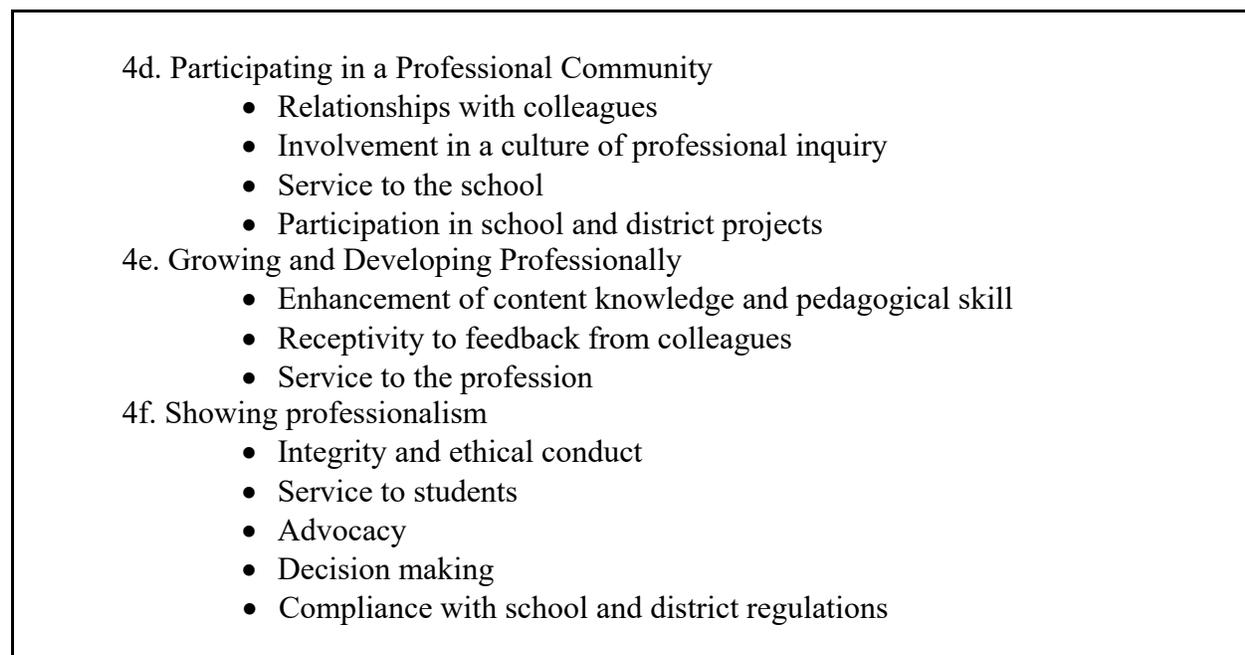

4d. Participating in a Professional Community
- Relationships with colleagues
- Involvement in a culture of professional inquiry
- Service to the school
- Participation in school and district projects

4e. Growing and Developing Professionally
- Enhancement of content knowledge and pedagogical skill
- Receptivity to feedback from colleagues
- Service to the profession

4f. Showing professionalism
- Integrity and ethical conduct
- Service to students
- Advocacy
- Decision making
- Compliance with school and district regulations

Figure 1. Informal Teacher Leadership Components and Elements (Danielson, 2007, p. 4)

Components 4d, 4e, and 4f provide "a starting point for systematically encouraging and developing teacher leaders" because they describe commonly accepted conceptions of teacher leadership, include developmental descriptions of teacher leadership, and situate teacher leadership within the larger context of teaching (Hunzicker, 2017, p. 15). In addition to providing at least one artifact for each component, teachers were required to rate their performance (using a rubric adapted from the framework) and compose a written self-reflection that presented an evidence-based self-analysis of their growth as teacher leaders. Participants' written self-reflections ranged from 10 to 21 pages in length.

Eight of the ten invited teachers chose to participate in the study. All were white, non-Hispanic. Seven were female; one was male. Three were in their late 20s, four were in their early to mid-30s, and one was age 60. All held bachelor's degrees in various content areas including elementary education, special education, early childhood education, mathematics/science, and history. In addition, two held a middle school endorsement, and one held two bachelor's degrees plus a master's degree in special education. At the time of the study, two of the eight participating teachers taught in Spring Lake District 507, a suburban, P-8 (i.e., pre-kindergarten through eighth grade) school district. Six taught in Welchester District 62, a large, urban P-12 (i.e., pre-kindergarten through high school) school district (both pseudonyms). Their teaching assignments ranged from early childhood through ninth grade, and their years of teaching experience spanned five to 14 years (see Table 1).

Table 1.
Research Participants' Backgrounds and Context

School District	Grade/Content Area	Years of Teaching Experience
Spring Lake District 507	Seventh Grade Math and Literature	5
	Sixth Grade Math	6
Welchester District 62	Fourth Grade Special Education	6
	Fourth Grade	9
	Third Grade And Lead Teacher	11
	Ninth Grade Special Education	11
	Early Childhood Inclusion	11
	First Grade	14

Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection, which was part of a larger study, took place during July 2010. Via e-mail, participants completed a brief questionnaire and provided the researcher with an electronic copy of their TLP written self-reflection. Questionnaire responses focusing on demographics and professional background (questions 1-7) were compiled into a table to examine individual and group characteristics. Responses to questions 8 through 12, which focused on participants' professional goals, the STEM education master's program, and conceptions of teacher leadership, were compiled into a table to examine participating teachers' thinking about themselves as teacher leaders.

Data analysis for the larger study took place between August 2010 and October 2013. The research findings and discussion related to the larger study (i.e., participants' TLP written self-reflections and questions 1 through 10 and 12 of the questionnaire) were reported elsewhere (see Hunzicker, 2012, 2013, 2014). Data analysis for the final phase of the study, reported here, took place between March 2015 and June 2017. The final analysis focused on question 11: Do you consider yourself a teacher leader? Please explain.

Data analysis was guided by the following research questions: 1) How do teachers progress from teacher to teacher leader? and 2) What factors and conditions influence this progression? While analyzing findings from the larger study, the researcher used the eight participating teachers' written self-reflections to begin creating a visual model conceptualizing the progression from teacher to teacher leader, including factors and conditions that influence this progression. To develop the model, the researcher organized key findings and terminology from the larger study to create a composite sequential progression. Then, the researcher analyzed participants' responses to question 11 to identify themes in participant's self-perceptions as teachers and as leaders. Finally, the researcher integrated participants' verbatim responses to question 11 with the key findings and terminology from the larger study. In June 2015 and September 2016, the model was informally shared and discussed with two different groups of STEM teacher leaders (approximately 60 teacher leaders from 12 different school districts), and minor revisions to the model were made based on their observations. After meticulously comparing the model to the larger body of research on teacher leader development using a constant comparative analysis approach (Fram, 2013), more revisions were made. The model was finalized in June 2017.

Previously-reported Findings

The study's previously-reported findings focused on the eight teachers' TLP written self-reflections and their responses to questions 1 through 10 and 12 of the questionnaire. Findings from the larger study revealed that all eight teachers demonstrated dispositions of emerging teacher leadership by valuing students and prioritizing student needs and interests. Additionally, these teachers positioned and prepared themselves to serve students by building collegial professional relationships and pursuing professional growth (Hunzicker, 2013). Encouraged by job-embedded collaboration and professional development experiences, their leadership skills grew over time as a result of exposure to research-based practices, increased teacher self-efficacy, and service beyond the classroom (Hunzicker, 2012). Ultimately, six of the eight teachers demonstrated at least one act of teacher leadership during the study. Motivated by student-focused concerns, their acts of teacher leadership were classified into two categories: student advocacy and school-level leadership roles and responsibilities. By speaking out on behalf of students and accepting or initiating school-level leadership opportunities, the teachers in the study "positioned themselves to positively influence teaching and learning beyond their own classrooms, and most were successful" (Hunzicker, 2014, p. 411).

Current Findings and Analysis

The current findings focus on the eight teachers' responses to question 11: Do you consider yourself a teacher leader? Please explain. When asked if they considered themselves teacher leaders, all eight teachers described themselves as teacher leaders although only six had demonstrated teacher leadership during the study. The six teachers who demonstrated acts of teacher leadership articulated a range of teacher leader self-perceptions that were later organized into three developmental stages: teacher leader, developing teacher leader, and situational teacher leader. The self-perceptions of the two teachers who did not demonstrate acts of teacher leadership during the study comprised a fourth developmental stage: classroom teacher leader (see Table 2).

Table 2.
Four Developmental Stages of Teacher Leader Self-perceptions

Demonstrated Teacher Leadership?	Verbatim Teacher Leader Self-perception	Grade/ Content Area	Years of Teaching Experience	School District Type
Teacher Leader				
Yes	"Teacher Leader"	Third Grade and Lead Teacher	11	Large, urban, P-12
Yes	"Informal Teacher Leader"	Early Childhood Inclusion	11	Large, urban, P-12
Developing Teacher Leader				
Yes	"Teacher Leader Still Learning"	Sixth Grade Math	6	Suburban, P-8
Yes	"Developing Teacher Leader"	Seventh Grade Math and Literature	5	Suburban, P-8
Situational Teacher Leader				
Yes	"Leader among Teachers and Students"	Ninth Grade Special Education	11	Large, urban, P-12
Yes	"Small Group and Grade Level Leader"	Fourth Grade Special Education	6	Large, urban, P-12
Classroom Teacher Leader				
No	"Beginner Teacher Leader"	Fourth Grade	9	Large, urban, P-12
No	"Teacher Leader, with Reservations"	First Grade	14	Large, urban, P-12

Of the six teachers who demonstrated teacher leadership, only two viewed themselves unequivocally as teacher leaders. One of these teachers wrote:

> I definitely consider myself a teacher leader in both formal and informal roles. I serve as a lead teacher, on the [school] leadership team, math committee, provide professional development, as well as contribute to many informal roles. I act as an advocate for teachers in my building, students, and parents.

The other teacher stated:

> I consider myself an informal teacher leader. I make a conscious effort to lead by example, as well as seek out solutions for problems at both my grade level and school. I am also involved in informal mentoring of new teachers and trials of new assessments and curriculum. Participating in lifelong learning is another way that I demonstrate leadership in my current role.

Both of these teachers taught in Welchester District 62, the large, urban P-12 school district. In addition, both had demonstrated numerous and significant acts of teacher leadership during the study. At the time of the study, both teachers had 11 years of teaching experience. The first teacher held the formal position of lead teacher in her school, which helps to explain her unequivocal self-perception of teacher leader since teachers are more likely to recognize leadership when it occurs through formally-assigned leadership roles (Hanuscin et al., 2012). The second teacher, who did not hold a formal leadership position, appropriately viewed herself as an informal teacher leader.

Developing Teacher Leader

The remaining four teachers who demonstrated teacher leadership during the study articulated their self-perceptions as something less than teacher leadership even though some had demonstrated multiple acts of leadership during the study. Two described themselves as developing teacher leaders, reasoning that they were still learning how to lead. One teacher explained:

> Teachers in my department definitely come to me with questions, and I tend to be one of the teachers that administration approaches when they need a job done or the perspective of a classroom teacher. However, I still feel like I have so much to learn from others.

The second teacher wrote:

> I consider myself a developing teacher leader. At the beginning of the program, I was not a teacher leader in the least. However, throughout the program, I have increased my role as a teacher leader within my school and district.

Both of these teachers taught at the same school in Spring Lake District 507, the suburban P-8 school district. At the time of the study, these teachers held six and five years of teaching experience respectively. Although both teachers demonstrated numerous and significant acts of teacher leadership during the study, neither fully embraced a self-perception of teacher leader. One explanation may be that the disposition of humility kept them from assertively referring to themselves as leaders (Collinson, 2012). Because both teachers were younger and newer to the profession, it is also possible that their colleagues did not view them as leaders (Johnson & Donaldson, 2007; Nicolaidou, 2010), which influenced them to minimize their self-perceptions.

Situational Teacher Leader

The other two teachers who demonstrated leadership during the study articulated their teacher leader self-perceptions around their preferences for leading subtly and on a smaller scale. One of these teachers elaborated:

> I hope I am a leader among teachers and students. I think before I speak, so I am not going to be the teacher who controls meetings or dominates meetings with her ideas. I think about the process and ideas and then I say what I think is meaningful. I look at data and think about how ideas are going to work in the classroom before I express opinions. I would say I work on the sidelines with the best interest of the school at heart.

The other teacher wrote:

> I see myself as a teacher leader in small groups, on many grade level topics, and among many grade level peers. However, I do not think others outside of my grade level see me as a leader because I am not on any school wide committees.

Both of these teachers taught in Welchester District 62. At the time of the study, the first teacher held 11 years of teaching experience and the second teacher had been teaching six years. Both teachers demonstrated one significant act of teacher leadership during the study, and both held self-perceptions of teacher leadership that were limited to specific situations, which established consistency between their self-perceptions and actions. Their self-perception as situational teacher leaders is similar to Roby's (2009) notion of frequent contributors. One explanation for these teachers' self-perceptions may have been the school cultures in which they worked. The first teacher worked in an overly rigid school culture. Such school cultures disempower teachers by limiting or removing their ability to exercise professional judgment (Coleman et al., 2012; Nicolaidou, 2010). The second teacher may have been affected by an unsupportive principal in terms of "in-groups and out-groups" (Angelle & DeHart, 2011, p. 155). This teacher elaborated, "I was more of a teacher leader at my old school. I was on our school leadership committee and made presentations to the staff. I have not been approached to do anything like that at my new school."

Classroom Teacher Leader

The final two teachers, who did not demonstrate teacher leadership during the study, still classified themselves as teacher leaders at the classroom level or pending future opportunities. One teacher wrote, "I consider myself a beginner teacher leader with hopes of becoming more confident in my leadership skills." The other explained, "I see myself as a teacher leader, but with reservations. I do not aspire to any role outside the classroom, but that is fine. I can still impact those around me."

Both teachers taught in Welchester District 62. At the time of the study, the first teacher held nine years of teaching experience and the second teacher had been teaching 14 years. Neither teacher demonstrated an act of teacher leadership during the study, making their self-perceptions as classroom teacher leaders consistent with their actions. Because teacher leadership builds from a foundation of pedagogical knowledge and skills (Carver, 2016; Collinson, 2012; Toplinski, 2014), the progression from teacher to teacher leader begins in the classroom. Moreover, because the progression is different for each teacher (Smulyan, 2016) and dependent upon each teacher's readiness for expanded leadership roles and responsibilities (Carver, 2016), these teachers' self-perceptions as classroom teacher leaders should be respected as developmentally appropriate.

It is possible that the developing, situational, and classroom teacher leaders described here may have minimized their standing as teacher leaders, either through their TLP written self-reflections or when articulating their teacher leader self-perceptions. If so, the notion that the progression from teacher to teacher leader is a gradual, recursive process that occurs over time offers one explanation (Collinson, 2012; Nicolaidou, 2010; Smulyan, 2016). It is also possible that the lack of alignment between these teachers' self-perceptions and their demonstrated acts of leadership reveals a discrepancy between their conceptions of teacher leadership and the teacher leadership framework that guided the study (Hanuscin et al., 2012).

Influential Factors and Conditions

The eight teachers' personal circumstances and the school and district cultures in which they worked rendered various levels of support, which influenced their progression toward leadership. One developing teacher leader reflected, "It is important to be in an environment that encourages leadership and innovation, where there are people around to support you." Although some teachers experienced many opportunities to exercise leadership, others found very few. For two teachers, personal commitments and responsibilities made finding time to lead particularly difficult. One classroom teacher leader stated, "With busy schedules and life's stresses, it's easy to let after school events slip by." A situational teacher leader wrote, "Honestly, I currently am not seeking teacher leadership roles because I feel too busy with family and school."

The current findings do not reveal any patterns between teachers' self-perceptions and their school district type, years of teaching experience, or grade/content area. However, the fact that most teachers in the study were in their late 20s or early to mid-30s reinforces Hildebrandt and Eom's (2011) finding that teachers in their 30s may be more motivated by financial gain and external validation than teachers in other age groups, as well as Smulyan's (2016) assertion that teachers' interest in professional development and leadership opportunities beyond their own classrooms increases after they earn tenure.

Teacher Leader Progression and Influences Model

Based on the eight teachers' self-reported leadership experiences and self-perceptions, Figure 2 offers a visual model conceptualizing the progression from teacher to teacher leader, including factors and conditions that influence this progression. The model provides a composite of the eight teachers' experiences, beginning with their dispositions and progressing to factors that developed their leadership skills and self-perceptions over time. The model includes indicators, or acts, of teacher leadership, as demonstrated by the eight teachers during the study, as well as their teacher leader self-perceptions upon completion of the study. The model illustrates that, although each teacher intentionally pursued leadership by putting students first, engaging in job-embedded collaboration and professional development, and accepting or initiating school-level leadership opportunities, their progress was gradual and recursive, sometimes making it difficult for them to view themselves fully as leaders, especially amidst challenging personal circumstances and less supportive school and district cultures.
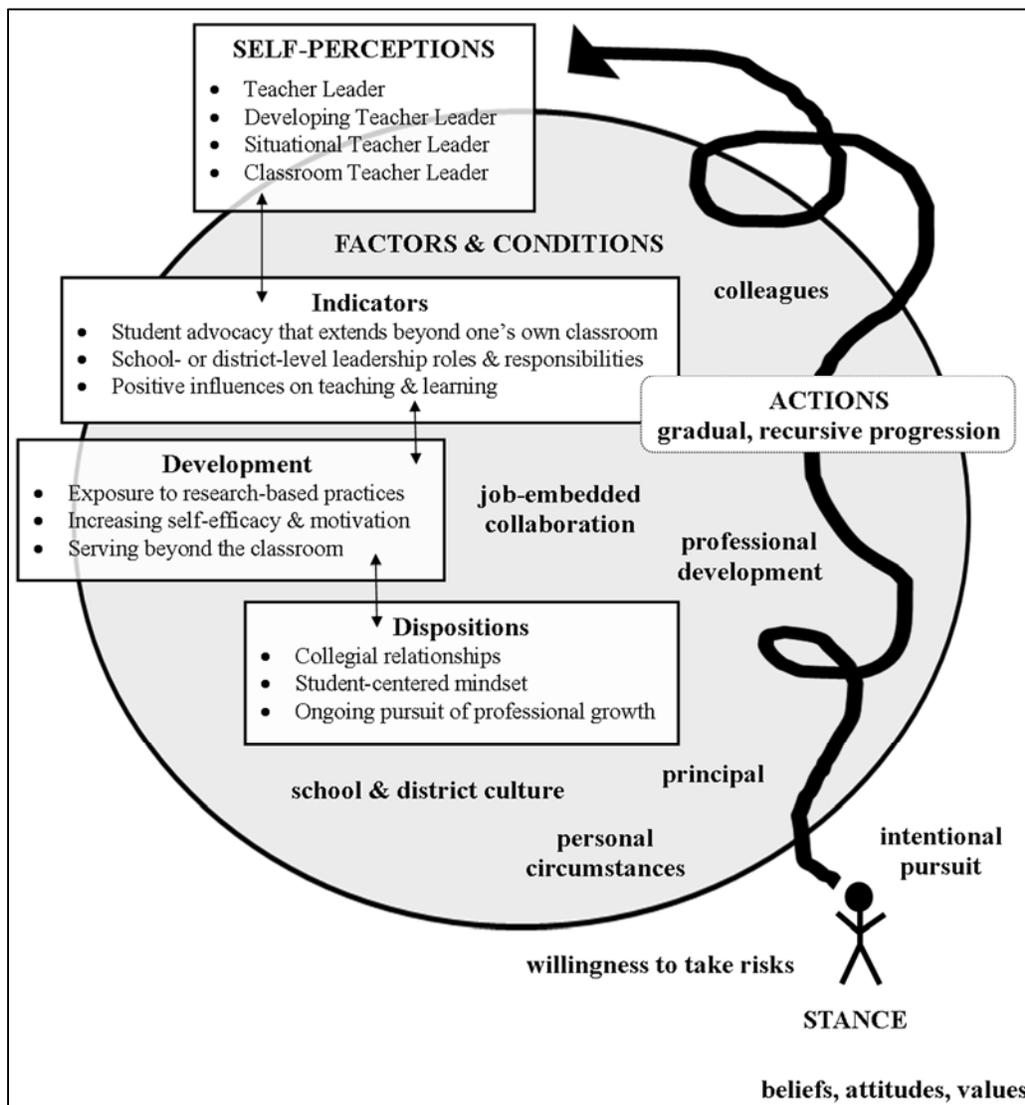

Figure 2. Teacher Leader Progression and Influences Model

Discussion

The visual model presented here offers one empirically-based conception of how teachers progress from teacher to teacher leader as well as the factors and conditions that influence this progression. Because teacher leadership is "defined by the context in which it is experienced" (Angelle & DeHart, 2011, p. 142) and "expresses itself in a myriad of ways" (Helterbran, 2010, p. 364), each of the eight teachers in the study experienced a unique progression toward leadership. At the same time, they undoubtedly shared some experiences in common.

Influential Factors and Conditions

For the teachers in the study, the progression from teacher to teacher leader was influenced by the conditions of school and district culture paired with their personal circumstances. Factors that supported – or hindered – their progression toward leadership included beliefs, attitudes, and values, willingness to take professional risks, intentional pursuit of goals, participation in professional development, and job-embedded collaboration related to a variety of instructional initiatives.

Research documents that obstacles to teacher leadership can be intimidating and difficult to overcome. In a study of 302 primary-level teachers in Turkey, attitudes and behaviors associated with teacher professionalism predicted that teachers would engage in school improvement efforts, but feelings of perceived stress more strongly predicted that they would not (Kilinc et al., 2015). The study's research team concluded, "Stress is more important than teacher professionalism in regard to the collaboration of teachers with their colleagues for improving teaching and increasing student success" (p. 17). Even so, many teachers still progress toward teacher leadership. Dozier (2007) explained, "The success or failure of teacher leaders has most often depended on context and on the experience and personal characteristics of the teacher" (p. 55). Because teacher leadership is a stance, or way of thinking and being, the decision to lead or not to lead ultimately lies within the power of teachers themselves, even when faced with obstacles such as an undesirable school culture, an unsupportive building principal, or resistant colleagues.

Poekert et al. (2016) observed that for some teachers, challenges generate "a productive tension, rather than a barrier, contributing to the development of persistence and stamina when addressing dilemmas" (p. 323). For example, the teachers in Collinson's (2012) study revealed several strategies for moving forward with innovations in spite of unsupportive principals, including modeling or piloting desired changes, reasoning with administrators, finding alternative solutions, doing things themselves, making top-down decisions work, working around administrators, altering administrators' rules, bargaining with administrators, speaking truth to empower, and leaving the school. Reason and Reason (2007) explained:

> Teachers don't realize just how powerful they are in establishing the organizational culture in a school. Teams of teachers often work together for decades. They develop powerful and sophisticated social networks that have great potential influence in the school district…The more aware teachers become of their capacity to drive change, the more likely it is that deep change will occur." (p. 37)

For these reasons, overcoming obstacles may actually help teachers develop a teacher leader self-perception. Carver (2016) wrote that to overcome leadership obstacles, teachers must "first perceive themselves as leaders capable of enacting change within and beyond their own classroom" (p. 161). Once teachers view themselves as leaders, they begin to seek answers to questions, intentionally pursue solutions to problems, and take ownership for both successes and failures of the school (Danielson, 2006; Helterbran, 2010). Over time, these teachers develop a sense of "purposeful agency," or motivation to initiate action on behalf of students instead waiting for direction from others (Helterbran, 2010, p. 366). In this way, the progression from teacher to teacher leader advances as teacher self-efficacy and self-confidence increase and teacher leader self-perceptions grow stronger, which seems to have been the case for at least half of the teachers in the study.

Teacher Leader Self-perceptions

The study's findings revealed that six of the eight teachers demonstrated acts of teacher leadership during the study, yet only two viewed themselves unequivocally as teacher leaders. This proportion of 25% is comparable to Roby's (2009) findings, in which 29% of participating teachers considered themselves to be influential or respected contributors. However, the proportion is significantly lower than Mongillo et al.'s (2012) findings, in which two-thirds of participants considered themselves literacy leaders in their schools.

The fact that four of the six teachers who demonstrated teacher leadership did not fully view themselves as leaders is also comparable to other studies of teachers enrolled in leadership-focused graduate programs (Carver, 2016; Mongillo et al., 2012; Roby, 2009). Their self-perceptions of developing teacher leader and situational teacher leader may have been due to a "mismatch between how leadership is defined in the literature and how leadership is defined by teachers themselves" (Hanuscin et al., 2012, p. 16). It is also possible that these four teachers embraced what Carver (2016) called the teacher versus leader myth; the belief that teacher leadership requires an either/or choice between teaching and leading. Or perhaps they were influenced by obstacles such as overly rigid or overly loose school cultures (Nicolaidou, 2010; Mangin, 2008), unsupportive principals (Angelle & DeHart, 2011; Helterbran, 2010), or resistant colleagues (Kilinc et al., 2015; Moller & Pankake, 2006). Regardless, it is likely that their self-perceptions are currently in-progress, somewhere between teacher and teacher leader. Smulyan (2016) wrote, "Providing opportunities for teachers to reflect, take risks, share experiences, and explore options for growth within a supported community can lead to the development of a leadership stance" (p. 25). It is likely that, over time, these four teachers will come to view themselves unequivocally as teacher leaders.

The two teachers who did not demonstrate teacher leadership during the study, embraced a self-perception of classroom teacher leader. Because these teachers indicated that they viewed themselves as leaders within their own classrooms (Cannata, McCrory, Sykes, Anagnostopoulos, & Frank, 2010; Nicolaidou, 2010), it is possible that they will progress toward a self-perception of teacher leadership over time, as they serve beyond their classrooms, increase their self-efficacy, and gain exposure to research-based practices. It is also possible, however, that these teachers will not develop self-perceptions as teacher leaders. Carver (2016) wrote, "Some teachers naturally identify as leaders whereas others do not; some are naturally comfortable embracing leadership responsibilities outside the classroom whereas many are not" (p. 175). Teaching is a noble profession, and there is much to accomplish within one classroom, especially when done well. If these two teachers maintain their self-perception of classroom teacher leader

for the remainder of their teaching careers, they can effectively and honorably serve their students, their schools, and the profession from their classrooms.

Several studies support teacher self-perceptions as influential to progression from teacher to teacher leader. In Roby's (2009) study of teacher contribution in schools, participants attributed teacher self-perception to both low and high levels of contribution. Helterbran (2010), who described informal teacher leadership as emergent and self-generated, cautioned, "This 'emergence' cannot and will not occur unless and until teachers recognize their own leadership potential and develop the confidence and skills to be effective teacher leaders" (p. 365). Carver (2016) wrote, "Teacher leadership identity formation is both subtle and profound, resulting not only from time and expertise but also from teachers' perception of and readiness for expanded leadership roles and responsibilities" (p. 176). These observations indicate that teacher self-perceptions are essential to the progression from teacher to teacher leader, but they are difficult to track and measure.

Research also suggests that teachers are more likely to view themselves as teachers than as teacher leaders. This finding holds true even when teachers are pursuing advanced leadership degrees and credentials and/or engaging in leadership work. In Roby's (2009) study, only 29% of the participants, who were enrolled in a leadership master's program, considered themselves influential or respected contributors. In Hanuscin et al.'s (2012) study of Missouri science teachers, 95% reported participating in school- or district-level curriculum work or school improvement efforts, but only 60% viewed these activities as leadership. Nicolaidou's (2010) study of a highly-centralized school system in Cyprus found that although many teachers considered themselves classroom leaders, formal teacher leaders did not view themselves as leaders because the highly-prescribed nature of the school system limited their impact. Moreover, in their exploration of teacher leader influence through job-embedded collaboration, Fairman and Mackenzie (2012) described teachers as:

>…reluctant or ambivalent about being regarded as "leaders," in that they did not want to take on formal titles of leadership and seemed to prefer working through informal channels to effect change. Some recognized that their work was leading change in their schools, but others did not really understand the leadership potential in their work, and just saw it as being "what we do." (p. 244)

Consistent with the research, the eight teacher leaders in this study did not fully view themselves as teacher leaders, even though all claimed a teacher leadership stance and six of the eight demonstrated at least one act of teacher leadership during the study. A closer look at the relationship between teacher leadership stance, actions, and self-perceptions may help to explain why.

Teacher Leadership Stance, Actions, and Self-perceptions

The findings of this study suggest that internal factors such as motivation and confidence are likely to influence the progression from teacher to teacher leader more so than external factors. Because a teacher leadership stance arises from a teacher's beliefs, attitudes, and values (Smulyan, 2016), it makes sense that actions of teacher leadership follow stance (Riveros et al., 2013). Lowery-Moore et al. (2016) referred to this as "a new sense of emotional responsibility" (p. 11), a commitment to positively influencing teaching and learning that teachers develop as they progress toward teacher leadership.

The Teacher Leadership Skills Framework (Center for Strengthening the Teaching Profession [CSTP], 2009), one teacher leadership framework currently available for the study and practice of teacher leadership, describes the interrelationship between teacher leader dispositions and actions as follows:

> Effective teacher leaders…are energetic risk takers whose integrity, high efficacy, and content knowledge give them credibility with their colleagues. Their desire to work with adults is grounded in their belief that systems-level change will positively impact student learning, and that their contributions to the profession are important and needed. The natural curiosity of teacher leaders makes them life-long learners who are open to new experiences and challenges…Difficult challenges require teacher leaders to tap into their deep sense of courage, and their unwavering perseverance helps them to follow through. When best-laid plans have unexpected outcomes, teacher leaders are open to constructive criticism. They reflect on their experience, learn from it, and then with resilience move forward to the next challenge. (p. 1)

This description of effective teacher leaders reiterates the idea that teacher leadership actions follow stance. For example, a teacher's belief in system-level change (a disposition) leads to tireless work with colleagues on behalf of students (an action); an attitude of curiosity (a disposition) leads to the pursuit of professional development (an action); a tendency toward courage (a disposition) fosters perseverance (a disposition) and follow through (an action), and so on. In this way, teacher leadership stance is comprised of dispositions; teacher leadership actions emerge from teacher leadership stance.

According to their self-reports, all eight teachers in this study possessed a teacher leadership stance, and six of the eight teachers demonstrated at least one act of teacher leadership during the study; yet only two teachers viewed themselves unequivocally as teacher leaders. Based on these findings, one question lingers: Are the remaining six teachers likely to develop unequivocal self-perceptions of teacher leader, and if so, when? Further research on the progression from teacher to teacher leader is needed, focusing now on the relationship between teacher leadership stance, actions, and self-perceptions.

Limitations

The data collection for this study was limited by a small number of participants, making it impossible to generalize the study's findings. Moreover, participant self-reports are considered a subjective form of evidence. To overcome the first limitation, the visual model was created as a composite so that aspects of several individual experiences could be illustrated "on *conceptual* grounds, not on representative grounds" (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014, p. 34). The second limitation was justified by the researcher's belief that, in creating such a visual model, teachers' voices must be honored (Helterbran, 2010; Laverty, 2003; Loftus & Higgs, 2010). In addition, informal focus groups and meticulous comparisons to the body of research on teacher leader development were undertaken to strengthen the authenticity of the model (Morse & Richards, 2002). Although several years passed between the time the participant data were collected and publication of the final model, the rigorous process of constant comparative analysis between the development of the model, recent literature, and keen feedback from practicing teacher leaders helped to ensure that the model provides a current conceptualization of the progression from teacher to teacher leader that reflects both theory and practice (Fram, 2013).

Conclusion

Similar to other studies, the Teacher Leader Progression and Influences Model suggests that the progression from teacher to teacher leader is a gradual, recursive process through which teachers expand their influence over time. While external factors such as school culture, the building principal, and colleagues can influence teachers' progression toward leadership, the decision to lead or not to lead is ultimately within the power of teachers themselves. The findings of this study indicate that teacher leadership stance precedes the actions of teacher leadership although development of teacher leader self-perception may take longer. As the eight teachers in this study demonstrated, even when teachers do not view themselves as leaders, they can effectively and honorably serve their students, their schools, and the profession from their classrooms—and many seem to prefer it that way!

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