

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

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

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## Introduction

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

### Why Teacher Leadership?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

Table 1.

*Attributes and Indicators of Teacher Leadership*

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

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

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

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



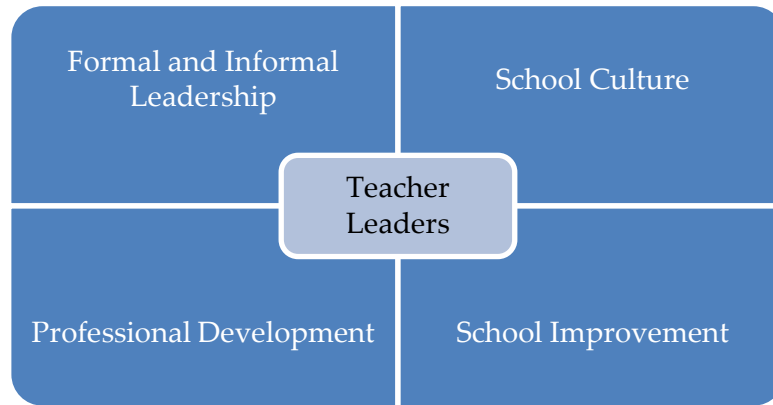


Figure 1.  
*Concepts Related to Teacher Leadership*

### **Formal and Informal Leadership**

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

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

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

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

### **School Culture**

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

### **Professional Development**

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



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

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

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

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

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

### **School Improvement**

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



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

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

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

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

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

### **Cautionary Considerations**

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

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

Table 2.

#### *Cautionary Considerations*

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





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

## **Context**

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

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



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

### **Leadership Capacity**

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

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

### **Group Dynamics**

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

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

### **Apparent Political Beliefs**

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Table 3.

*Research Plan*

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



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

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

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

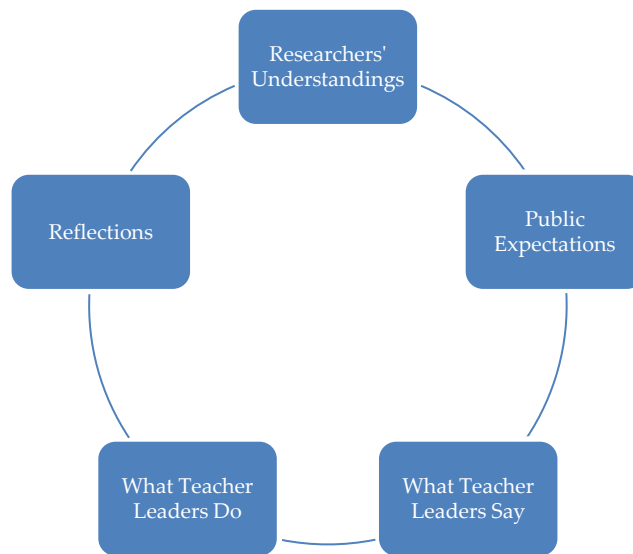


Figure 2.

*Study Components*

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





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

### **Conclusion**

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

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

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

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