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## Principals' Perceptions and Understandings of Teacher Leadership

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## **Introduction**

In recent years, teacher leadership (TL) has been increasingly recognized as a powerful tool for improving teacher retention and job satisfaction, school climate, and student achievement (Teacher Leadership Exploratory Consortium, 2011). Unfortunately, this boost in visibility has not yet translated to widespread adoption across the United States. Because principals often act as the gatekeepers to the goings-on in the schools they lead, their support is essential to the successful implementation of TL. However, it is quite difficult to implement something about which one is uninitiated. While a great deal of research around many facets of TL has been carried out over the past thirty-plus years (e.g. Nguyen et al., 2020; Wenner & Campbell, 2017; York-Barr & Duke, 2004), little if any inquiry into principals' baseline knowledge of TL as a construct has been done. As such, the purpose of this study is to investigate public school principals' perceptions and understandings of TL in an effort to better inform continued efforts toward its ubiquitous application in American schools.

## **Relevant Literature**

### **Definitions of TL**

As with many other key concepts across the field of education (e.g. Hart, 2020), there is no consistent definition of TL, either in practice or in theory, in spite of the fact that research on TL and the role teacher leaders play in schools has been in progress for more than four decades (Francisco, 2020; Muijs & Harris, 2003; Sebastian et al., 2016). A number of authors have provided their own definitions of TL over the years (Cosenza, 2015), all of which speak to the influence teacher leaders have in their schools and communities (see Table 1). Instead of providing yet another nuanced definition of TL, Berg (2019/2020) recently argued that "waiting for a national consensus to form is unnecessary and potentially futile" (p. 86), suggesting that

communities, schools, and districts should come together and create a working definition of TL that meets their local needs. She later states that “the lack of consensus about what counts as teacher leadership limits educators from being strategic in ‘doing’ teacher leadership” (Berg, 2019/2020, p. 87). This limitation and its role as a contributing factor to principals’ potential ignorance of TL was a motivating factor for conducting the current study.

**Table 1.** Sample Definitions of TL

<b>Source</b>	<b>Definition of TL</b>
Diffey & Aragon (2018)	The process by which teachers extend their impact - influencing colleagues, principals, members of school communities and beyond to improve teaching practices and support student learning.
Katzenmeyer & Moller (2009)	Teacher leaders lead within and beyond the classroom; identify with and contribute to a community of teacher learners and leaders; influence others toward improved educational practice; and accept responsibility for achieving the outcomes of their leadership
Danielson (2006)	That set of skills demonstrated by teachers who continue to teach students but also have an influence that extends beyond their own classrooms to others within their own school and elsewhere. It entails mobilizing and energizing others with the goal of improving the school's performance of its critical responsibilities related to teaching and learning.
York-Barr & Duke (2004)	The process by which teachers, individually or collectively, influence their colleagues, principals, and other members of the school community to improve teaching and learning practices with the aim of increased student learning and achievement.
Wenner & Campbell (2017)	Teacher leaders [are] teachers who maintain K-12 classroom-based teaching responsibilities, while also taking on leadership responsibilities outside of the classroom.

### **Current Status of TL in American Schools**

There are numerous positive outcomes attributable to the implementation of TL, including enhanced capacity of school principals, increased student achievement, and a

broadened capacity to meet the needs of 21<sup>st</sup> century learners (Teacher Leadership Exploratory Consortium, 2011; Valdez et al., 2015). Even with the recognition of these benefits, TL has not yet gained traction in all states across America. Although a database of state-level TL initiatives compiled by the Education Commission of the States (Aragon, 2018) shows that thirteen American states have no legislation or statewide policies pertaining to TL, many states do have structures in place that support teacher leaders and their work, as shown in Table 2. However, due to the shifting definition of TL and the roles teacher leaders are assigned, comparing actual state practices remains difficult.

In the state of Georgia, the setting of the current study, a great deal of work has been done toward the promotion and support of TL. As shown in Table 2, Georgia offers a TL certificate endorsement pathway, has written and adopted its own proprietary set of TL standards, and provides support and incentives for TL by way of specialized TL institutes and, in some districts, financial compensation. A number of additional initiatives have originated at the state level, including the creation of the *Teacher Leadership Advisory Council (TLAC)*, co-sponsored by the Georgia Professional Standards Commission (GaPSC) and the Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) and comprised of teachers, principals, professional learning directors, human resources directors, superintendents, Regional Educational Service Agency (RESA) representatives, school board members, and higher education faculty; the GaPSC's publication of the *Teacher Leadership Tool Kits* for Teachers, Principals, and Central Office Leaders (GaPSC, 2019); and the creation of the *Teacher Leader Academy*, a joint effort by the Governor's Office of Student Achievement (GOSA), Governor's School Leadership Academy (GSLA), Georgia RESAs, and local schools and districts, aimed at promoting and supporting the work of teacher leaders at the state, district, and local levels through collaborative professional

learning and peer coaching. This work serves as the backdrop of the current study, the conceptual framework for which is described in the next section.

**Table 2.** Existing State-Level TL Structures (Diffey & Aragon, 2018)

<b>States that...</b>	
Offer a TL license and/or endorsement (n=22)	Alabama, Arkansas, Connecticut, <b>Georgia</b> , Hawaii, Idaho, Illinois, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Michigan, New Jersey, New Mexico, Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Carolina, South Dakota, Texas, Virginia, West Virginia
Have adopted TL standards (n=17)	Alabama, <b>Georgia</b> , Idaho, Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Maine, Michigan, Minnesota, New Jersey, North Carolina, Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, West Virginia
Define the role (prescribe certain duties) of teacher leaders (n=13)	Alabama, Arkansas, Idaho, Illinois, Iowa, Kentucky, Louisiana, New Jersey, New Mexico, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon, Utah
Provide formal supports or incentives to teacher leaders (n=23)	Alabama, Arkansas, California, Connecticut, <b>Georgia</b> , Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maine, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nevada, New Jersey, New Mexico, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Utah, Washington, Wisconsin
Have no legislation or statewide policies pertaining to TL (n=13)	Alaska, Arizona, Colorado, Delaware, Florida, Maryland, Massachusetts, Montana, Nebraska, New Hampshire, North Dakota, Vermont, Wyoming

### **Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework guiding this study draws from two sources. First, the waves of TL (e.g. Berry et al., 2013; Pounder, 2006; Silva et al., 2000; Stoddard, 2020) provide a historical and practical yardstick by which principals’ perceptions and understandings of TL may be measured. Positioning theory (e.g. Harré & Secord, 1972; Harré & van Langenhove, 1999) was selected as an additional lens in an effort to better identify and analyze the cultural and interactional aspects of principals’ perceptions and understandings of TL and to provide a specific conceptual language to assist in succinctly conveying these ideas. The waves of TL and

positioning theory are described independently below, followed by an explanation of their synthesis and use in the context of this study.

### **The Waves of TL**

The emergence of TL over the past several decades has been described as a series of waves (e.g. Berry et al., 2013; Pounder, 2006; Silva et al., 2000; Stoddard, 2020). First wave TL saw the introduction of formal leadership positions for teachers, such as grade chair, department head, or union representative, that were “focused on the effectiveness and efficiency of the system rather than on instructional leadership” (Silva et al., 2000, p. 780). Teacher leaders were selected to serve essentially as middle managers, located hierarchically between school administrators and their colleagues and responsible for carrying out bureaucratic duties as assigned by their superiors. Teacher leaders were selected to fill these positions almost exclusively at the behest of the principal. In the second wave of TL, another set of formal middle management positions emerged as leadership outlets for teachers. These positions, such as curriculum developer and team leader, were intended to capitalize on teacher leaders’ pedagogical prowess but were still deeply aligned with a top-down model of management and often required educators to leave their classrooms to assume them (Levin & Schrum, 2017). In both first and second wave TL, teacher leaders were not afforded the authority to make decisions for themselves; instead, they were expected to function as an extension of their supervising administrator(s).

Emergence of third wave TL saw a turning of the tide away from the hierarchical status quo of school leadership toward “fundamental cultural changes in the goals, structure, roles, and norms” (Silva et al., 2000, p. 781) of P-12 institutions. TL was seen as a mechanism through which meaningful collegial support between educators could be leveraged for continuous school

improvement. Third wave TL deemed both school administrators and teachers themselves as responsible for the identification of teacher leaders, a major shift from first and second wave TL, with teacher leaders both formally appointed to and informally assuming roles such as mentor and professional development leader. Though a clear departure from second wave TL, lingering shadows of hierarchical leadership remained evident in third wave TL, as teacher leaders were often still limited in their ability to truly lead due to ineffective or unsupportive school structures or cultures (Vingelli, 2017).

Beyond the original three waves of TL described by Silva et al. (2000), there is some divergence in the literature as to what constitutes fourth and fifth wave TL. Pounder (2006) suggested a fourth wave of TL exemplified by the emergence of “transformational classroom leadership” (p. 533). Transformational leadership, a term originally coined by James V. Downton in 1973 and later expanded upon by James MacGregor Burns (1978) and Bernard M. Bass (1985), “involves inspiring followers to commit to a shared vision and goals for an organization or unit, challenging them to be innovative problem solvers, and developing followers’ leadership capacity via coaching, mentoring, and provision of both challenge and support” (Bass & Riggio, 2006, p.4). Leaders operating in alignment with the transformational leadership model employ at least one of its four primary components, described as follows (Bass & Riggio, 2010):

- *Idealized Influence (II)* – Transformational leaders exhibit a high level of moral and ethical behavior are role models for their followers. They often garner a great deal of respect and admiration from those they lead.

- *Inspirational Motivation (IM)* – Transformational leaders are enthusiastic, optimistic vision-casters who motivate and inspire their followers to meet clearly articulated expectations and goals.
- *Individualized Consideration (IC)* – Transformational leaders provide differentiated attention and support via coaching, mentoring, and other similar activities for each follower individually, based on his/her personal preferences and desire for growth and achievement.
- *Intellectual Stimulation (IS)* – Transformational leaders encourage innovation, creativity, risk-taking, and “outside the box” thinking and problem solving.

Transformational classroom leaders are those who model strong pedagogical skills, nurture a positive classroom environment, and motivate, inspire, challenge, and foster creativity in their students and colleagues. Fourth wave TL recognizes the classroom as the “nucleus of leadership in schools” (Collay, 2011, p. 75), out of which a teacher leader’s ability to effect positive change is born (Pounder, 2006; Sanocki, 2013; Saputra, 2020).

Despite an overall lack of consensus in the literature, a commonly agreed upon feature of a new fifth wave of TL is that of advocacy. Berry et al. (2013) have asserted the need for what they term *teacherpreneurs* – “classroom experts who teach students regularly, but also have time, space, and reward to spread their ideas and practices to colleagues as well as administrators, policy-makers, parents, and community leaders” (Berry, 2013, p. 310). In a similar vein, Stoddard (2020) suggests that the fifth wave of TL be centered on teacher leaders’ responsibility and authority to influence both legislative and educational policy, as well as the curriculum and practices of institutions of higher education as they prepare teachers and school administrators for service in the field. These and others (e.g. GaPSC, 2019; Manner & Warren,



2017; Teacher Leadership Exploratory Consortium, 2011) have acknowledged the positioning of teacher leaders as advocates for students, educators, and the profession as a whole as critical in their depictions of the future of TL.

Although the waves of TL have been presented here chronologically, it is important to note that these waves may be “caught” in any order, as described by Sanocki (2013):

Just as a surfer catches some waves and not others, depending on the current and the time he is in the water and on the board, some authors and practitioners and not others have caught the waves of teacher leadership, depending on the time and the circumstance. Therefore, each school experiences differing levels and progressions of teacher leadership waves within their organization. How teacher leadership unfolds simply depends upon their unique circumstances and development of the concept within each school. (p. 20)

Very often, those “unique circumstances” equate to the awareness of and/or openness to TL shown by a school’s principal.

### **Positioning Theory**

At its core, positioning theory functions as a method for locating self and others in social and/or moral contexts via discursive practice (Harré and van Langenhove, 1999). While Davies and Harré (1999) define a *role* as “static, formal and ritualistic” (p. 32), a *position* is conversely seen as fluid and ever-shifting in concert with the ebb and flow of social interactions and discourse. This delineation of position as a “dynamic alternative” to role (van Langenhove & Harré, 1999, p. 14) is a key tenet of positioning theory and is of critical importance in understanding TL. The formal leadership roles of note in the context of TL, such as principal, department head, grade chair, and so on, each come with a particular set of rights,

responsibilities, and obligations for which the individuals who fill those roles are accountable. In contrast, the rights, responsibilities, and obligations held by a teacher leader are often wholly dependent on the constant negotiation and renegotiation of his or her position as a leader in any given *storyline*, or broad plot of a series of strung-together episodes (Hart, 2020). Harré and van Langenhove (1999) expand on this notion as follows:

[Positioning theory's] starting point is the idea that the constant flow of everyday life in which we all take part, is fragmented through discourse into distinct episodes that constitute the basic elements of both our biographies and of the social world. [...] Not only what we do but what *can do* is restricted by the rights, duties, and obligations we acquire, assume, or which are imposed upon us in the concrete social contexts of everyday life. (p. 4, emphasis added)

The rights, responsibilities, and obligations of leadership are often afforded to teacher leaders only when and if principals position them as capable and worthy of this work.

### **Synthesis of the Waves of TL and Positioning Theory**

Struyve et al. (2018) assert that although valuable, a full understanding of leadership cannot be gained through study of the roles, responsibilities, and actions of individual leaders alone. Instead, they posit that leadership must be explored more holistically, as “*constructed and practiced* in interactions between several actors” (p. 703, emphasis in original). A conceptual framework that synthesizes the waves of TL and positioning theory serves as a vehicle for doing just that. This framework is of particular use in the context of a discussion of TL because, as previously established, there is no singular definition of TL or the role of a teacher leader. Instead, teacher leaders position themselves and are positioned by others (e.g. principals, other teachers, etc.) as leaders, regardless of whether or not they have been given or have assumed a

formal (teacher) leadership role. It is through this lens that the perceptions and understandings of TL gathered from principals for this study are analyzed and discussed.

## **Methods**

### **Research Design**

The purpose of this qualitative case study is to explore the perceptions and understandings of TL held by principals of public schools across the state of Georgia. Participants were selected via purposive sampling, using the following criteria: (a) participants had to be currently serving as principal at the time of data collection, (b) participants had to be principals in Georgia public schools, and (c) participants' email addresses had to be included in the "GA Public School Contact List" database made available by request from the GaDOE. This case was bound by principals' knowledge specifically in regard to TL and, although tangential to this study, intentionally did not address principals' leadership style(s), teachers' perceptions and understandings of TL, or other issues relevant to the topic at hand. As such, the research questions guiding this study are:

1. How do principals define TL?
2. In what way(s) do principals characterize the work of teacher leaders in the schools they lead?

### **Data Collection**

Data were collected in two stages: first, through an electronic survey conducted via Google Forms, and later, with one-on-one interviews. A link to the electronic survey was delivered via email and the survey remained open from November 30, 2018 to December 30, 2018. After the collection period ended, a cursory review of the collected data was completed. This review helped to direct construction of the questions for the second round of data collection,

semi-structured one-on-one interviews, conducted in July 2019. In total, 40 principals participated in the electronic survey and eight participated in the interviews, the demographics of whom are detailed in Table 3. Because the same email database was used to procure participants for both the surveys and interviews, it is possible that one or more participants engaged in both methods of data collection, but whether or not this occurred is unknown.

**Table 3.** Study Participant Demographics

	Survey Respondents (n=40)	Interviewees (n=8)
<i>Gender</i>		
Male	22 (55%)	5 (62.5%)
Female	18 (45%)	3 (37.5%)
<i>Highest Attained Degree</i>		
Bachelor's	–	<i>Data not collected for interview participants</i>
Master's	2 (5%)	
Education Specialist	25 (62.5%)	
Doctorate	13 (32.5%)	
<i>Years of Experience as Principal</i>		
0-4	10 (25%)	2 (25%)
5-9	14 (35%)	2 (25%)
10-14	8 (20%)	3 (37.5%)
15-19	3 (7.5%)	1 (12.5%)
20-24	4 (10%)	–
25-29	–	–
30+	1 (2.5%)	–
<i>Level(s) of Schools Led by Participants</i>		
Elementary (PK-5)	17 (42.5%)	4 (50%)
Middle/Junior High (6-8)	8 (20%)	1 (12.5%)
High (9-12)	14 (35%)	3 (37.5%)
Other	1 (2.5%)	–

### **Data Analysis**

An inductive method was utilized in analyzing collected data. All data were read and reread by the researcher before coding began. During the first round of open coding, emergent themes were noted and data were coded using those themes as they emerged. During the second

round of coding, initial codes were refined and data were recoded using initial codes and subcodes as appropriate. The final codebook used in the analysis of data collected for this study is shown in Table 4.

**Table 4.** Codebook Used in Data Analysis.

<b>First Round Codes</b>	<b>Refined Second Round Codes</b>
<i>Principals' Definitions of TL</i>	
Action by Administrator	
Action by Teacher	
Action Neutral	
Qualities of TLs	Impacts Others Increased Responsibility Master Teacher Proactive
Holds a Role or Position	
<i>Principals' Recognition of the Work of TLs in Schools</i>	
Actions	Collaboration Committees and Teams Decision-Making Instructional Guidance Lead or Facilitate PLCs or PD Liaison Mentoring Other Peer Observations Provide Feedback
Roles	
TL = Teacher Leadership; TLs = Teacher Leaders	

## **Findings**

### **Principals' Definitions of TL**

When asked to provide a definition of TL in their own words, three major themes emerged from principals' responses: action-based definitions, centered on the action(s) of a particular individual as the catalyst for leadership; quality-based definitions, centered on

particular characteristics or traits exhibited by teacher leaders; and role-based definitions, centered on a leadership role or position—either formal or informal—held by a teacher.

### ***Action-Based Definitions***

Action-based definitions provided by principals fell into three categories: Action by Administrator, Action by Teacher, and Action Neutral. Principals operating under an Action by Administrator definition recognized themselves as the catalyst for TL. For example, one participant whose response fell into this category defined TL as “the process of growing and developing leaders within your school. Adding responsibilities and creating ownership of the decision making process.” Conversely, principals operating under an Action by Teacher definition placed the onus of TL on teachers themselves. An example of a response of this type defined TL as “teachers taking on roles outside their classroom such as mentoring, leading PD, attending meetings, planning school wide activities and programs.” Finally, the third and least prevalent type of response provided by principals was that of the Action Neutral definition of TL. Principals operating under an Action Neutral understanding of TL provided definitions that were more conceptual in nature and, although based on action, were not specific in attributing the action to any particular individual. Examples of Action Neutral definitions of TL provided by principals include “being able to mediate change, improvement, and development within a group of educators” and “the ability to influence the teaching behavior of others.”

### ***Quality-Based Definitions***

Four primary categories emerged from the quality-based definitions of TL provided by principals: Impacts Others, Increased Responsibility, Master Teacher, and Proactive. By far, the most prevalent quality noted was that of Impacts Others. Many principals defined TL in the context of a teacher’s ability to positively influence the practices and experiences of others,

particularly as a role model for their colleagues, describing TL as “demonstrated by teachers who teach students but also [extend] their influence and expertise to other teachers” and exemplified by individuals who are “[people] of integrity [...] willing to empower those that he/she works alongside.”

Increased Responsibility was noted in several definitions provided by principals. For example, one principal defined TL as “a veteran teacher entrusted with administrative responsibilities, which may include teacher observations, reviewing and analyzing data, conducting presentations on data, coaching, meeting with administrators on curriculum decisions, and advising instructional decisions at the building level, among others.” This viewpoint was supported by a second principal who defined TL as “adding responsibilities and creating ownership of the decision-making process,” although in this particular entry the participant did not make it clear who would or should be responsible for these tasks.

A third emergent theme of quality-based definitions position teacher leaders as Master Teachers. An example representative of definitions that fall into this category include a description of “teacher leaders [who ...] are very strong in their grade level or specific content area.” The final emergent theme of quality-based definitions of TL are those that illustrate teacher leaders as Proactive. One principal noted that “teacher leaders look for ways to make a positive difference not only in their own classroom, but also at the school and district level and in the community. They often volunteer or take on additional responsibilities for this reason.” Others in this category made mention of teacher leaders’ “initiative to share their knowledge and skills with other teachers” and ability to be “self-motivated and [...] self-directed to complete leadership task[s] in the building.”

### ***Role-Based Definitions***

As opposed to action-based or quality-based definitions of TL, which define TL in the context of the actions or characteristics exhibited by teacher leaders, role-based definitions provided by principals do so in the context of the specific leadership roles teacher leaders hold. Examples of these roles mentioned by participants include grade chair, department chair, mentor, leader of PLCs and/or other professional development activities, committee work, service as “liaisons between staff members and the administration,” and leader of other department- and/or school-wide activities and initiatives. It is important to note that the role-based definitions given do not make mention of the qualities or characteristics of teacher leaders who execute the duties of these roles *effectively*; instead, these definitions appear to indicate that the construct of TL can be equated to holding a non-administrative leadership role within a school.

### **Responsibility for Identification of Teacher Leaders**

When asked who is responsible for identifying educators as teacher leaders in a school, most participants initially responded that the principal should be responsible for this identification. However, after prompting, most agreed that self-identification by teachers can and should be done as well. Many noted that school culture played a key role in this process. One principal stated their belief that schools should work to create a “culture of leadership” in which TL emerges organically. Conversely to this sentiment, some principals remained quite reticent to agree that teacher leaders should self-identify as such, with one stating that this would only be appropriate “if ok’d by the principal first,” essentially negating the intent of self-identification.



## **Principals' Recognition of the Work of Teacher Leaders in Schools**

When asked to describe the ways teachers in the principals' own schools take on leadership roles within and beyond their classrooms, their responses again fell into action-based and role-based categories, in direct alignment with the thematic categorization of their definitions of TL. Here, Action-Based Leadership is defined by action(s) in which the teacher leader is engaged, while Role-Based Leadership is defined by a title or role—either formal or informal—filled by the teacher leader.

### ***Action-Based Leadership***

Principals noted many ways in which teacher leaders in their buildings engage in leadership. The most prevalent of these was leading and/or participating in school-, district-, and/or state-level committees and teams, and leading or facilitating PLCs and/or professional development. Other consistent themes that arose from principals' responses included mentoring pre-service teachers, those new to the profession, those new to the building, and those who are struggling to be effective; providing instructional guidance in the form of coaching, writing school-wide plans and goals, and implementing initiatives such as RTI; collaborating with colleagues toward improved practice; serving as a model teacher and allowing others to observe their practice; and providing input and assisting the decision-making process at various levels (e.g. school, district, etc.).

### ***Role-Based Leadership***

As with their role-based definitions of TL, principals defined many of the ways teacher leaders in their schools engage in leadership activities via identified roles themselves as opposed to the qualities or traits exhibited by individuals who are effective in those roles. The specific roles mentioned by principals in response to this question are essentially identical to those

included in role-based definitions, and include grade level or department chair, committee chair, PLC leader, mentor, content specialist, and/or academic coach.

### **Discussion**

Viewing the waves of teacher leadership through the lens of positioning theory helps to bring their implementation, or lack thereof, into focus. With the emergence of each wave, focus has consistently shifted away from the formal, hierarchical leadership roles indicative of first and second wave TL to a much more informal, bidirectional positioning and repositioning of teachers as leaders in schools. This shift has no doubt greatly contributed to the difficulty in pinpointing a singular definition of teacher leadership and the roles teacher leaders play in schools, resulting in what I call the TL *definition dilemma* – the assertion that TL should be defined locally based on the unique needs, desires, and circumstances of the “actors” in that local setting (Berg, 2019/2020), yet because there is no clear, overarching definition of TL, many principals are unsure of what it even is and are therefore unable or unwilling to give it a try. Said simply, principals don’t know what they don’t know when it comes to TL, and it’s unfair to hold them accountable as though they do. While the findings of this study provide cursory evidence that TL continues to be implemented in ways representative of each of the five waves, these data also appear to reveal that many principals have not yet “caught” any wave of TL beyond the second. More in-depth research would be required to determine the accuracy of this evaluation, particularly regarding the newer, more ill-defined fourth and fifth waves.

Even in states such as Georgia where a great deal of work has been done and continues to be done around TL, school leaders are largely unaware of these initiatives and remain ignorant about TL. Recognition of this ignorance is in no way intended to slam or vilify principals; in fact, it is quite the opposite. The results of this study provide hope that the third and subsequent

waves of TL may be “caught” simply by revealing to principals that they exist. Many principals’ lack of awareness of more current TL practices (i.e. third, fourth, or fifth wave TL), coupled with the sometimes-divergent literature on the topic, bring forth the question of whether or not the *construct* of TL can be defined apart from the *individuals* who enact it. A great many professions can be defined by the actions of those who practice them. The professions of nursing, counseling, law, social work, and medicine, for example, are often defined by the rights, responsibilities, and obligations of the nurses, counselors, lawyers, social workers, and doctors who practice them, and vice versa. Teacher leadership, however, is unique in that not all teachers are necessarily teacher leaders. This again points back to the definition dilemma and the lack of consistent representation of TL in both the extant literature and practice in the field.

If local solutions to the definition dilemma are to be crafted, principals must be equipped with the knowledge necessary to participate in this work. First, aspiring school administrators should be introduced to TL as part of Educational Leadership graduate degree programs and other available alternative certification routes. Expanding on a sentiment first expressed by Judith Warren Little over 30 years ago, Berry (2019) speculates that “teacher leadership won’t really take off until school leadership programs (in universities, districts, and nonprofits) begin to prepare teachers and principals together. Only by experiencing authentic collaboration with teachers can administrators become confident in teachers’ capacity to lead and in their own ability to cultivate teachers’ leadership skills” (p. 54). Although not widespread, collaborative programs of this nature do exist in the field. Prior to the advent of COVID-19, my colleagues at Columbus State University in Columbus, Georgia and I hosted an annual Innovation Leaders Cohort (ILC). The aim of the ILC was to bring interested candidates in the university’s Teacher Leadership and Educational Leadership programs together to learn about, engage with, and

create authentic, meaningful change in teaching and learning in their home schools. A restart of this program is planned for the 2021-22 academic year. Additionally, the Governor's School Leadership Academy (GSLA), a program of the Georgia Governor's Office of Student Achievement (GOSA), has for a number of years supported District-level, Principal, Aspiring Principal, Teacher Leader, and Induction Support Programs through regional and district-based cohorts. For the 2021-22 academic year, the work of these programs will overlap, with participants of each program strand engaging in collaborative professional learning opportunities and peer coaching together.

Veteran administrators should also be privy to targeted opportunities to learn about TL. A number of excellent resources intended to showcase and support the implementation of current-wave TL are available free of charge online. For example, both New Leaders (Valdez et al., 2015) and the GaPSC (2019) have published guidance for principals desiring to implement TL in their schools. These resources include guidance on how to identify, grow, and sustain teacher leaders, how to effectively distribute leadership among school staff, and how to craft shared goals around identified leadership needs within their schools. Finally, perhaps the most impactful of resources for principals are the personal stories of principals who have been there and done that with TL. These stories, such as that of Principal Brandon Mosgrove of Stone Creek Elementary published by the Center for Teaching Quality (CTQ) (CTQ, 2019), represent tangible examples of fellow principals' success and go a long way in authentically illustrating the "worth-it-ness" of TL.

Admittedly, the findings of this study are quite limited in scope, as they only include the perspectives of a small sample of principals from a single state. The decision to sample participants from only one state was made with great intentionality. Georgia was chosen as the

setting for this study because of the high level of emphasis on and support of TL at the state level, the volume of available state-sponsored publications and professional learning opportunities, and the official licensure pathways available to teacher leaders who wish to formally add the field of TL to their teaching certificates. However, even in Georgia, the gospel of current-wave TL seems to have gotten lost in transmission before reaching the local level. In fact, several participants' responses to both survey and interview questions from this study indicate they do not yet understand that TL is wholly separate from Educational Leadership and is not simply an alternative pathway to becoming an administrator. Continued research is needed to determine the cause of this breakdown in communication and how it might subsequently be shored up. TL stands as a formidable weapon in the fight against teacher attrition, diminished student achievement, and waning school climate (Teacher Leadership Exploratory Consortium, 2011; Valdez et al., 2015), but before it can be implemented it must be better understood by school leaders at all levels.

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