

Teacher Leaders' Participation in Teacher Evaluation

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This article shares the findings of a qualitative case study examining the experiences of teacher leaders as they engaged as teacher evaluators alongside school principals. Data collection included observations and interviews with four teacher leaders and three school principals to answer these research questions: (1) What TDEM structures have supported instructional improvement within ESD? (2) How have teacher leaders navigated the implementation of the TDEM? (3) How do teacher leaders support and evaluate career teachers within the TDEM? Findings from this study contribute to what is known about the ways that engaging teacher leaders in the teacher evaluation process can positively influence the meaning and purpose of evaluation for teachers.

Keywords: Leadership; teacher evaluation; teacher leader

Introduction

This qualitative case study (Stake, 1995) examined the experiences of teacher leaders in the Exodus School District (ESD, a pseudonym) as they engaged as teacher evaluators within the Teacher Development and Evaluation Model (TDEM, a pseudonym). Unlike other teacher evaluation programs, which typically assign all evaluation duties to school administrators (i.e., principals and assistant principals), the TDEM requires teacher leaders and administrators to work as a team to carry out teacher evaluation. The TDEM specifies that a few teachers are selected to fill formal teacher leadership roles including the positions of “mentor teacher” and “master teacher” while teachers who do not serve in formal roles are referred to as “career teachers.” Mentor and master teachers serve alongside principals and assistant principals on an “leadership team,” whose members utilize a detailed rubric to assess the performance of career teachers. In addition, teacher leaders guide ongoing professional development during which career teachers analyze their pedagogical practices in the context of student outcomes. The focus of the evaluation process is continual teacher development to improve student learning.

This study is a follow-up of a mixed methods study that examined teachers' perceptions of the teacher evaluation process in ESD after the adoption and implementation of the TDEM (Bradley-Levine, Romano, & Reichart, 2017). The first study utilized a survey instrument to measure differences in perception between career teachers and teacher leaders (i.e., mentor and master teachers). The survey included four sets of scaled items, three borrowed from the Teacher Leadership Inventory (Angelle & Dehart, 2016) and one developed by the research team with input from EDS school principals and the TDEM regional director. These item sets gauged teachers' perceptions regarding collaboration structures (i.e. Sharing Expertise Scale), sharing leadership across the individual schools in the district, going beyond typical teacher expectations (i.e., Supra-Practitioner Scale), and the overall teacher evaluation experience.

Results of the mixed-methods study (Bradley-Levine, Romano, & Reichart, 2017) prompted new questions that inspired the follow-up case study shared in this article. First, career teachers and teacher leaders agreed that the TDEM provides collaboration structures during which teachers share their expertise with each other. However, differences between career teachers' and teacher leaders' perceptions of shared leadership opportunities indicated that

teacher leaders believe all teachers are engaged in decision making, while career teachers believe that leadership is shared only among principals and teacher leaders. These results provoked new questions regarding the ways that principals and teacher leaders engage in sharing leadership and the processes used to structure collaborative learning experiences within the context of the TDEM.

Second, both career teachers and teacher leaders reported that the TDEM rubric defines clearly the expectations for effective instructional performance and provides a framework for feedback on teacher performance. However, teacher leaders were more likely to agree than career teachers that adoption of the TDEM had improved the overall teacher evaluation experience in ESD, that the feedback career teachers receive from teacher leaders and principals is consistent, that career teachers are adequately supported in implementing new instructional strategies, and that professional development aligns with teacher evaluation expectations. The qualitative data collected via the survey provided little insight into these differences. For example, some career teachers explained that although they “appreciated the opportunities to be coached by teacher leaders,” they did not like being evaluated by them (Bradley-Levine, Romano, & Reichart, 2017, p. 81), while other career teachers said they preferred being evaluated by a team including teacher leaders rather than just by principals. In addition, career teachers’ responses indicated that their perception of the TDEM may depend on the leadership style and personality of individual teacher leaders, as well as career teachers’ acceptance of professional norms including that all teachers should be treated as equals, be responsible for similar work, and receive comparable compensation. These results indicated a need for further exploration of the strategies used by teacher leaders in ESD to implement the TDEM.

These results inspired the follow-up qualitative case study described in this article. The study focused on answering the following research questions:

- What TDEM structures have supported instructional improvement within ESD?
- How have teacher leaders navigated the implementation of the TDEM?
- How do teacher leaders support and evaluate career teachers within the TDEM?

Next, I will provide background information related to the ESD, and follow this with a brief review of relevant literature. Then I will describe the methodology used to carry out the case study. As with most qualitative research, the findings section will focus on amplifying the voices and experiences of the participants by sharing detailed descriptions. Finally, I will return to the research questions to discuss the findings as they relate to the literature, acknowledge the limitations of the study, and offer a few broad conclusions.

Background

ESD adopted the TDEM following a statewide directive that all school districts implement a merit-based pay structure for teachers. Under the directive, teachers are observed at least twice per school year to assure that their teaching is effective as defined by a detailed evaluation rubric. Teachers’ salary increases are also determined by student outcomes on state standardized tests. Before the directive, teachers were evaluated yearly during their first three years of teaching and then only once every five years. Evaluation programs differed among districts with few using a consistent rubric to define effective teaching. In addition, teachers

received annual pay increases regardless of evaluation results, and raises were not linked to student outcomes. After the new teacher evaluation directive was approved, the U.S. state in which ESD is located offered the option for school districts to use a teaching rubric provided by the state's department of education, or to adopt a state-approved teacher evaluation program. TDEM was among the endorsed programs. Thus, ESD administrators reviewed the TDEM and offered their teachers an opportunity to adopt it as the district's teacher evaluation model; a majority of teachers voted to begin using the TDEM for evaluation during the next academic year.

In addition to meeting the state directive through performance-based compensation and instructionally-focused accountability (i.e., teaching observations using a state-approved rubric), the TDEM offers career advancement opportunities for teachers and integrated ongoing applied professional development (PD). As described earlier, career advancement provides career teachers opportunities to pursue teacher leadership positions. Teachers who accept these instructional leadership roles (e.g., mentor teacher and master teacher) are released from some or all classroom teaching responsibilities so that they may work part- or full-time with career teachers on instructional improvement. Teacher leaders plan and facilitate collaborative PD focused on improving student outcomes through more effective instructional practice. Career teachers across the school meet weekly in small working groups to examine student assessment and teacher evaluation data. Through this data analysis, they work with administrators (i.e., principals and assistant principals) and teacher leaders to pinpoint areas for instructional growth and improvement. Teacher leaders then select instructional strategies to address these areas for development. They model the strategies in classrooms across the school so that career teachers can see for themselves how to use the strategy with students. Finally, teacher leaders coach career teachers as they implement the strategies in their own classrooms.

Teacher leaders also work alongside school principals and assistant principals to collect teacher evaluation data during multiple scheduled and unannounced teaching observations. For scheduled observations, the evaluator meets with the career teacher before the observation to discuss the instruction planned for the upcoming lesson. Conversely, evaluators use unannounced observations to view the career teacher's instruction on a typical day. Evaluators meet with career teachers after both types of observation to review the teacher's performance on the evaluation rubric. The rubric focuses on measuring the teacher's content knowledge, use of research-based instructional strategies, and understanding of student learning. The TDEM provides evaluators with PD focused on how to use the rubric to guide continual instructional improvement. During the PD, members of the leadership team learn how to interpret the rubric, conduct observation conferences, design and lead PD sessions, and coach career teachers. Additionally, the TDEM provides each district with a coach to ensure consistent and high-quality implementation of the model.

Literature Review

The No Child Left Behind Act codified teacher quality into U.S. law, and teacher evaluation became a mandated piece of governmental control. As a result, teacher accountability policies and instructional improvement models began to emerge, including a few in which teacher leaders serve as evaluators (Darling-Hammond, 2010). These teacher leaders commonly demonstrate instructional expertise, receive various levels of training in evaluation protocols, and engage in observations and scoring of teacher performance in cooperation with school principals (Goldstein, 2007; Marsh, Bush-Mecenas, Strunk, Lincove, & Hugnet, 2017). Teacher leaders

also often receive time away from classroom teaching duties to observe and mentor teachers (Goldstein, 2007; Mangin, 2016). Including teacher leaders in the evaluation process is supported as a way to distribute instructional leadership across a school (Derrington, 2011; Farris-Berg, 2014).

Teacher Leaders in Support Roles

Despite these shifts caused by policy, there is disagreement about the role that teacher leaders should take in evaluating their peers' teaching. Although the research indicates that teacher leaders should play a role in teacher evaluation, some scholars advocate for a collaborative or supportive role (Berry, 2019). Coaching models, for example, separate the formal teacher evaluation process from the supervision of instructional improvement interventions (Mangin, 2016). This separation assigns evaluation to the principal while peer coaches provide non-evaluative feedback and instructional supports (Fesler & Ungaretti, 1994). Further, Woulfin and Rigby (2017) suggest that effective evaluation programs should position coaches to assist teachers through the evaluation process, but specify that coaches should not serve as evaluators. Danielson (2006) echoes these sentiments, assigning teacher evaluation responsibilities only to those in school-level administrator positions such as principals and assistant principals.

This separation of roles is justified by a few studies. For instance, Woulfin and Rigby (2017) found that teachers who are evaluated by teacher leaders may avoid the instructional supports that teacher leaders offer through coaching and mentoring. Mangin's (2016) research provides insight into this phenomenon. She explored the relationship between instructional support policies that utilize teachers in coaching roles and accountability policies such as high-stakes teacher evaluation. Although the teacher leaders in her study did not participate in formal evaluation, the teachers that these leaders were supposed to support feared that in requesting support, they would draw attention to instructional weaknesses and that these would be used against them by school principals during evaluation. As a result, teachers focused more on complying with the evaluation policy than with using coaching support offered by teacher leaders to improve their instructional practice (Mangin, 2016).

However, excluding teacher leaders from formal evaluation practices does not necessarily ensure that teachers will accept instructional supports or that support relationships are equitable. For example, Coburn and Woulfin (2011) discovered that instructional coaches pressured teachers to implement specific instructional changes. As such, the study demonstrates that even when attempts are made to separate supportive roles from accountability roles, teacher leaders may still exert power and control over their peers' work. In addition, only about half of the teachers in Mangin's (2016) study embraced the opportunities to grow their practice that the teacher leaders offered. Therefore, it may not be worthwhile to continue to exclude teacher leaders from participating fully in teacher evaluation.

Teacher Leaders as Evaluators

There is also a body of research that suggests teachers should engage more fully in peer evaluation, providing "ongoing coaching and mentoring" to their colleagues (Blasé & Blasé, 2006; Farris-Berg, 2014, p. 35). Research on the experiences of teacher leaders as evaluators and the peers who they are evaluating is promising. Darling-Hammond (2010) cites research that found teachers, including evaluators or those who were evaluated, experience personal and professional growth through the process of peer evaluation. For example, Ford, Urick and

Wilson (2018) found that when a peer filled the role of primary evaluator, teachers had higher levels of job satisfaction than did teachers whose primary evaluator was a school principal. In addition, teachers perceived the evaluation process as more supportive of their development when they experienced higher job satisfaction. In other words, teachers felt more positive about their work when they were evaluated by peers, and in turn, they believed evaluation supported their growth when they felt more positive about their work.

Although there are a variety of models for integrating teacher leaders in teacher evaluation, specific design features have been identified as leading to better outcomes. For example, Goldstein (2007) examined the use of peer assistance and review (PAR) in one district. PAR is “an alternative model of teacher evaluation used in some school districts over the last two decades in which led teachers conduct personnel evaluations of other teachers” (p. 480). The district under study resolved the issue of school principals not having enough time to mentor, support, and develop teachers’ instructional practice by integrating teacher leaders into the evaluation process. Goldstein (2007) noted that teacher leaders aligned PD with evaluation so that teachers received ongoing and job-embedded feedback on performance standards as well as support to meet their individual instructional growth goals (Looney, 2011). Also, to develop confidence in the process, PAR was designed so that teachers were typically evaluated by teacher leaders with similar content/subject area background and/or grade-level teaching experience. In addition, teacher leaders participated in extensive training to learn the rubric and align their expectations, and collaborated as a team alongside school principals. These design features increased the transparency of the evaluation process, holding teachers more accountable for their instructional practice (Goldstein, 2007).

Further, findings from a multiple-case study demonstrated that in schools where teacher leaders were involved in the evaluation process, teachers were more likely to reflect on and change their practice based on peer feedback than were teachers in schools that did not involve teacher leaders in the evaluation process (Marsh, et al., 2017). Teacher leaders at these schools also supported a culture of continual growth by field testing instructional practices and demonstrating for teachers how to implement them in specific classes. Additionally, teacher leaders used evidence they collected during lesson observations to thoughtfully rate teachers on the evaluation rubric instead of assigning ratings during the observation. They also guided teachers in creating short-term goals based on observation feedback and ratings, and designed professional development to move teachers toward these goals. As a result, these schools used shared leadership structures to “complete teacher evaluation in reflective ways by expanding the number of evaluators and support providers” (Marsh, et al., 2017, p. 558).

Although teacher leader engagement in teacher evaluation has promise, teacher leaders have also found that cultivating positive and trusting relationships is a challenge (Bradley-Levine, Romano, & Reichart, 2017). For instance, in a mixed-methods study of department chairs (i.e., teacher leaders) serving as evaluators, all teacher respondents reported feelings of discomfort at having their department chairs in the room observing while the department chairs reported going to “...great lengths to avoid being perceived by their colleagues as someone who claimed to be in a somewhat superior position, in terms of status or knowledge” (de Lima & Silva, 2018, p. 17). Teacher leaders were also less likely to give fellow teachers negative feedback regardless of the quality of teaching they observed. Finally, there is a need for teacher leaders to develop content-specific knowledge in order to be effective at evaluating teachers across all grade levels and content/subject areas (Liu, 2021; Marsh, et al., 2017; Norris, van der Mars, Kulinna, Kwon & Amrein-Beardsley, 2017). This study will explore the approaches that

teacher leaders have used to navigate their dual role to provide instructional support as members of an evaluation team within the context of a specific evaluation model.

Methodology

The study followed a case study design, a research design used to examine the “uniqueness and commonality” of an educational program (Stake, 1995, p. 1). Because the purpose of the study was to better understand the ways that teacher leaders and school administrators (i.e., principals and assistant principals) collaborated to implement the TDEM, it was appropriate to identify a specific district to serve as the particular case for the study (Stake, 1995). However, the focus for the study is not the district, but the TDEM program. Stake (1995) defines this type of case study as “instrumental” because it is meant to accomplish “something other than understanding” a particular case (p. 3). For this study, the experiences of the teacher leaders and school administrators are “instrumental to learning about the effects” of the TDEM program (Stake, 1995, p. 3). The study answered the following research questions:

- What TDEM structures have supported instructional improvement within ESD?
- How have teacher leaders navigated the implementation of the TDEM?
- How do teacher leaders support and evaluate career teachers within the TDEM?

ESD was selected as the case for the study because teachers voted to implement the TDEM in every school across the district. This is not always the implementation pattern since the model may be implemented by individual schools within a district. Focusing the study on a district-wide implementation allowed for the exploration of implementation in different school settings, but where all schools had similar district-level supports.

Site

ESD, located in a small city of a Midwestern state, is considered a “high need” district by the state department of education because 57% of students are considered “economically disadvantaged,” 63% of students are students of color, and students have consistently performed below the state average for the state-mandated assessment. Thus, the district provides a context whereby teacher improvement could have a positive impact on student outcomes. There are about 6,500 students in the district, attending seven elementary schools (i.e., pre-kindergarten to grade 4), one intermediate school (i.e., grades 5 and 6), one junior high school (i.e., grades 7 and 8), and one high school (i.e., grades 9 to 12). Just over 500 teachers work in the district.

Participants

Four teacher leaders and three school principals participated in the study. The teacher leaders had between eight and 15 years of teaching experience, plus five to 12 years of teacher leadership experience, see Table 1. The three principals had between 12 and 16 years of teaching experience, plus nine to 10 years of leadership experience. All three principals also had experience in teacher leadership before becoming a school administrator. These four teacher leaders and three principals participated in individual in-depth interviews. There were also six teacher leaders and one principal, all from the same elementary school, who contributed to the study by participating in a group interview during a TDEM professional development event.

However, I did not collect descriptive details about these participants. All participants were recruited via an email, which was sent directly to all teacher leaders and school administrators in the ESD. Those who participated responded to that email; thus, convenience sampling was used. A limitation of the sample is that only teacher leaders and principals from elementary and middle schools volunteered to participate.

Table 1.
Study Participants

Participant	Current TDEM Role	Years of Teaching Experience	Years of Leadership Experience (Position)
Teacher leader 1	Elementary school master teacher	10 (elementary teacher)	12 (6 as instructional coach; 6 as elementary school master teacher)
Teacher leader 2	Middle school mentor teacher	15 (elementary teacher)	5 (2 as elementary school mentor teacher; 1 as elementary school master teacher; 2 as middle school mentor teacher)
Teacher leader 3	Elementary school master teacher	8 (elementary teacher)	5 (2 as elementary school mentor teacher; 3 as elementary school master teacher)
Teacher leader 4	Elementary school master teacher	12 (elementary teacher)	6 (1.5 as elementary school mentor teacher; 4.5 as elementary school master teacher)
Principal 1	Middle school principal	16 (13 as middle school teacher; 3 as high school teacher)	10 (3 as literacy coach; 7 as middle school principal)
Principal 2	Elementary school principal	12 (elementary school teacher)	9 (3 as grade-level lead teacher; 6 as elementary school principal)
Principal 3	Elementary school principal	16 (elementary school teacher)	10 (4 as instructional coach; 2 as elementary school master teacher; 4 as elementary school principal)

Data Collection

Data collection began at a TDEM summer PD for teacher leaders (i.e., master teachers and mentor teachers) and school administrators (i.e., principals and assistant principals), which occurred between the fifth and sixth years of TDEM implementation in ESD. During the multi-day PD, I observed participants as they collaborated with others on their school’s leadership team. I recorded a “thick description” of what I observed occurring among school leaders, detailing what I saw and heard during the events on each day (Carspecken, 1996, p. 45). I used these observations to build an understanding of the TDEM evaluation program and structures, as well as the supports provided to those on the leadership team in preparing to implement the TDEM. In addition, observing the participants during the PD helped me understand some of the

dynamics present among those on each school’s leadership team. Also during the PD, I met with the leadership team from one of the elementary schools to ask them about the TDEM implementation at their school, as well as the ways that they collaborate to meet the needs of the career teachers. Although I audiotaped the meeting, I allowed those present to interact with each other around just two questions focusing on TDEM implementation and leadership team collaboration.

After the PD, I met in-person and virtually with the seven teacher leaders and principals who agreed to participate in the interview portion of the study. I used a semi-structured protocol to guide the interviews. The protocol included questions asking participants to compare the teacher evaluation process before and after the implementation of the TDEM, describe the roles of master and mentor teachers, share strategies teacher leaders use to support career teachers, and comment on strengths and challenges of the TDEM. I invited participants to share their stories to enable the exploration of multiple possible influences that including teacher leaders on the leadership team as part of the TDEM might have on the teacher evaluation process (Carspecken, 1996). I audiotaped and transcribed each interview verbatim, collecting a total of six hours of interview data.

Analysis

I used an interpretive approach to analyze the data (Hatch 2002). First, I read all of the thick description (i.e., field notes) and interview transcripts, recording my impressions about the possible meanings of the data in memos. Next, I reviewed these memos to create a list of possible codes to represent the possible meanings represented in the data. Then I reread the data, assigning codes to specific excerpts of data. After assigning codes through all of the data, I sorted the data by code and reread the coded data to identify patterns within the code and across the codes. Finally, I compared the summaries in order to identify similarities and differences, and to sort the codes into broad themes. Table 2 provides a list of the themes, the codes that were sorted to each theme, and the number of data excerpts that were assigned to each code.

Table 2.
Themes and Codes

Theme	Code	Number of Excerpts
TDEM features	Shared leadership	47
	Student-focused	26
	Professional development	24
	Common language	16
	TDEM flexibility	16
Support versus accountability	Teacher growth	45
	Support structures	41
	Teacher learning	22
	Holding teachers accountable	21
Teacher leader approaches & relationships	Leadership approaches	33
	Building trust	28
	Colleague relationships	19
	Feedback to teachers	14

To improve the validity of the data collection and analysis, I completed two of Denzin's (1984) triangulation protocols that Stake (1995) recommends for case study research. First, I applied methodological triangulation by assembling multiple forms of data such as the observation data and group discussion data I gathered during the TDEM summer PD, as well as the in-depth interview data I collected following the PD. These diverse data sources allowed me to utilize data source triangulation as a second protocol. During analysis, I searched for consistency across data sources and participants to determine whether the "case remains the same at other times, in other spaces, or as persons interact differently" (Stake, 1995, p. 112). Throughout the data collection process, I was able to observe and speak with multiple participants at several points in time, making comparisons among participants and across data methods possible during analysis. In addition, because this study was a follow-up to a survey study (see Bradley-Levine, Romano, & Reichart, 2017), I compared the qualitative findings collected for the case study to the survey results in order to double check data consistency. Stake (1995) also advocates for the use of member checking for case study research. To complete member checks, I asked participants to review excerpts of the findings in which I describe their "actions or words," checking my writing for "accuracy and palatability" (Stake, 1995, p. 115). This provided participants an opportunity to clarify my descriptions and interpretations of the data. Finally, the TDEM regional director served as a peer editor who reviewed multiple drafts of reports, papers, and articles I wrote about the TDEM. Her reviews allowed me to present an accurate description of the TDEM.

Findings

The findings of the case study are arranged into three broad themes: (1) Features of the Evaluation Model, (2) Blending Accountability and Support, and (3) Teacher Leaders' Approach to Evaluation Work. Within these broad themes, I will report six subthemes to further focus the presentation of findings. Thus, for the first theme, participants described two specific features of the evaluation model including the collaborative culture supported by TDEM (i.e., Culture of teamwork), and the TDEM structures that assisted teacher leaders in aligning instructional practices across schools (i.e., Common expectations and development structures). These features facilitated teacher leaders' engagement in evaluation practices. Under the second theme, participants shared two ways that leadership team members blended accountability and support including by utilizing teacher evaluation to maintain high expectations for teacher performance (i.e., Evaluation as accountability), while simultaneously supporting teacher growth (i.e., Support for teacher growth and authentic learning). These practices demonstrate how teacher leaders managed their work as both evaluators and PD facilitators. Finally, within the third theme, participants illustrated the strategies that teacher leaders used to establish and cultivate productive relationships with career teachers (i.e., Developing positive relationships), and to address instances of career teacher resistance to teacher leaders' role in the TDEM (i.e., Managing resistance). These strategies provide insight into the ways that teacher leaders navigated potential conflicts with career teachers.

Features of the Evaluation Model

Teacher leaders and principals described two features of the TDEM that facilitated their evaluation work. First, the leadership team is an important feature of the TDEM. These teams include school principals, master teachers, and mentor teachers. They embody the idea of

collaborative and teacher-led decision making with a focus on student growth through the evaluation process, and supported by professional development. The second feature of importance to teacher leaders and principals was the evaluation rubric. Common expectations are communicated through the rubric, which teacher leaders unpack during weekly professional development meetings. I will describe findings related to each of these subthemes next.

Culture of Teamwork

Although the language of teamwork is embedded within the TDEM through the naming of a “leadership team,” the teacher leaders and principals brought meaning to the concept through their descriptions of what teamwork looks like within these schools. First, principals and teacher leaders described the ways that they shared leadership. For example, one principal noted that teacher leaders support her work:

I don't know how I could adjust...to not having a leadership team of mentors and masters...They help me grow in ways I cannot even bring to explain. It's like I get feedback from them and I trust them, but they help me to grow. I know I can go to them when I'm struggling with something in particular or in an evaluation piece.

This principal identified teacher leaders as those colleagues who push her to continue to develop her practice as a lead instructor. Another principal echoed these sentiments: “That is such a gift to a principal to have a group of people you can count on for an hour every single week where you aren't cutting into their personal time.” For this principal, the value of having teachers appointed to formal leadership roles was particularly helpful since it meant that they had allocated time to provide support to career teachers, as well as to the principal. In addition, principals and teacher leaders viewed membership on the leadership team as something that is spread across many teachers over time. For instance, a principal explained, “We have four career teachers...that were mentors at one time but have stepped back in the classroom.” She went on to explain that she “love(s) that model” because it gives many teachers the opportunity to grow through the leadership experience. Likewise, a master teacher who gave up the role for a few years described how “stepping out of the master role has made me a far better master teacher.” He further explained, “I do see some real merit to returning to the classroom and kind of trying to live out the high expectations we have.” This notion that master and mentor teachers should meet the same instructional standards as career teachers was common among teacher leaders. A principal described the leadership team as the “lead learners” who must “lean on each other, be vulnerable, all learning together.” According to this principal, a shared leadership approach created a culture of learning within the schools where career teachers offered as much feedback to each other as they received from the leadership team.

Collaboration was also strongly supported by the culture of teamwork. Teacher leaders in particular described how the leadership team works together to “support our students [and] to support our teachers.” A master teacher explained how she co-planned with another teacher leader: “It was very powerful for us... We could [test instructional strategies] together. We planned our [PD] together... We could sit down with our principal and have conversations about...[meeting] the needs of our teachers.” Likewise, another master teacher noted that leadership team members share knowledge about career teachers' performance on evaluations including strengths and areas for growth. As such, principals and teacher leaders work together not only to assess career teachers, but also to assure that teachers' needs are met so that they may

experience instructional growth and development. Through ongoing collaboration, leadership team members take a problem-solving approach. For instance, a teacher leader described how her team handles challenges: “Let’s dig our heels in. We’re just going to have to figure it out. Together we’ll figure out why, and we’ll do it.” This teacher leader emphasized a persistence among leadership team members that allows them to collaborate effectively and efficiently.

Common Expectations and Development Structures

The TDEM uses a comprehensive teaching rubric to anchor the evaluation process. The rubric is based on Danielson’s (2013) Framework for Teaching, which includes four domains: Planning and Preparation, Classroom Environment, Instruction, and Professional Responsibilities. Each domain provides detailed descriptions of teaching behaviors and expectations arranged on a four-level continuum from unsatisfactory performance to distinguished performance. TDEM’s rubric provides teacher leaders and principals with clearly defined expectations to frame teaching feedback. During pre- and post-observation conferences, teacher leaders and principals utilize the rubric to identify “reinforcement” (i.e., strengths) and “refinement” (i.e., areas of needed growth). A mentor teacher shared:

I like how I get specifics about what I am doing well, but then I also have places to grow...even as a rock-solid teacher, there are still areas [where] I know I can be more student-centered and push myself up toward the higher end of the rubric.

In other words, the rubric provides clear expectations, which in turn motivates teachers to pursue continual improvement. A master teacher also appreciated the clarity of the rubric: “We never had a common language or a common measuring stick” prior to adopting the model. She went on to describe evaluation before: “It was like I didn’t know what [the principal] was coming to look for. I didn’t know what I thought was good.” Another master teacher expressed, “It’s very focused. You know what you’re looking for and [career teachers] know what you’re looking for.” For these teacher leaders, the rubric contributes consistency and transparency to the evaluation process.

In addition, the rubric provides a bridge to PD. During weekly PD sessions, teacher leaders facilitate teacher learning. PD sessions are focused around learning explicit skills. As one principal explained, “New learning is either specifically related to a teacher action [such as] deepening teachers understanding the best practice...or a student strategy.” The emphasis on students is different than what teachers may be used to. A principal compared the PD she planned when she was an instructional coach (before ESD adopted the TDEM) to the PD that teacher leaders at her school design now:

It really wasn’t about the students. It was about giving teachers strategies [like] how to differentiate your instruction, [or] how to teach math in a conceptually oriented way...That’s how I viewed PD [before the model was adopted]...The real premise of [PD now] is what strategy are you going to be teaching your students to use, like we are going to teach our students how to be good at context clues, [or] we are going to teach our students how to write an opinion essay. It’s not about the teacher; [PD] is about the student.

The focus on student learning is embedded in both the PD and the rubric. During PD sessions, career teachers learn strategies that they are expected to practice in their classrooms. Then, when they are observed, teacher leaders and principals use the rubric to assess how effectively the teacher has implemented these strategies. Moreover, teacher leaders design PD with an emphasis on applying new learning. A master teacher explained, “I don’t think there was as much urgency in the application of what was being presented” in PD before the adoption of the TDEM. Nevertheless, teacher leaders recognized that PD must be applicable for career teachers, or they will feel that it is a waste of time. For example, a master teacher noted that related arts teachers at her school did not find PD sessions useful:

At the end of the year, one of them had said to me, “Well, we know we are just the extras. We know we don’t fit the norm of what we are supposed to be doing here in the district and what we are trying to accomplish as a school. We are just the extras.” I just stood there. I mean, I didn’t even know what to say.

After this exchange, the master teacher worked with her leadership team to develop a PD session specifically for related arts teachers at their school. She explained that “everything is geared specifically to their related arts...and we are starting to see small shifts in thinking from our related arts teachers.” In this case, creating a PD experience that is meaningful for teachers in the context of their work was essential to engaging them fully in the process.

Blending Accountability and Support

Teacher leaders and principals also revealed the way that the TDEM addresses the need for teacher accountability and continual support. Although these ideas may seem to conflict, teacher leaders and principals understood that holding teachers accountable and providing extensive support structures are equally important to career teacher growth, as well as student learning. In fact, a principal described evaluation as a “tap dance” between accountability and support. Teacher leaders accepted that if accountability is necessary, then support structures must be robust. In this section, I will share participants’ explanations of the TDEM as a teacher accountability process. Then I will describe multiple examples of the support structures that teacher leaders utilized to assure that career teachers continually develop their practice.

Evaluation as Accountability

Teacher leaders and principals viewed the evaluation process as a way to hold career teachers accountable. They equated elements of the TDEM with teacher professionalism. One principal explained:

It should be part of your job that you experience professional development. It should be part of your job that you have to look [at] and analyze student work, and that you should have goals professionally to get better at things. Those should not be choices of things that we do in our profession.

In other words, requirements embedded in the TDEM including ongoing PD, a focus on instruction driven by student data, and teacher improvement goals are all part of behaving as a teaching professional. A mentor teacher described how student data is used to hold teachers accountable for continual improvement: “We also use data so they can’t argue...They can’t say,

‘I don’t need help.’ They can see, ‘I need help because this student data is not showing that I’m [effective].’ The need for professional accountability driven by student achievement results led teacher leaders and principals to view evaluation as a means to motivate teachers to strive to improve their instruction, but also to control career teachers’ practice. A principal pointed out that prior to adopting the TDEM, “There was not the accountability...It was not systematic. It was too loose. There was no transfer of the best practice to students.” The TDEM has effectively addressed this problem.

In particular, the rubric is used as a tool of accountability. A mentor teacher noted that the rubric is a tool used for identifying areas of needed growth: “It’s a great way of giving feedback. As a teacher, I want to know how I can be better.” Another mentor teacher pointed out that the rubric is also used to provide positive feedback that will “help teachers become aware of and use their strengths...It’s not all about improving. Sometimes it’s about keeping going with things that are effective.” As a tool of accountability, however, the rubric can feel overwhelming. A principal observed that “the rubric is intense and [although] it is a strength, it’s also a challenge that there’s so much accountability with the evaluation process.” A master teacher described the difficulty that some teachers have had transitioning from an evaluation process where they were typically rated highly effective to a system where they are given detailed and specific feedback about areas of strength and areas of needed improvement:

I try to help teachers see the rubric as a place we can go to for ongoing guidance and feedback for steps that will never run out, as well as trying to set reasonable expectations and goals for ourselves about who am I as a teacher, how can I gain confidence and validation from these numbers I am receiving, as well as from other feedback I am getting.

Nevertheless, the rubric is used to quantify teaching performance. According to a principal, “We sometimes do say things like, ‘That’s not going to score well’ to teachers. In fact, she shared that when a teacher said she didn’t “care about the scores,” leadership team members explained that “the reason we care about the scores is not because that is the score; it is because we really trust our rubric, and our rubric can help us be effective.” Teacher leaders and principals have deep faith in the rubric as a tool to hold career teachers accountable for consistently demonstrating highly effective teaching.

Support for Teacher Growth and Authentic Learning

Teacher leaders and principals also view the TDEM as a way to provide career teachers with meaningful support. One mentor teacher described evaluation as supportive because “we’re giving [career teachers] a plan on how to make their teaching better.” Feedback is individualized for each career teacher, and therefore more useful. For example, during teaching observations, the evaluator (e.g., a teacher leader or principal) takes detailed notes, writing down as much as possible about what the career teacher does and says during the lesson. Then to prepare for the post-observation conference, the evaluator uses evidence from these observation notes to rate the career teacher on the rubric. The evaluator then shares the ratings and evidence with the career teacher during the post-observation conference, identifying areas of strength and areas for growth. Finally, the evaluator and career teacher collaborate to develop individual goals that the career teacher will work toward until the next observation. A principal noted that the process is about “differentiating and meeting people where they are.” Teacher leaders agreed that meeting

career teachers' specific needs is a goal. According to a master teacher, evaluators attempt to "merge" supports they think career teachers need "with the teacher's own perception of her needs." Likewise, a mentor described being responsive to career teachers: "It depends on what level of support the teachers want." Additionally, she noted that "it's important to differentiate" by "giving more power to them and having them [reflect on] their practice" so that the process is more "authentic." In other words, teacher leaders recognize that evaluation should be responsive to career teachers' needs if it is meant to support teacher growth. A principal summarized: "Our goal is to support you to always improve, and you've got to be willing to take the support that we're offering... Let's be proactive. Let's set some goals. Let's move forward."

Teacher leaders provided support through a scaffolded approach. First, they modeled their expectations. A master teacher described this process as "a gradual release of responsibility" where teacher leaders are "modeling first and then partnering with [career teachers], and then releasing" them to implement new instructional approaches on their own. The process of continual improvement expected of career teachers is also modeled by the leadership team. According to a principal,

The first time we try a given strategy or an instructional approach, it is not going to be what we eventually want it to be. It's going to be messy. There's going to be a lot of changes and tweaks that need to take place.

Teacher leaders field test new strategies before they present them to career teachers. This allows them to share with teachers what went well and what they would change in future. As such, they create a culture that accepts growth through trial and error. One mentor explained that teacher leaders demonstrate that they will not "stay stagnant... just doing the same thing over and over." Instead, she explained that teacher leaders show how to "change this little part" in order to "build off of what we already did and... make it better." Once career teachers understand the expectations, teacher leaders move them toward independence. They want all teachers to be able to track student data themselves, and respond by modifying their teaching. A mentor teacher described how one career teacher became extremely self-reflective without being prompted by the mentor: "[She] started coming to me and telling me what she had been working on and what was going well, and something that was still a stumbling block for her." After the mentor had observed this teacher's lesson, she shared what happened next:

[She] came back and had a couple of things she had already noticed or she was thinking about or wanted to ask about, and at the end of the day she came in and was reflecting. By the time we got to the [post-observation] conference, there really wasn't a whole lot to talk about because she had already reflected through by herself and very accurately targeted what in the lesson was working well for her kids, and why and what was still an issue.

This is the end goal for all teachers; the evaluation model is supposed to move each teacher toward experimentation and revision via self-reflection, with the goal of professional growth and improved student achievement.

Teacher Leaders' Approach to Evaluation Work

Lastly, teacher leaders and principals acknowledged that although all members of the leadership team must take time to establish positive relationships with career teachers, it is even more important that teacher leaders approach this work with humility and empathy. Such an approach allows teacher leaders to build trust with career teachers as well as to manage resistance to the TDEM or to teacher leaders' engagement in evaluation work. This third theme is expressed through two subthemes. The first one focuses on the ways that teacher leaders cultivated positive relationships with career teachers. The second subtheme relates strategies teacher leaders used to manage resistance to the evaluation model.

Developing Positive Relationships

Teacher leaders developed relationships with career teachers by establishing trust, behaving with humility, and showing empathy. Creating trust with career teachers was essential to the evaluation process; teacher leaders understood that without trust, teachers would be less likely to accept feedback and implement suggestions for change. As one master teacher explained, "There were a lot of preconceived ideas and notions of who I was...There was a lot of [feeling that]...[the TDEM] is a "gotcha" in this building, that we are trying to catch you." She described one way that she developed trust with career teachers in her building:

Getting into the classroom and leaving positive notes was a first step for me to develop relationships with them, and for them seeing me just physically in the classroom. I noticed last year when I would just walk into the classrooms at the beginning of the year, I could feel the angst...So even just the physically being in your room and leaving you a positive note was a huge paradigm shift for teachers.

Another master teacher developed trust by "being very transparent, being very proactive in my role to communicate what we are thinking." This master teacher worked on communicating expectations and plans with teachers so that they did not feel surprised, uncertain, or frustrated.

In addition, teacher leaders demonstrated humility. A principal noted that all members of the leadership team must be willing to be vulnerable: "We model that vulnerability...If we as leaders are more reflective in our practices and open about that, the vulnerability and comfort level of others doing that will increase as well." Teacher leaders shared the importance of being sincere, as described by a master teacher:

Teachers are pretty savvy people...They know if you're genuinely interested in them and an authentic relationship, or if this is for the sake of your job or your results. So the key, I think, is...to be genuinely interested in people because they enrich my life and make me a better coach. So when you're untangling something that's difficult either relationally or instructionally, we're both learning from it and I'm growing as a person, as well.

Another master teacher described a time when she encouraged a career teacher to try something new in his classroom even though he felt very uncertain. She told him, "It's not about perfection. I'm not perfect." This master teacher realized that the career teacher needed to know that he was not alone and that others also struggle. This idea of joining teachers in a journey toward better practice was echoed by a principal: "It is possible that an instructional coach can evaluate, if the support and professional development is strong, and if the coach does so with humility and as a

learner alongside of that person.” Taking this approach, however, is not always easy for teacher leaders. Another principal described “highly effective master teachers who have had a bit of an edge or a little bit of an arrogance to them.” In these cases, the principal said she has to “coach” the teacher leaders to embrace humility.

Finally, teacher leaders reported that responding to career teachers with empathy was an important factor in developing relationships. Getting to know each teacher as an individual was an important step to showing care and concern. A master teacher described that she learned how to coach career teachers better once she understood them as people: “It was really getting to know my teachers and what motivated them, what they believed in, [and] what they were passionate about.” To do this, she talked to them over lunch by “sharing stories” about her family and asking them about their lives outside of school. Another master teacher explained that “listening to people talk about how they are feeling is almost as much as listening to people talk about what’s happening and how it has helped kids.” Teacher leaders recognized that they need to acknowledge the humanness of each career teacher with whom they work. Developing this type of relationship means that when career teachers feel upset, teacher leaders are able to respond with compassion. A master teacher shared, “I had a teacher last year who was a solid teacher, and we’re going through the post conference and...then I go out to get something and when I come back she’s in tears.” In response, the master teacher showed genuine concern by explaining to the career teacher that it takes time for everyone to improve their practice, including teacher leaders. Another master teacher noted that

Finding time to sit and hear teachers’ frustrations and let them feel heard and acknowledged for saying things like, “I don’t think I’m doing a good enough job. This is so overwhelming. This is so hard.” [Listening] can help people feel safe and then hopefully it can help them to get to a place where they can hear: “We want you here. We want you to keep doing the roles that you are doing here. We are glad you are here, and we need to find a way to have [you] feel successful and affirmed and have an encouraging team so that you can give your best to your kids.”

These teacher leaders understood the importance of giving career teachers space and time to struggle through change. They did not demand that career teachers perform perfectly; instead, they showed empathy by traveling with them toward improved practice. A principal summarized this perspective: “It’s not going to be great right out of the gate. What’s going to be great is that we have each other.”

Managing Resistance

Both teacher leaders and principals had to negotiate career teachers’ resistance to the TDEM. A master teacher explained, “At my building there is a dance that we kind of do right now because we are not all sold on the [TDEM].” For example, one mentor described a career teacher opposed to the model who set up a video recorder in her room during an observation so that she could gather evidence to refute the mentor teacher’s assessment of the lesson. A principal described a “hindering factor” of the model as “a resistance to feedback or a lack of openness to even conversing about how we develop our craft and our ability to provide quality instruction.” Teacher leaders have had to develop strategies beyond developing positive relationships that have helped to address strong resistance. For instance, teacher leaders recognized that shifting the focus of evaluation from the teacher to the student allowed many

career teachers to be less defensive. A master teacher explained that some career teachers “live with a high level of anxiety and frustration around being scored.” He described his approach:

The overall message that I continue to try to name for teachers is this is one of the best tools we have to help us really have [the] impact with kids we want to have. It is less about [our] feelings or opinions and more about what is helping kids have results, and sometimes that feels wonderful and sometimes it feels hard [for us]. But if we are able to take those steps together, we will continue to be able to help our kids take positive steps.

A master teacher agreed that shifting the focus from the teacher to the student is a useful strategy for addressing opposition: “You try to make it less about them and more about their students. So focusing on the students really takes some of the heat off.” These teacher leaders realized that the message they delivered was just as important as how they delivered it.

In addition, teacher leaders and principals recognized that teacher leaders who know the context of the school and personalities of the career teachers at the school have an advantage when it comes to resistance. One principal explained that having background knowledge about the career teachers with whom they work allows teacher leaders to understand more fully how to manage resistance and coach effectively: “How they approach that individual and build relationships and trust is actually going to be different.” In other words, when teacher leaders know career teachers well, they are able to take a more personal approach in addressing the needs of each teacher. Another principal revealed that she would be more likely to hire a teacher leader from her school because relationships are already established: “Folks know them. They’re familiar with them. There’s not that huge level of awkwardness.” Further, she noted that these teacher leaders would have the advantage of knowing “the culture of our school.” A master teacher shared the view that career teachers were less likely to resist her work because she had been a career teacher in their building:

When I stepped into that mentor role, I had been a teacher in the building so I already had those relationships. Then when I went from mentor to master, teachers were used to seeing me in the evaluation. They were used to seeing me in follow-up. They were used to me being in their classroom to field test. They were used to that coaching process. So it was a familiar face. It wasn’t anything horribly new.

This teacher leader recognized that career teachers often resist change or things that are new. Therefore, their familiarity with her caused them to feel less threatened by the evaluation process.

These findings, organized into three themes and six subthemes, reflect participants’ experiences and perceptions implementing the TDEM, an evaluation model that integrates teacher leaders as members of a leadership team that collaborates to evaluate teacher performance. However, within the TDEM structure, teacher leaders are more than just evaluators. They also design ongoing professional development and provide individualized instructional support linked directly to student achievement data. As a result of this combining of accountability and support, teacher leaders must cultivate positive relationships with the career teachers with whom they work while maintaining high standards for effective teaching as defined through the evaluation rubric. I will now return to the research questions and literature as I discuss the implications of these findings.

Discussion

The purpose of this case study was to examine the experiences of teacher leaders in ESD as they engaged as teacher evaluators within the TDEM. I sought to answer three research questions through data collection and analysis:

- What TDEM structures have supported instructional improvement within ESD?
- How have teacher leaders navigated the implementation of the TDEM?
- How do teacher leaders support and evaluate career teachers within the TDEM?

In the following discussion, I will revisit the findings in the context of each of these questions. *What TDEM structures have supported instructional improvement within ESD?*

The findings provide insight into the TDEM structures used to support instructional improvement. The TDEM offered clear expectations alongside several teacher development structures. Teacher leaders and school principals used the evaluation rubric to define effective teaching practices for teachers across the district (Goldstein, 2007). This allowed evaluators to clearly communicate expectations, as well as to provide targeted, individualized feedback to each career teacher. In addition, the rubric served as a framework for PD (Goldstein, 2007; Looney, 2011). In other words, teacher leaders designed PD activities to directly relate to instructional feedback they provided to career teachers following classroom observations. Teacher leaders referenced the rubric and specific feedback throughout PD so that the connection was obvious. Through their alignment efforts, teacher leaders perceived that career teachers became more reflective and self-aware (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Ford, Urick & Wilson, 2018; Marsh, et al., 2017).

As an accountability measure, participants reported that the TDEM motivated career teachers to strive to improve their teaching practice; however, they acknowledged that the intention of the TDEM is to control teachers' work (Coburn & Wolfen, 2011). Further, teacher leaders and principals shared an awareness that the rubric can be overwhelming and that career teachers may become discouraged or experience exhaustion due to the perpetual constructive feedback offered via multiple observations and ongoing PD (Mangin, 2016). To mitigate some of the pressure that career teachers experience, teacher leaders utilized practices to guide career teachers toward growth and authentic learning. For example, they employed field testing not only to assess possible instructional practices for career teachers to use in their classrooms, but also to demonstrate the importance of persisting through struggles. When sharing the results of field testing with career teachers, teacher leaders were transparent; they owned their failures and elucidated the adjustments they had to make in order for the new practice to work more effectively. Thus, teacher leaders modeled a growth mindset, creating a culture in which failure is viewed as an opportunity to learn (Dweck, 2007). Establishing such a culture may help alleviate teachers' fears that asking for help will negatively impact their evaluation outcomes (Mangin, 2016).

How have Teacher Leaders Navigated the Implementation of the TDEM?

The findings also demonstrate the ways that teacher leaders and school principals collaborated to support and evaluate career teachers. Importantly, the TDEM united teacher leaders and school principals as a leadership team. This team shared responsibility for both

teacher evaluation and development, collaborating to consistently support each other, as well as career teachers (Goldstein, 2007). As part of their leadership role, the team participated in intensive training to acquire a comprehensive understanding of the evaluation rubric and the processes for achieving reliable evaluation. It may be this intense training that inspired teacher leaders and school principals to report that they trust the rubric as a valid and reliable tool for assessing teaching (Goldstein, 2007). Of interest, the participants of this study also shared that several career teachers had stepped into leadership roles (i.e., as teacher leaders), and then returned to full-time teaching (i.e., as career teachers) since the adoption of the TDEM in the district. Whether this particular practice of sharing leadership was intentional, it may have resulted in a broader understanding of the TDEM among career teachers, and reduced resistance to the model.

Nevertheless, teacher leaders and school principals identified the TDEM as a system of both accountability and support (Mangin, 2016). They recognized that the system is intended to influence and even force career teachers to align their practice with the definition of effective teaching described through the rubric. Thus, teacher leaders wielded power over career teachers as they participated in teacher evaluation alongside school principals (Coburn & Wolfen, 2011; de Lima & Silva, 2018). Although teacher leaders did not have control over career teachers' continued employment in ESD, they implicitly contributed to such decisions since they produced at least part of the evaluation data that school and district administrators used for decisions regarding job security. Teacher leaders attempted to mediate the power present in these forms of accountability by providing extensive support through coaching and PD. However, they also had significant control over the types and nature of support they provided to career teachers. In order to justify their regulatory influence, teacher leaders told themselves and the career teachers with whom they worked that the TDEM was really about improving student learning. Although there is certainly an emphasis on improving student learning, this shift has the potential to motivate career teachers through guilt and shame.

How do Teacher Leaders Support and Evaluate Career Teachers within the TDEM?

The findings uncover the strategies that teacher leaders employed to navigate TDEM implementation and their role to simultaneously develop, support, and evaluate career teachers. Teacher leaders agreed that developing positive relationships with career teachers is essential to the success of their role (Bradley-Levine, Romano, & Reichart, 2017; Goldstein, 2007). They used concrete techniques including verbally affirming career teachers' instruction to build self-efficacy, transparently sharing their own instructional practice, and clearly communicating constructive feedback and goals for growth. In addition, teacher leaders recognized that the way they approached their work affected how career teachers responded to them (Bradley-Levine, Romano, & Reichart, 2017; Goldstein, 2007). For instance, they noted that reflecting on and owning their strengths and weaknesses built their credibility with career teachers. Teacher leaders also used empathy when interacting with career teachers; they took the time to get to know them as individuals and listened carefully, accepting their responses to the evaluation experience without judgement (Bradley-Levine, Romano, & Reichart, 2017; Goldstein, 2007). Teacher leaders concluded that these techniques and approaches helped them manage resistance to the TDEM, and allowed them to balance their potentially conflicting responsibilities to develop teachers while also evaluating their teaching (Bradley-Levine, Romano, & Reichart, 2017; Mangin, 2016).

Overall, teacher leaders made an effort to approach their work in ways that they felt would cultivate positive and meaningful relationships with career teachers. They affirmed career teachers and listened carefully, accepting each teacher's response to the evaluation process. They also demonstrated humility by openly reflecting on their own practice and approaching their work with career teachers as an opportunity for mutual learning. In addition, teacher leaders showed an authentic interest in career teachers, taking time to get to know them as teachers and humans. These practices demonstrate the virtues of ethical leaders: responsibility, authenticity, and presence (Starratt, 2004). The teacher leaders who participated in this study were responsible to multiple stakeholders (e.g., career teachers, district and school administrators, students, families, etc.) for implementing the TDEM in a way that fostered teacher growth and improved student outcomes. As authentic leaders, they practiced humility, owning their own strengths and weaknesses. Further, they invited career teachers to express genuine feelings about the evaluation experience including their frustration, fear, enthusiasm, and hope. In addition, teacher leaders were self-reflective and they invited career teachers to join in reflection with them. Finally, teacher leaders practiced presence by listening attentively and constructing individualized responses to career teachers' needs. Likewise, they encouraged career teachers to be present through genuine interactions that "provide some kind of pleasure and satisfaction and, at the same time, dignity and honor" (Starratt, 2004, p. 87).

Limitations

There is one important limitation to the case study described here, namely that participants of the study were primarily teacher leaders and school principals working in elementary/primary schools. This may have influenced the findings, especially since the study that inspired this research (see Bradley-Levine, Romano, & Reichart, 2017) demonstrated that elementary teachers reported more positive perceptions of the TDEM than secondary teachers. Thus, further research is needed to examine the collaboration between principals and teacher leaders within secondary schools, where teachers typically focus on one content/subject area while evaluators may lack similar content/subject knowledge (Liu, 2021; Marsh, et al., 2017; Norris, et al., 2017). Thus, leadership teams may need further discipline-specific training to evaluate effectively at the secondary school level.

Conclusion

This study builds on existing research by examining the TDEM, which includes teacher leaders as evaluators. It demonstrates how teacher leaders in collaboration with school principals make a positive contribution to the evaluation process, while acknowledging the challenges associated with teacher leaders' involvement in evaluation and offering realistic approaches to managing these difficulties. In this study, teacher leaders and school principals recognized the valuable roles that they play as a leadership team that both models and supports career teachers during a journey focused on individual teacher growth and improved student learning. Teacher leaders provided support to career teachers through ongoing professional development linked to rigorous expectations as defined by the evaluation rubric. They made themselves vulnerable in order to build trust between themselves and career teachers. Although this was a difficult task, they believe that it facilitates improved teaching that leads to better student results. This belief drove their work and sustained it despite some career teachers' resistance to the demands of

rigorous evaluation and PD. For the most part, teacher leaders seemed to enjoy their work, and find it meaningful. They demonstrated strong commitment to the TDEM.

Findings from this study contribute to what is known about the ways that engaging teacher leaders in the teacher evaluation process can positively influence the meaning and purpose of evaluation for teachers. The findings also have applications for countries, states and school districts or local education authorities that are in the process of designing and implementing more rigorous teacher evaluation programs per policy mandates and/or incentives. Further, in the context of teacher evaluation policy, this study provides an example of how such policies can be implemented to empower teachers to improve their teaching and take responsibility for achieving equitable educational outcomes for all their students.

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