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Changing leadership: Teachers lead the way for schools that learn

Monica Taylor*, Jennifer Goeke, Emily Klein, Cynthia Onore, Kristi Geist

Montclair State University, Montclair, NJ, USA

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents findings from a three-year, qualitative study of teachers enrolled in a Masters of Teacher Leadership program. Researchers sought to understand the ways teachers' beliefs about and understandings of teacher leadership were affected by their participation in a formal teacher leadership program, as well as the kinds of actions they took up as a result of this participation. Data indicate three significant ways participants' work as teacher leaders was developed and enhanced, including: (a) identifying and amplifying their professional voice, (b) deepening and extending their voice as they plan, and (c) reframing their work/shift responsibility through constructing widening circles of influence and impact. Authors identify implications of their research for growing teacher leaders, school improvement and change, changing school culture, enhancing student engagement, and building new structures.

1. Introduction

Internationally, teacher leadership (TL) has been offered as a potential remedy to a host of educational problems, including school improvement, student achievement, teacher learning, professional development, and retention, and democratization of schools (Greenlee, 2007; Muijs & Harris, 2006; Taylor, Yates, Meyer, & Kinsella, 2011). TL advocates believe that school change is context-specific and can be driven by teachers who empower, transform, and create strong professional learning communities (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2009; Margolis & Deuel, 2009). Within the large body of TL literature that exists, however, research evidence and methodological rigor are just beginning to emerge, with the US in the forefront (Muijs & Harris, 2006).

In 2006, we – four teacher educators at varying career points with backgrounds in urban education, special education, school partnerships, and self-study – were asked to develop a Masters in Teacher Leadership program. At that time, our conceptualization of TL was quite different from what existed in the literature. In 2007, we launched our first cohort to "provide practicing teachers with the requisite knowledge, skills and dispositions to remain in the classroom and actively engage with their profession, peers, and community in an ethical manner as leaders in teaching, learning and professional development." Originally designed in collaboration with the local teachers union, our goal was not to prepare teachers to become administrators, perform administrative tasks or report directly to administration, or formally evaluate the performance of their colleagues. Our commitment was to a definition of TL based in the work of classroom teachers that was neither supervisory nor hierarchical but focused on individual and school growth and development. It was designed to be a two year, 35 credit program that paired course work with field experiences.

This paper presents findings from a three-year longitudinal study of teachers enrolled in our program. We believe that the ways in which we developed the program and designed and taught the courses impacted how teachers in the program shaped their identities as TLs (Onore, Goeke, Taylor, Klein, 2009). We asked the following questions:

- In what ways are teachers' beliefs about and understandings of TL affected by participating in a formal teacher leadership program?
- How do course work, action research, inquiry, and engaging in leadership activities impact their agency as TLs?
- What kinds of actions do they take up as a result of this program participation?

2. Where we began

To develop this innovative program (there were no other TL programs of this kind in our state and only a few in the United States), we examined the literature to see how TL was defined and nurtured. Our search uncovered little international research on TL, so findings from research conducted in the US provided the foundation for our program. Below we provide a brief literature review

* Corresponding author. Department of Curriculum and Teaching, University Hall, 2142, Montclair State University, Montclair, NJ 07043, USA. Tel.: +1 973 953 5899 (cell), +1 973 239 3213 (home), +1 973 655 6952 (work); fax: +1 973 655 7084.
E-mail address: taylorm@mail.montclair.edu (M. Taylor).

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that summarizes the definitions of, barriers and challenges to, and examples of preparation for TL. This research helped us to articulate a conceptual framework for the program that integrated the TL research with our own beliefs about teacher learning.

2.1. Definitions and work of TLs

TL is an umbrella term for work that encompasses three developmental foci among practicing teachers: (a) individual development; (b) collaboration; and (c) organizational development. Recent organizational leadership models recognize that leadership must emerge from many individuals within an organization rather than being vested in a small number of formally recognized leaders. Applied to schools, this model of organizational leadership provided an impetus for the emergence of TL.

Because it is not a formally recognized role or position within a school, definitions of TL are often ambiguous. Previous metaphors for the work of TLs (e.g., steward, captain, manager, instructional leader) proved inadequate because they suggested that TL is confined to a role or set of skills and tasks to be accomplished (Lambert, Collay, Kent, Richert, & Dietz, 1996). TLs are most successful when their roles are mutually negotiated and shaped by constituents (e.g., TLs, colleagues, principals) on the basis of context-specific instructional and improvement needs (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). In this way, definitions of TL can be numerous, context-specific, and unique.

A potentially more useful definition of TL suggested by Donaldson (2006) framed TL as "relational leadership", in which leadership resides not in individuals, but in the spaces between and among individuals. As such, TL is a specific type of relationship that mobilizes other people to improve their practice. Because TLs have the trust and respect of their colleagues, they are often able to unite colleagues with whom they are already aligned in a way that is different than an administrator pushing teachers to collaborate. TLs are motivated by a desire to help students and support their fellow teachers, not to enforce a new policy or evaluate others' competencies. Thus, a key asset of TL is mobilization of naturally occurring and informal collaborations among teachers. In this way, TL relationships can "trump" those of administrators and other formal leaders (Spillane, 2006).

The notion of relational leadership can determine whether TLs are seen as well-meaning colleagues who dispense advice or TLs who ignite and impact learning. The literature is rife with recommendations regarding ways to engage in collaborative TL practice. These range from vital conversational elements, to maintaining a coaching stance, to collaboration and facilitation (Lipton & Wellman, 2007). Both a strong cognitive foundation and skilled interpersonal capacities are necessary to exercise leadership in improving practice. Research in TL suggests that principals as well as other teachers who possess these skills can shape teachers' beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors.

Outcomes of TL are often described in terms of individual, classroom, and school level effects. There are ample accounts of the transformative nature of TL work on individual teachers (Danielson, 2006; Lieberman & Miller, 2004) in terms of their professional growth, classroom practice, and psychological well-being. To this point, research has not provided comprehensive evidence of the outcomes of TL work on student learning and achievement. These findings may be difficult to achieve due to the fluid, complex, and context-specific nature of TL.

2.2. Barriers and challenges to TL

Widespread emergence of TL is challenged by a professional culture of isolation, individualism, and egalitarianism in teaching. Teachers who lead feel conflict and isolation as collegial relationships shift from primarily horizontal to somewhat hierarchical (Danielson, 2006; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). TL challenges traditional assumptions about authority and leadership in schools, namely, that schools are female dominant and male led (Schmuck & Schubert, 1995); and that teachers work with students while designated leaders work with adults. Because teachers' work is confined to children, they are often isolated and have virtually no time allocated for adult interaction. Those who desire professional development and status enhancement struggle with cultural norms and organizational structures that limit this development. Teachers who survive this enculturation are seen as "true leaders" and are encouraged to become administrators.

Carr (1997) problematized the traditional model of administrative authority figures who are removed from the classroom, suggesting that they often inhibit rather than promote innovation. In contrast, Sergiovanni (2005) offers a model where teachers and administrators work as partners to encourage risk taking and enable communication between and among various constituencies in the school, and meet initiatives with support rather than impediments.

2.3. TL preparation

Despite the conflict between innovative, teacher-led models of TL and traditional school leadership, descriptions of TL preparation presented in the literature focus primarily on preparing TLs for pseudo-administrative roles through formal training and job-embedded support, demonstration of curricular, instructional, and assessment practices, and successfully supporting collegial interactions. The need for administrator support in preparing TLs is noted repeatedly in the literature, although this is more often espoused than enacted (York-Barr & Duke, 2004).

2.4. Interpreting the TL literature

We were surprised to find specific aspects of the TL literature limiting for our work. First, extant models of TL drew predominantly from models of educational leadership that prepare future administrators (Cochran-Smith, 2004). Although this conceptualization has resulted in a large body of writing, it provided us with little useful or valid information for developing a formal TL program with our stated mission. Second, most of the literature examined TL development within school settings through professional development and leadership initiatives (Crowther, Ferguson, & Hann, 2008; Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2009; Lieberman & Miller, 2004). No research existed documenting ways in which TL develops in a formal TL program. Finally, we repeatedly encountered formal examples of TL that flourished through top-down, administrator-mandated initiatives (Crowther et al., 2008; Taylor et al., 2011). Although TL seems to depend in important ways on administrative leadership, it is not clear that administrators are the only ones in a position to create a fertile context for teacher leadership work.

In our own experiences as TLs in public schools as well as our work in partnership with teachers as co-learners, we recognized the unsanctioned work of TLs as often covert and subversive, but not ineffective. This work has the potential to create new zones of influence, that function outside of administrator's purview. We were interested in creating a definition of TL that leaves open the possibilities for redefining roles and relationships that may reflect a disunity or disruption of traditional leadership and followership. This definition seeks to replace traditional values of power and hierarchy by emphasizing the importance of cooperative, non-hierarchical models for teacher leader learning and development.

3. Conceptual framework for the program design

In contrast to the majority of TL initiatives, which rely on professional development models, we constructed a masters degree program. For us, creating a formal program conveyed symbolically and practically that TL development rests on a rich combination of theoretical and practical knowledge; our intended message was that teaching, learning, and leading are interconnected (Odell, 1997). To emphasize this interconnectedness, our program centered on intertwining these three elements. The challenge of any program in TL, then, is to create opportunities for leaders to develop– a process about which we don't yet know enough (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). What we do know about the prerequisites for TL is that TLs have content and pedagogical expertise and a well-articulated philosophy of education (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001). However, previous research does not provide any indication of specific orientations toward teaching and learning that correlate best with leadership. Our perspective was that there *is* a philosophy about learning that has the potential to develop leadership and it is the one around which our program centers: inquiry. In our program, two central activities instantiated this philosophy: action research and negotiating the curriculum. These are described in more detail below.

As a core mode of learning in the TL program, action research is emancipatory in several ways. It "leads not just to new practical knowledge, but to new abilities to create knowledge" (Reason & Bradbury, 2008, p. 3). While there are important skills and knowledge about leading that TLs need to develop, just as important is developing TLs' capacity to generate new knowledge for themselves, which is both the spur to new action and the result of new action. Inviting TLs to produce knowledge for themselves through action research echoes some of the significant principles of the APA Boulder model in psychology (Raimy, 1950). For example, emphasizing that psychologists be "more than consumers of scientific knowledge" but also "know how to produce it themselves" (Peterson & Park, 2005, p. 1148) through practice and research resonates with our program's invitation to conduct cycles of action research throughout the course of study.

Engaging in action research that addresses real quests for understanding can only be accomplished through a climate of self-directed learning in collaboration with peers and trusted, interested experts. This is the overarching role that Negotiating the Curriculum (Boomer, Lester, Onore, & Cook, 1992) plays. Throughout the course of study, and within curricular constraints set in advance, program participants co-created questions for means of investigation in their coursework. In this way, participants acted as leaders of their own learning and had the opportunity to experience the power of their own expertise and experience. If teacher leaders are told what to learn, how to learn, and why to learn, their learning is controlled by others and their capacity to lead is stunted. To learn to lead, then, teachers must place their own issues and concerns at the center of their learning process, know themselves as learners, reflect on their learning and share it with others. This is an apprenticeship in leading.

In summary, TLs have the potential to enact Dewey's (1929) vision of schools as sites of inquiry, where they collaboratively investigate practices through observation, reflection, analysis, and dialogue. But they can also participate in wider conversations about theory and practice in university, district, and policy settings. We wanted to create a program that blended knowledge and expertise —a mix of theory and practice — inviting participants to engage in discussions about teaching, learning and schooling beyond their classrooms and schools. We embraced what Lieberman and Miller (2004) called "the shifting conception of teacher leadership" to include the roles of "teacher as researcher, teacher as scholar, and teacher as mentor" (p. 28).

4. Method

We took a phenomenological approach to exploring the work of TL — in particular, to understanding participants' beliefs, intentions, knowledge, and actions related to this emerging phenomenon. Phenomenology avoids pre-constructed, fixed procedures and instead, uses personal experience as the starting point (Holloway, 1997). This account of lived experience is less concerned with factual accuracy and more focused on participants' living sense of the experience. In this case, what is it like to live through the experience of becoming a TL?

While there is no fixed set of procedures, we viewed phenomenological research as an interaction of several research activities (Van Manen, 1997), including: (a) turning to a phenomenon which seriously interests us and commits us to the world; (b) investigating experience as participants live it rather than as we conceptualize it; (c) reflecting on the essential themes that characterize the phenomenon; and (d) balancing the research context by considering the parts and the whole. The activities involved gathering, coding, and interpreting the data as well as trying to capture the complexity of the phenomenon through an interpretive process.

We are fully aware of the roles that we play in understanding the data under scrutiny. The data are not separate from us; we chose them and looked at them through our lenses, which are aspects of our histories, both individual and collective. As such, our personal perspective is privileged. In this case, we recognize that our own process of becoming TLs impacts the ways in which we interpret the data. Although we did not complete formal programs in teacher leadership, we became TLs through a variety of catalysts such as a masters programs, curriculum development, grant writing, or action research. Our own lived experiences influence the structures and coursework that were created for the program and construct the biases through which we analyze the data.

As a method for studying change, therefore, a phenomenological approach offers specific advantages. Most importantly, it can be useful for surfacing deep issues and making voices heard. This is not always comfortable for participants, especially when the research might expose taken for-granted assumptions or challenge a comfortable status quo. However, by studying their initial and emerging beliefs, their learning through research, and their practices of teacher leadership in situ, this study aimed to uncover the dynamics of participants' praxis —their actions and reflections in the settings in which they occurred. As such, phenomenology might yield valuable insights in terms of uncovering participants' established assumptions, prompting action, or challenging complacency — all fundamental goals of TL development and practice.

4.1. Participants and research context

All participants ($n = 13$) were members of the first cohort in a Masters in TL program housed in a college of education at a public university in the mid-Atlantic of the US. A prerequisite for the program was at least 3 years of teaching experience. All participants were women between the ages of 25 and 55 who had between 3 and 30 years of classroom teaching experience. The majority (11 out of 13 participants) taught in suburban communities. The Masters in TL program is a 5-semester cohort experience in which participants study teaching and curriculum, professional development, and organizational change, in addition to engaging in recursive cycles of action research, and collaborative inquiry.

4.2. Procedure

Participants gave consent for all of their written course work to be used as data and to be interviewed upon entry and exit from the program. We collected and analyzed application materials completed at the time of admission to the program (i.e., writing samples, letters of recommendation, and admissions interviews) as well as programmatic assessments completed throughout the program. These course-embedded artifacts included TL philosophy statements, TL metaphors, case studies, action research papers, reflective process logs, class presentations, and discussion board postings.

Each participant was interviewed about her experiences as an emerging TL. Interviews took place upon entrance to the program and upon graduation. A series of semi-structured interview questions were used. The questions served as a guide, but other questions were asked to probe specific issues as needed. Interviews lasted approximately 60 minutes and were conducted by the TL graduate assistant who was not an instructor in the program. Participants also completed a demographic questionnaire that collected information related to gender, ethnicity, years and type of teaching experience, educational background, teaching certification, classroom composition (e.g., grade, number of students with special education needs, number of students receiving supplemental instruction), school characteristics (e.g., urban, suburban, rural; high, average, or low SES, size; available resources) and instructional program/curriculum currently implemented in their setting.

4.3. Data analysis

Phenomenological data analysis entails investigating the constituents of a phenomenon while retaining the context of the whole (Hycner, 1985). It is a way of transforming the data through interpretation. We engaged in Hycner's process of five steps or phases, which are: (a) bracketing and phenomenological reduction; (b) delineating units of meaning; (c) clustering units of meaning to form themes; (d) summarizing each interview; and (e) extracting general and unique themes from all the interviews and making a composite summary. Analysis of course documents and interview transcripts was intended to discover and describe how participants "struggled with ideas and practices" (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001, p. 19). A set of common codes was developed for analyzing both course documents and interview transcripts to ensure team-based qualitative analysis (MacQueen, McLellan, Milstein, & Milstein, 1998). All participants contributed to the creation and development of the codebook. A preliminary code list was created from theoretical constructs that supported our conceptual framework. As a group, we defined the codes with examples, and then refined, added, and deleted codes.

Once the codebook was established, we conducted a group coding exercise in which all members together coded selected transcribed quotes from the interviews and written reflections from the course documents. This allowed us to develop shared experience applying the codes and made explicit the criteria and rationale for each coding decision. Following the group coding we completed independent assignments to apply codes to each interview transcript or course document. To ensure coding reliability two colleagues independently coded each data source and then met to compare codes. When codes for a particular response did not agree, the data were reread and discussed until agreement was reached. As a result, several responses were recoded. Initial disagreement on codes was found in only 7% of all coding instances (i.e., 93% agreement).

Codes that did not work were eliminated and problematic code definitions were collaboratively reworded. Also, we identified single responses that were unique and significant but could not be coded using broad patterns and themes. A single generic code (i.e., "unique") was designed to capture all such idiosyncratic responses. In sum, we viewed the codebook as a representative distillation, not a historical document of every response given.

To extract themes, we analyzed the coded data using the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Constant comparative analysis requires comparing data to developing categories of responses that emerge during the coding process (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). We wrote memos consisting of questions and speculations about the data that emerged as codes were sorted and compared, to document and enhance the analytic process. We did this until analysis produced no new codes and when all of the data were included in the codes. Table 1 presents the codes and their definitions, and examples and frequencies of each code. Interview data and other data sources were triangulated to contrast and validate the data if they yielded similar findings (Holloway, 1997).

The process of bracketing or suspending our personal views or preconceptions (Miller & Crabtree, 1992) was particularly important for ensuring truthfulness and validity in this study. We bracketed ourselves consciously in order to understand the phenomenon in terms of "an insider perspective" (Mouton & Marais, 1990, p. 70), attending as closely as possible to the lived experience of participants. Participants also received a copy of the text to validate that it accurately reflected their perspectives. The results of the study are presented next.

5. Findings

The research questions that guided our investigation were: (a) In what ways are teachers' beliefs about and understandings of TL affected by participating in a formal teacher leadership program?; (b) How do course work, action research, inquiry, and engaging in leadership activities impact their agency as TLs?; and c) What kinds of actions do they take up as a result of this participation? In this section we present the results of our study.

5.1. Emerging beliefs about TL: TLs identify and amplify their professional voice

The first dominant theme that emerged was that teachers' beliefs and understandings of TL were impacted in specific ways through participation in our program. Their coursework led them to identify their professional voices when they began an epistemological shift from viewing themselves as passive receivers of information to active constructers of knowledge. This shift represented a developmental process during which teachers' perspectives of teaching and learning were transformed. Notions of learning as transmission were challenged once they began coursework grounded in "inquiry as pedagogy, pedagogy as inquiry" where "courses are structured to investigate and critique a set of overarching questions, initially established by course planners but continually renegotiated" (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009, p. 108). Negotiating the curriculum and conducting a year-long action research and self-study program influenced the TLs to understand that they can construct meaning for themselves, and that having ownership over their own learning empowers them as professionals (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2009).

The TLs shifted from being receivers of knowledge to meaning-makers as they identified and amplified their professional voices. They began to view being a TL as a role they created themselves rather than one that was designated externally. Participants reported that their courses and assignments helped them to revisit their passions and expertise in a new way through taking action in their classrooms, schools and communities. For many of the program participants this

Table 1
Codes, definitions, and examples.

Code	Definition	Example	Frequency
Teacher Leaders Identify & Amplify their Professional Voice	The code means that TLs (a) identify themselves as leaders, rather than having an externally defined role or task and (b) develop already existing knowledge and expertise into usable knowledge for leadership and extend it into action in their settings. [developmental difference between some TLs = whether this process happens sequentially or simultaneously] Non-stage-like – more of an open process of development; we don't try to move them from point 1 to point 2 Identification = moment of "discovery; " how it might conflict with previous notions of formal, externally defined leadership.	**Identification:** At the beginning I really thought that it was that you're going to take control. But that's not what it is. I believe, it's trying to get people on the right path just with collaboration, opening up people's eyes and minds to different ways and methods of doing things, to come to an outcome that would be good for everyone. I truly believe that it's not a dictatorship type thing at all, where I thought more in that way at the beginning. I just thought if you're a leader, they're going to follow. But that's not what leadership is. Setting a good example is more of what it's about. And so I think I've been a leader forever but I didn't really know that that's what I was doing. But I think it just happens naturally with me. So that's why I got interested in the program actually also. Because I said maybe this is what I do anyway so maybe let me find out about if I'm really doing this or not. So it's working with people. That's, like, the key – working with people to work to come to some sort of good outcome. Maybe some sort of change. I think a lot of us do it informally when you come up with a great idea or you had a very successful lesson and you share it with your colleagues. I think that's a form of leadership… I always thought of it as that formal role: a grade level team leader, a department chair, someone whose job was specifically professional development. I saw it in very formal roles. But now I see that you lead everyday, informally. **Amplifying:** I think that teacher leadership is keeping your eye and ear open for what's important in education for students and then trying to move the curriculum and your peer teachers in that direction.	1. **Identify** $N = 9/11$ 2. **Amplify** $N = 9/11$
Teacher Leaders Deepen and Extend their Voice as They Plan	As teacher leaders plan and carry out an initiative that is organic to their context their voices as leaders are enriched. This development is fused to planning and action.	**Deepening and Extending**: Teacher leadership is just that…it's teachers. And teachers working for change. Many times it can be with administration but this program is pretty clear. This is for teachers who wanted to stay in the classroom. Maybe not all of us will stay in the classroom, but it's really geared towards teachers who want to stay in the classroom and who want to be a change agent in some way. And who they work with can vary from administration, other teachers, community, parents, students themselves, business people, anyone really. But it's quite different….it's not a path towards administration. It's again, a facilitator that works with a variety of people, including administration. I definitely learned that it's not just in the classroom, that teacher leaders start in the classroom and go out into the community and into the world, that teacher leaders have a goal. I'm trying to think of the specific word but I can't of it, so goal will work. They have something that they want. They see what they want to change and they try to work towards that, whereas I hadn't really known… And then there it was. All at once – I felt like a leader. I felt like a teacher leader! I had waited for nearly two years to finally understand what it meant to be a teacher leader, and then, when I least expected it, there it was. I never dreamed that this moment would happen outside the classroom. For me, teacher leadership has always been so much about content knowledge and classroom practice. I was stunned to realize that this moment of epiphany had little to do with either and much to do with policy and people. I've become the public face advocating for change that I never thought I would be and I never really wanted to be. When I started the cohort, it was my understanding that it was a personal journey and this was all about what happened in my classroom. And by the end of the program, I understood that it really required you to step out of your comfort zone or out of your classroom at least, and work in a more collaborative environment so that it was a benefit to the school, the community, not just the group of students you stood in front of.	**Deepening and Extending** $N = 9/11$
Reframe their Work/Shift Responsibility Through Constructing Widening Circles of Influence and Impact	TLs create new spheres of influence, both formal and informal, and engage colleagues in collaboration around shared goals. This work was rarely linear but often emerged through action, when TL's were engaged in work beyond their immediate spheres.	**Reframing**: I always thought of it [Teacher Leadership} as that formal role: a grade level team leader, a department chair, someone whose job was specifically professional development. I saw it in very formal roles. But now I see that you lead everyday, informally. And I was doing a lot of leading without even knowing that's what I was doing. I just thought I liked to share ideas. But when I think about it, that's really what it is. Almost at the ground level, you're looking for ways to improve,. You see a need and you take the opportunity to address that need. A lot of it is very spontaneous. **Shifting**: We're actually not just going to try to make a change in our classrooms for our students and the way we meet the needs of the students, but also how we work with the in-class support teachers in our classroom. We found that was an area that really needed some work…So there are a lot of realizations that come out of this. Not just for me but for a lot of other people. So we're working on a lot of things. We want to put these things into practice next year. Of course it's going to take time. Next year will not be the end of it. Every year we're going to do a bit little more and a little bit more.	**Reframing** $N = 7/11$ **Shifting** $N = 9/11$

came as a sudden revelation. One teacher remarked, "I've been a leader forever, but I didn't know that was what I was doing." Without the recognition that one is already a leader, the fulfillment of one's own potential and the capacity to influence others is diminished. This teacher further remarked that the program gave her an opportunity to explore her leadership potential further. She continued: "Maybe this is what I do anyway so maybe let me find out . . . if I'm really doing this or not. So it's working with people. That's, like, the key – working with people to work to come to some sort of good outcome. Maybe some sort of change." Out of recognition comes an increased desire to work with others and act on the environment. In paying conscious attention to her own development, she is coming into consciousness about herself as a learner which, in turn, is central to identifying herself as a leader. As a learner herself, a teacher can model and lead by example.

In their pre and post program interviews, teachers also articulated the deep differences between formal leadership roles and the roles that TLs play. For example:

> I think a lot of us do it informally when you come up with a great idea or you had a very successful lesson and you share it with your colleagues. I think that's a form of leadership… I always thought of it as that formal role: a grade level team leader, a department chair, someone whose job was specifically professional development. I saw it in very formal roles. But now I see that you lead every day, informally.

To suggest that leading everyday is a natural part of what teachers do lends additional power to the work of teachers. Taken together, then, naming one's stance (I am already a leader) and taking advantage of that stance (I lead every day through sharing my success as a teacher) mark a significant moment in TLs' development. The capacity to make effective use of your own knowledge and expertise directly relates to recognizing that you have them in the first place. Consistent with our mission and counter to the majority of literature focusing on formal TL roles, this represents a conceptual shift from authority figures defining the TL role to teachers using their own authority to define themselves as TLs.

We found that a number of participants thought there was something "natural" about being a leader, something connected to who they are in the world. For example:

> I'm a positive person. I'm logical. I feel like I'm non-threatening. And I think all of these things have helped me be able to relate to my colleagues well and to maybe help them see certain things or help move them in a certain direction. So it's always been a natural kind of thing for me. And I think the program has helped me feel more confident in that area.

This finding highlights how some teachers developed existing knowledge, expertise and personality traits into usable knowledge for leadership. One TL used her time in the program to create a summer reading curriculum for students and a teacher study group. Her study group applied for and received a small grant to fund their cross-disciplinary work. Though the study group was initially created to support new teachers, she saw it as a short-term project that would be useful while she was in the TL program. By the end, however, it had emerged as something different:

> My group wants to go on and I didn't expect it, I just thought we'd do it for a year…I didn't know how I was going to get people to buy into it in the first place. I didn't think that they'd want to continue and now it kind of has a life of its own…I'm training somebody else to help me out…And it's gone in all kinds of new directions and we're still developing a new direction for next year.

We were particularly struck by one teacher's articulation of what TLs do to mobilize their leadership potentials: "I think that teacher leadership is keeping your eye and ear open for what's important in education for students and then trying to move the curriculum and your peer teachers in that direction." Being active makers of knowledge and facilitators of others' work can result quite simply from discovering one's own voice as a leader and using it.

5.2. Finding agency: TLs Deepen and extend their voice as they plan actions

A second prominent theme explored how TLs began to find agency. Once TLs discovered their professional voices, they realized they have the knowledge, skills, and expertise to act as change agents beyond their own classrooms. Our data indicated that participants developed more complex definitions both of the nature and work of TL. A number of participants initially defined a teacher leader as "content expert." But by the end of the program, they saw themselves as fully engaged in action as they became the public face of their initiatives. For one teacher, this definition evolved after taking on a self-study first of her transition back to teaching after maternity leave, and later through a project to understand maternal leave policies in the district. During her work in this area, colleagues in her building began to see her as an advocate for other women trying to negotiate complex and opaque policies. She described how she felt upon being asked to help a fellow teacher struggling to manage an unfavorable leave situation:

> And then there it was. All at once – I felt like a leader. I felt like a teacher leader! I had waited for nearly two years to finally understand what it meant to be a teacher leader, and then, when I least expected it, there it was. I never dreamed that this moment would happen outside the classroom. For me, teacher leadership has always been so much about content knowledge and classroom practice. I was stunned to realize that this moment of epiphany had little to do with either and much to do with policy and people. I've become the public face advocating for change that I never thought I would be and I never really wanted to be.

As we have already seen, participants discovered both that they were already TLs and that they had skills and knowledge that they could activate in this work. As a result, over the two years of the program, a number of participants began to reframe their informal leadership work by creating spaces for sharing new knowledge with colleagues, even when they did not have a clear sense of where this sharing might lead. To make space for such sharing required them to engage in a complex process of negotiation with building and district-level administrators and to construct new relationships with colleagues. They needed to be deliberate in order to share and implement new ideas. One participant, whose initial leadership work was narrowly focused on garnering administrative support to develop and teach a new course, discovered that to accomplish this, she would need to work with her colleagues across departments and, together, they would have to recruit students. She said:

> My initiative has changed from creating a single course curriculum to creating a study group of teachers who acknowledge the importance of introducing international themes into all of the disciplines throughout the school. I have grown in so many ways from working on this project. It encouraged me to connect to staff members within my organization that I rarely interface with and to reach out to faculty and students in a common cause of improved student learning.

To reach out effectively to colleagues and students and persuade administrators that her initiative had value, this participant had to

plan and prepare thoughtfully. She needed to research other high school programs that emphasize international ideas, study extant curricula, make formal presentations, and create flyers to distribute to students. No action plan existed. She had to construct one and carry it out. As her supervisor's and colleagues' enthusiasm for this work grew, she grew in her capacity to see the next step in the process and determine what she needed to learn in order to make her case forcefully, all while working productively with others. Her developmental process illustrates how learning, planning, and acting all reinforce one another and propel each other forward.

This was the first time many participants had ever worked to engage meaningfully with colleagues around student work and most were encouraged by the response. Collaborating with others and catalyzing collaborative action engendered a marked sense of participation in the school community. As one teacher told us in her exit interview:

> When I started the cohort, it was my understanding that it was a personal journey and this was all about what happened in my classroom. And by the end of the program, I understood that it really required you to step out of your comfort zone or out of your classroom at least, and work in a more collaborative environment so that it was a benefit to the school, the community, not just the group of students you stood in front of.

In summary, our second research question investigated how course work, action research, inquiry, and engaging in leadership activities impacted participants' agency as teacher leaders. We developed our program in partial response to the questions posed by Wood (2007, p. 282): "Should teachers be passive recipients of others' expertise? Are they possessors of tacit knowledge built from practice? Should they be researchers, scholars, and theorizers?" Conducting action research and negotiating the curriculum led participants to begin to see themselves as agents of change. The next step for them involved taking action and widening their circles of influence and impact.

5.3. Taking action: TLs reframe their work/shift responsibility through widening circles of influence and impact

Our third research question examined the types of actions TLs took up as a result of their participation in the program. When they entered the program, participants did not see themselves as change agents, except, perhaps, in their work with their own students. As they engaged in their own learning and acting, they came to understand their work as members of a school community, even in cases where a communitarian spirit was not evident. Through ongoing cycles of action and reflection, participants came to see their work differently. No longer solely focused on themselves as learners and meaning-makers, their work became public. The need to act beyond their classrooms and build new relationships became central to being the kinds of TLs they wished to be. We have termed this "reframing their work and constructing widening circles of influence and impact."

One teacher expressed this as building a new commitment and new opportunities for conversation. She said, "My goal is to increase dialogue, the sharing, dialogue between teachers. Good, bad, or indifferent. Because that's how you make change, that's how you make things work. If no one says a word, then you could just keep doing the same poor things all the time." Interestingly, this teacher did not position herself as leading the dialogue; she simply committed to making it possible for dialogue to take place. To take action toward change, TLs realized they needed to reframe their relationships with members of their school and the larger professional community.

A middle school math teacher in the program went from focusing on differentiating instruction to better serve the needs of the strongest students in her classes to working with other teachers on her grade level and eventually to working with math teachers throughout the middle school. She and her colleagues met regularly in a study group and then, toward the end of the school year, they had a collective realization:

> We're actually not just going to try to make a change in our classrooms for our students and the way we meet the needs of the students, but also how we work with the in-class support teachers in our classroom. We found that was an area that really needed some work.

She went on to recognize that her previously neatly-bounded project had evolved into much more:

> So there are a lot of realizations that come out of this. Not just for me but for a lot of other people. So we're working on a lot of things. We want to put these things into practice next year. Of course it's going to take time. Next year will not be the end of it. Every year we're going to do a bit little more and a little bit more.

Many participants spoke about TL extending beyond not only their classroom, but beyond the walls of their schools, and spoke about collaboration with other schools through curriculum development, action research, and professional development. This work was rarely linear; rather, it moved between and among actions and understandings, new ideas and familiar ways of thinking and working. This provides an illustration of "relational" leadership to which we referred at the beginning of this article – attending to the spaces between and among people. These findings speak to a fundamental reframing of the very work of teaching and, in turn, who and what a TL might be and how she might do her work.

5.4. The Cycle of Teacher Leadership: a visual summary

In this section, we present The Cycle of Teacher Leadership (see Fig. 1) as a summarized illustration of our findings. In analyzing the data, we created a visual graphic to show how the TLs use the specific activities of connecting theory and practice, inquiry and action research, and meaning-making through negotiating the curriculum. Fig. 1 consists of two interacting circles:

1) The inner circle represents The Cycle of Praxis in which TLs (a) identify and amplify their professional voice; (b) deepen and extend their voice; and, finally (c) reframe their work and shift responsibility through constructing widening circles of influence and impact. The process of discovering their professional voices and acting in and on their professional contexts is, as the graphic portrays (See Fig. 1), a recursive one. Through continual cycles of creating their own professional knowledge through action research and negotiating the curriculum in the Cycle of Praxis, participants were simultaneously constructing and applying new knowledge and understandings which led, in turn, to new initiatives. In other words, enriching and deepening understandings is fused to planning and acting in their settings, and the planning and acting launch the quest for new understandings.

We cannot emphasize enough the power of praxis (ongoing cycles of reflection and action, meaning-making and practicing leadership) for developing TL. Without ongoing Cycles of Praxis, no amount of formal study of TL could effect change in their actions. The elemental curricular structures found in the Cycle of Praxis unite theory and practice continually and create the possibilities for new initiatives, which, in turn, engender the intention to seek and make new knowledge. The Cycle of Praxis acts as a catalyst to the outer circle, or

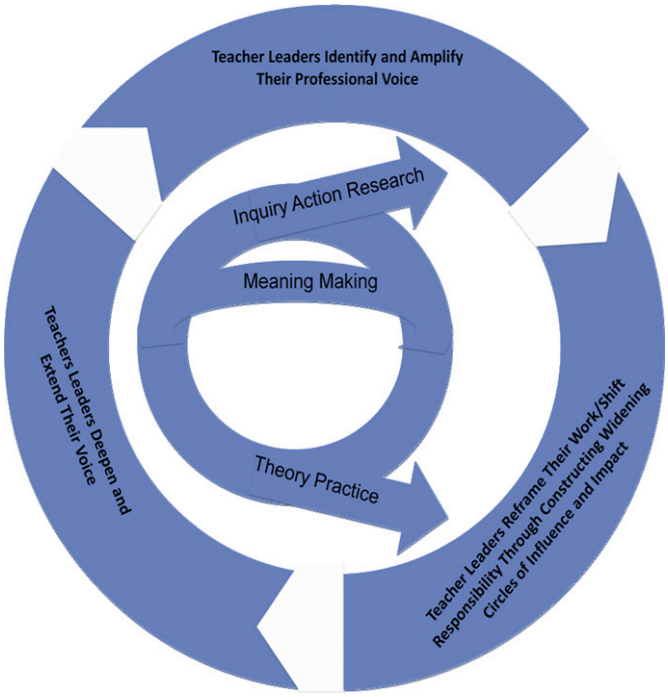

Fig. 1. The Cycle of Teacher Leadership.

2) The Cycle of Impact. This Cycle represents key moments or insights into thinking and doing as TLs which emerged over the course of participation in the program. Realizing their power as meaning-makers led them to identify as TLs. Their authority emerged from the experience of developing understandings. They self-identified as TLs, planned actions, acted as change agents, and extended their impact beyond their own classrooms. The important point to emphasize is that this Cycle, although it surrounds the Cycle of Praxis, encompasses both that which is caused by and enacted through the Cycle of Praxis, and also sometimes leads the TL back into the Cycle of Praxis. Engaging in action and agency are propelled by their emerging identities as TLs and congruently these acts impact how they perceive themselves as TLs.

As a whole, The Cycle of Teacher Leadership is fluid and non-linear in that TLs move freely between each part of each cycle, as well as between the two cycles, depending on their situation, context, goals, readiness, and challenges. Similar to the process of becoming a teacher, a TL could be in one cycle for one endeavor and a different cycle in a different situation, constantly shifting back and forth between them through the course of one project or situation.

6. Implications

The words and work of participants caused us to view TL from a wide angle. In our initial program design and, based on the other programs we investigated, we began the development of our course of study focused primarily on the premise that through deliberate infusion of inquiry, negotiation, and action, participants would become effective researchers, meaning-makers, and theorizers (Schon, 1983). However, participants led us to understand the impact of a course of study in TL differently. We moved from a perspective driven by a traditional, linear curricular framework to one that is more organic and open-ended, resembling the everyday lives of teachers, and continuing beyond the program. As a result, we see our work contributing to a growing body of research on TL in ways that are discussed in the following section.

6.1. School improvement and change

School improvement and reform must be grounded in the learning and lives of teachers to be sustained. Research suggest that top-down, mandated change does not have lasting impact on practice (Fullan, 2001). TL is essential to such work and therefore, we need to develop better understandings of it. Our work reinforces the notion that change is simultaneously top-down *and* bottom-up (Fullan, 1993). For example, embedded in the narrative of the middle school math teacher's work lies another story—that of how she and her principal co-invented a change strategy for math instruction. It would be impossible to tease out from this layered story which action or whose action precipitated which change. What we know is that the TL both led and was led by her principal to convene the middle school math teachers to talk about differentiating instruction, that the teachers in the group took on initiatives to learn more about and to practice differentiation, and that the principal attended meetings to be informed about what they were learning and proposing and supported their efforts through time to meet and experiment. Ultimately, both the practice of mathematics education and the structures for teacher collaboration to improve math instruction emerged. As one teacher noted about the fluid way she works with her principal: "He's the one that got my research going. He had an idea or thought there was a need and together, we created what's happening now which is fabulous." The point, from our perspective, is that TL practices can be instantiations of Fullan's maxim about the change process—that it is both top-down and bottom-up—which is often quoted but seldom enacted or documented. Additionally, however, our research indicates that beyond their pivotal roles in providing opportunities for TLs to do their work, administrators may also be partners with TLs in the work.

6.2. Changing school culture

TL affects school culture. TLs cannot work in schools that are not learning organizations (Sergiovanni, 2005). The steps taken by TLs engage others in school-based work, launch a process of school improvement, and alter the climate and culture of the school. An overriding cultural norm in schools is the "teacher as rugged individualist" (Britzman, 1986). Typically, teachers close their doors and pursue their work in isolation. They feel comfortable ensconced in their private worlds and, as the recent drive to "sell" lesson plans on the Internet indicates, teachers have a proprietary sense of their work. This stance blocks the possibility that teachers can learn from one another and, consequently, that continuous improvement of practice can be part of school life. Our work suggests that once teachers begin to lead, they must, by necessity, break out of the confines of their classrooms, open their doors to colleagues, and invite administrators to observe and learn from their work, not just evaluate it.

In anecdote after anecdote and project after project, participants opened their classrooms to others. Some were able to establish ways for the teams they led to conduct interclass observations and, not so incidentally, to garner administrator support for this. Others conducted professional development for colleagues during which they shared artifacts of their students' work. In each case, the climate and culture of the school was subtly but profoundly altered.

6.3. Limitations

There is, of course, a flip side to these transformations of schools into cultures of learning. As discussed in the literature review, the barriers and obstacles to TL development are well-documented. Several of the teachers worked in environments which seemed to

be impervious to change. They were blocked by administrators (and even colleagues) from engaging in the kinds of collaboration that teachers must have in order for a school truly to be a learning organization. Their voices are not documented in our findings because the barriers to action inhibited their development as TLs. So, while we would like to assert that TLs can have a profound impact on school climate and culture, we understand that this outcome is not a given. As one teacher noted when a new principal was brought into her school, morale was very low: "I don't feel the support really to try anything new or…I think everyone's just trying to keep it going." As we know, school principals are a key component in the possibilities for change.

6.4. Student engagement

As we have described elsewhere (Onore, Goeke, Klein, & Taylor, 2009), we structured the final semester of the program around participants' questions and issues for investigation. Our purpose was to make manifest to the TLs that in order to lead their students' learning they must experience being leaders of their own learning. Further, we posited that teachers who are leaders of their own learning can support students in taking charge of their learning, thus, affecting student engagement in learning.

One consequence of becoming leaders of their own learning was that TLs became more deeply engaged in the learning process than they had been before. In their interviews and final course reflections, participants reported that the experience of taking charge of the curriculum, setting both what and how they would learn, was a deeply motivating experience.

One teacher captured the transfer of this experience to her own classroom and speculated about connections between her engagement in learning and that of her students:

> The negotiation was huge…I felt like it honored us as students. It honored them as professors. It was really exciting to have a say in what we were going to learn and how we were going to learn it. I had never experienced that before. And that was one of the reasons I wanted to figure out how to do that in my classroom. Because usually you go to class and they tell you what you're supposed to learn and how you're supposed to learn it. And then you do it and you're never quite sure if that was the right way. And here it was, they trusted us to take ownership of what we were learning and use it in ways that made sense to us, which I thought was wonderful and exciting.

The implications for classroom teaching and the potential for student engagement are deeply connected to the forms and structures of programs that develop TLs. They must enact the principles of epistemology, inquiry, and collaboration they want TLs to promote. For teacher educators, walking the walk is critical to TL with deep purpose, impact and transformative possibility.

6.5. Renewing school structures

TL can lead the way toward new school structures. It relies upon and can also build new ways for schools to be organized for continuous improvement. While distributed leadership is not yet the norm in schools, TL makes the need for shared leadership structures apparent. We discovered that TLs became savvier about the barriers and supports for TL through their work. Once they shifted their gazes beyond their classrooms and had deep intentions to get specific things accomplished, they recognized what institutional structures could be brought to bear to achieve their goals, but they also recognized what needed to be changed. One teacher who became a mentor for a new teacher learned along the way that she and her mentee needed time together. She didn't just complain about the lack of time but she worked collaboratively with her principal to make time in the school day. Another TL's work involved the creation of a tool-kit including books and videos for teaching democratic dispositions in elementary school. When she discovered that there was no time to meet together, she turned to her principal who created an afternoon slot where either the special education or general education teachers would take all the students, thus freeing up the other group to meet. The point we wish to make is that creating new structures or taking advantage of underutilized resources can result directly from TLs' work. Once structural changes are made for one group with its own goals, opportunities open up for other teachers to do the same and for principals to reconsider their options.

6.6. Growing teacher leaders

Currently there are only a small number of programs for TL in the United States. This research points to some of the significant components and dimensions of a program that develops and supports TL practice and advocates for the development of more programs. To the extent that there are no career ladders for teachers who wish to stay in the classroom, and often no structures in schools for teachers to enact leadership roles, TL programs are actually preparing teachers for contexts which do not yet exist. Our research along with other recent international studies suggests that in an unplanned way, TLs' work provides reasons for there to be such career ladders and school structures (Taylor et al., 2011). Our hope is that the press of their work on the ground will result in larger institutional and professional change.

7. Conclusion

Although TL may not result in wholesale change in schooling, what is clear is that it can affect in profound ways the nature of teacher knowledge and expertise. Programs that educate teachers as leaders are launching a change project that, though undefined in its specific consequences can alter the relationships of teachers to students, administrators, and parents. In closing, one of our program participants describes this phenomenon:

> While administrators and sometimes community can be impressed by the numbers, they're not seeing what teachers see as what the real results of the learning is or the direction of the learning. And I think that's why the teachers are in the best position to lead. Because they have the sense of what's going on that isn't measurable in numbers and that I think is what teacher leadership is. That's where it should be.

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