

Teacher-Driven Professional Learning as a Vehicle for Teacher Leadership

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Abstract

Over the past 20 years, a host of formalized teacher leadership programs have emerged in response to numerous calls for the re-culturing (Fullan, 2001) and re-professionalization (Hargreaves, 2000) of teaching. That being said, very little research has explored the manner in which such programs have facilitated real change in the leadership capacity of teachers. As such, the purpose of this study was to explore the nature and sustainability of leadership roles experienced by three participants in the Teacher Learning and Leadership Program (TLLP), a one-year program in Ontario, Canada, where teachers ‘take the lead’ in developing context specific professional learning opportunities with the aim of impacting both student and teacher learning. Results indicate that the TLLP provided participants with an avenue for the development and enactment of various teacher leadership opportunities both in and beyond their own school. However, extending that leadership beyond the timeframe of their TLLP projects proved to be a difficult endeavour. Understanding the impact of cultural norms, top-down hierarchies, and historical views of the teacher as implementer on the sustainability of teacher leadership is of particular relevance to planning committees who organize and develop such programs as well as progressive school boards who are genuinely interested in promoting authentic change in school leadership development.

Introduction

Teachers and teacher unions have long advocated for genuine teacher voice at all levels of educational decision-making (Bascia, 1998; 2003; Bascia & Osmond, 2012; Hargreaves, 1994; Lieberman & Pointer Mace, 2008). Largely conceived as the purview of official legislators and elected politicians, much of the planning, research, and development of educational reform has traditionally implied a hierarchical decision-making process (Elmore, 2004) where mandates rather than capacity building reforms have been the policy instrument of choice (McDonnell & Elmore, 1987). Within this context, teachers have often been situated on the “far end of educational reform” and (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2012, p. 1), viewed as “executing the innovations of others” (van Driel, Beijaard, & Verloop, 2001, p. 140), rather than contributing to the innovations themselves.

Over the past 20 years, however, the formal notion of teacher leadership has emerged, focusing on the ways in which teachers might influence educational change at the school level and beyond (Harris, 2002; Little, 2003). During this time a host of formalized teacher leadership programs have emerged in various jurisdictions where teachers actively construct and share their knowledge with other educators as they become leaders in their own classrooms and beyond (Frost, 2011; Hargreaves, Crocker, Davis, McEwan, & Sahlberg, 2009; Lieberman, 2010). However, according to Muijs and Harris (2003), the question remains as to whether the existence of such programs represents a genuine shift in the discourse around the work of teachers and leadership, or whether it is “simply reconstituted professional development?” (p. 438).

As such, the purpose of this study was to explore the extent to which former participants in Ontario’s Teacher Learning and Leadership Program (TLLP) were able to engage in teacher leadership that transcended their

traditional purview of the classroom. In partnership with the Ontario Federation of Teachers (OFT), the province of Ontario launched the TLLP in 2008 as an opportunity for teachers to take the lead in extending their professional expertise into self-initiated projects, often related to problems of practice. More specifically, with the stated goal of helping classroom teachers “develop leadership skills for sharing learning and exemplary practices on a board-wide and/or provincial basis” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010, p. 3), the program appears to represent a genuine attempt to encourage Ontario teachers to extend their expertise beyond their own classrooms and facilitate the professional growth of their peers and colleagues on a larger scale.

However, at the time of this study, little research has explored whether or not TLLP participants actually experienced this depth of teacher leadership. To fill this gap in research, this study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What kinds of leadership roles do TLLP participants experience?
2. Does the TLLP promote teacher leadership that extends beyond the classroom? The school? The district?
3. How sustainable is the leadership? What opportunities for continued teacher leadership exist after the TLLP has ended?

To this end, building on Harris’ work on teacher leadership (2002, 2005, 2011) and utilizing Jimenez-Castellano’s (2010) adaptation of Brofenbrenner’s ecological systems model to teacher engagement, the study at hand attempts to provide insight into the factors and conditions surrounding the sustained development of leadership capacity once participation in formalized leadership programs like the TLLP ends.

Background: The History of the Development of the TLLP

From 1995 to 2002, teachers in Ontario experienced what has become known as one of the most controversial periods in the province’s educational history (MacLellan, 2009). Stating that the system was grossly overfunded, Premier Mike Harris called for sweeping budget cuts in education coupled with the implementation of a province-wide curriculum in addition to new policies around student assessment, teacher evaluation, and teacher professional development (Anderson & Ben Jaffar, 2003). As a result, those years were rife with work to rule action, strikes and lockouts (Anderson & Ben Jaffar, 2003) as the divide between teachers, unions, and the Ministry continued to grow.

In 2003, newly elected Liberal Premier Dalton McGuinty began the burdensome task of rebuilding the much-damaged working relationship with the teachers of Ontario. This included the establishment of the Education Partnership Table. Comprising parents, teachers, trustees, administrators, and other educational stakeholders, the Partnership table examined a host of issues including the status of teacher professional development, which at the time required teachers to take 14 Ministry approved courses every five years in order to maintain their teaching certification (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2004). Stemming from this work, in 2005, the Liberal government established the Working Table on Teacher Development, which recommended the government develop “a structure which enhances opportunities for teachers to expand their knowledge and skill, and share exemplary practice with other teachers” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 6). It was this recommendation that gave birth to the ideas and thinking that eventually evolved into the TLLP, which was launched in 2007.

Operating in yearly cycles, participation in the TLLP is open to experienced (beyond induction stage) classroom teachers who are interested in extending their own learning and sharing that learning with others. Applicants can apply as a team or on an individual basis; however, aligning with the “teacher-led” goals of the program, administrators and those in coordinator roles cannot be primary applicants. Interested applicants create a detailed proposal that outlines their project, its potential impact on student and teacher learning in their own school, and broader applications through the sharing of exemplary practices. Proposal submissions, which are due in November of each year, are first vetted through a board level committee and then through the Teacher Learning and Leadership Committee which has representatives from both the Ontario Federation of Teachers (OFT) and the Ministry. Successful applicants are notified in the late winter or early spring, with projects receiving an average of \$14,000 dollars (Campbell, Lieberman, & Yashkina, 2014).

In May, the Ministry and the OFT hosts a two-day leadership skills session where applicants are prepared for the task of implementation, which occurs from September to June of the next school year. After the projects have been completed, applicants are invited to attend the ‘Sharing the Learning Summit’ during which teachers share their expertise with other TLLP participants and invited guests from their schools, boards, and the Ministry (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2011). From 2007 to 2011, over 300 projects have been funded involving upwards of 1500 educators teaching in diverse school boards all over the province (Campbell, Lieberman, & Yashkina, 2014). Currently the program is entering its 8th year, with a new cohort of teachers beginning their projects in September 2014.

Review of the Literature: What is Teacher Leadership?

First described over 20 years ago, “the concept of teacher leadership suggests that teachers rightly and importantly hold a central position in the ways schools operate and in the core functions of teaching and learning” (York-Barr & Duke, 2004, p. 255). However, the concept of teacher leadership has not been well defined (Leithwood & Duke 1999) and is more of an umbrella term that encompasses a host of actions and activities that teachers engage in both in and outside of the classroom. For instance, Katzenmeyer and Moller (2001) declared in general terms that “teachers who are leaders lead within and beyond the classroom, identify with and contribute to a community of teacher learners and leaders, and influence others towards improved educational practice” (p. 17). Frost and Harris (2003), however, believed that this phrasing suggested that teacher leadership is something bestowed upon certain teachers in designated roles. On the other hand, Frost and Durrant (2003) emphasized the capacity of all teachers to demonstrate leadership; stating that teacher leadership “is not a matter of delegation, direction or distribution of responsibilities, but rather a matter of teachers’ agency and their choice in initiating and sustaining change.” Likewise, Danielson (2007) described teacher leaders as having the desire to improve education beyond their own classrooms or even beyond their own schools. It is this definition that underpins the work of this study: teacher leadership that blurs the lines between the ‘leaders’ and the ‘followers’ and redistributes the power imbalance that exists between these often juxtaposed notions.

What is the Impact of Teacher Leadership?

The empirical literature on the benefits of teacher leadership has been described as somewhat limited and exhibiting varying levels of congruence (Muijs & Harris, 2003; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). However, some empirical studies have described teacher leadership as contributing to successful school revitalization and collective efficacy (Angelle, Nixon, Norton, & Niles, 2011), promoting teacher renewal and empowerment (Lieberman & Friedrich, 2007), and supporting the creation of enhanced learning environments for students (Hallinger & Heck, 2010). Likewise, much of the theoretical literature “asserts that the principal reason for teacher leadership is to transform schools into professional learning communities and to empower teachers to become involved closely in decision-making within the school, thus contributing to the democratization of schools” (Muijs & Harris, 2003, p. 439). Barth (2007), for instance, positioned teacher leadership as improving teacher learning and empowering teachers as “first-class citizens in the school house.” Similarly, Muijs and Harris (2003) posit that teacher leadership enhances teacher’s self-esteem, improves their confidence, and offers teachers a new professionalism. Lieberman and Miller (2005) also referred to teacher leadership as creating a new vision of the teaching profession.

It is also important to note, however, that the impacts of teacher leadership have not been exclusively positive. For instance, teachers in Lieberman and Friedrich’s National Writing Project study (2007) were reluctant to describe themselves as leaders, associating leadership with telling people what to do. Other studies have reported issues related to the time required to take on extra responsibilities (Little & Bartlett, 2002) as well as shifts in the nature of peer relationships with other staff members (Barth, 2007).

Situating the Study: Questioning the Nature of Teacher Leadership

Despite almost 30 years of teacher leadership initiatives, according to Barth (2007), “something deep and powerful within school cultures seems to work against teacher leadership” (p. 10). Likewise, Rottman (2007) suggested that

many teacher leadership programs are better characterized as system-driven programs where teacher leaders carry out pre-determined district initiatives rather than challenge district level decision-making. On a similar note, Hargreaves (1994) warned of “contrived collegiality” in which the micro politics around control of teaching turn collaboration into coercion in order to achieve a particular district or Ministry outcome. For instance, Rottmann (2007) noted that much of the existing literature presents research that explores how *policy makers* have fostered *teacher leadership* (original emphasis). Engaging in the broader picture of schooling is described as “a perk for teachers who lead” and “a break from the routines of the classroom” (York-Barr & Duke, 2004, p. 259) rather than part of the professional role of everyday teachers.

In relation to these concerns, Frost and Harris (2003) described three overarching and interlinking factors that influence the nature and extent of teacher leadership. Firstly, conceptions of teacher leadership are shaped by discourses of teacher professionalism, which define the roles and responsibilities of professional teachers and the extent of their influence. Such discourses serve to “shape the way teachers think, talk, and act in relation to themselves as teachers individually and collectively” (Sachs, 2003, p. 122). As discussed earlier, a traditional view of the teacher as implementer has persisted in education and, in some cases, even teachers themselves are unsure about the boundaries of their work (Lieberman & Miller, 2005). For instance, results from Bangs and Frost’s (2012) international study revealed that the vast majority of teachers felt that it was normal for teachers to lead development within their *prescribed* role but far fewer felt that it was normal for teachers to lead change *beyond* their designated roles. Likewise, when asked whether teachers should lead the learning of other teachers, the reaction was mixed, which the authors suggest may have been interpreted as claiming status or position above other teachers.

Secondly, the organizational culture and context of educational policymaking have limited both notions of teacher leadership and teacher professionalism. In other words, “the bureaucratic, hierarchical nature of school often conflicts with the collegial nature of the reforms that teacher leadership is designed to bring about” (Lieberman & Miller, 2005, p. 39). In this environment, policies are used as a means of control at the expense of teacher autonomy (Muji & Harris, 2003). One only has to look at the history of educational decision making in Ontario (Anderson & Ben Jaffar, 2003; Gidney, 1999) to see that much of the educational reform of the past two-decades has continually focused on centralization and an increased role for school boards and Ministries. Consequently, rather than fostering a culture of learning and leadership, these structures promote a culture of compliance, painting a portrait of the professional teacher as one who meets organizational goals, works efficiently to meet “one size fits all” benchmarks of student achievement, and documents this process for the accountability of the system (Sachs, 2003).

Thirdly, Frost and Harris (2003) discussed the personal capacity of teachers to assume leadership roles and successfully carry them out. As Danielson (2007) points out, good leadership skills such as curriculum planning, data analysis, classroom research, and reflexivity have not been traditionally part of teacher preparation programs. Thus, according to Day and Harris (2003), teachers often reflect only at the classroom level and do not concern themselves with the reasons for or ethical considerations of their teaching. Furthermore, collaborating as part of a community of practitioners, an integral part of teacher leadership as identified by almost all the literature, is not guaranteed to be a part of the culture of teaching either (Hargreaves, 1994). As suggested by both Servage (2009) and Hargreaves (1994), depending on the extent to which they are truly teacher-driven, PLC’s may actually reinforced and reified a limited version of what teachers do. This again can be linked back to traditional discourses of teacher professionalism.

However, as stated by Zeichner and Liston (1996):

Teachers cannot restrict their attention to the classroom alone, leaving the larger setting and purposes of schooling to be determined by others...they need to determine their own agency through a critical and continual evaluation of the purposes, the consequences, and the social context of their calling. (p. 11)

Consequently, this study explores how teacher leadership is actually being realized in the daily lives of teachers. In particular the study attempts to explore the extent to which the leadership roles experienced by three teachers who have participated in the Teacher Learning and Leadership Program extend into the arena of broader educational change. Moreover, the study aims to identify the conditions that support and limit the ability of teachers to demonstrate sustained teacher leadership outside of such programs, supporting a vision of the teaching profession

where genuine teacher leadership is the norm rather than the work of the few who dare to challenge traditional notions of what it means to be a teacher.

Frameworks

Various authors define the roles of teacher leaders using diverse frameworks. York-Barr and Duke (2004) grouped teacher leadership roles into three broad levels: organizational-level work (e.g., membership in a site-based decision-making council), professional development work (e.g., mentoring), and instructional-level work (e.g., action research). In addition, Harris (2002), presented yet another framework:

1. Brokering: implementation of initiatives changes in classroom practices.
2. Participative leadership: collaborating with other teachers, forming committees, working with administration to develop school policies, sharing findings with other staff, influencing the practice of their peers.
3. Mediating as experts: invitations to present at board level or other schools, sitting on board/regional committees, presenting at conferences and other knowledge mobilization events, and
4. Forging close relationships: interacting with other educators.

It is this view of the roles of teacher leaders that most closely aligns with the purposes of this study as it positions teachers as experts of their own craft. As such, the framework serves as a good foundation for gathering insight into the potential of the TLLP to act as a mechanism for extending teacher leadership beyond the traditional classroom level.

While Harris' (2002) framework allows for exploration of the kinds of leadership roles TLLP participants experienced, it does not provide a lens for examining the extent to which teachers were able to extend their leadership "beyond the school walls" (Jimenez-Castellanos, 2010). To that end, I draw from Jimenez-Castellanos' (2010) adaptation of Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems model as applied to teacher engagement, which describes layers of embedded teacher engagement. Written from the perspective of the American school system, which has a federal department of education, I have adapted the framework for the Canadian context of classroom, school, district, and provincial level engagement (as there is no federal educational authority in Canada).

1. Microsystem: Engagement at the classroom level such as student-teacher interaction and lesson planning. As a result of external testing, workload, and increasing standards it is easy for teachers to get caught up in this work and, as such, this is the most typical form of teacher engagement both in the literature and in the daily work life of teachers.
2. Mesosystem: Engagement at the school level. This includes collaborating with teachers, grade-level planning, impacting school policy and practices, and working on school-level committees.
3. Exosystem: Engagement with the wider school community at the level of the district through to influence district policy and/or impact the practice of teachers in schools across the district. This could be through committee work, designing and delivering professional development seminars, or other teacher leadership roles.
4. Macro-system: Engagement beyond their own school district. This could include collaborating with school districts across the province, the provincial Ministry of Education, or teacher associations.

Combining these two frameworks, I analysed the kinds of leadership roles participants experienced as well as their depth of engagement.

Research Methods

This study is concerned with generating a rich description of teacher leadership roles and the conditions surrounding the sustainability of such roles. Consequently, the study lends itself well to the use of qualitative methods, which aim to understand the how and why of a particular human or social phenomenon (Creswell, 2009). Moreover, the study focuses on meaning and understanding from the participants' perspectives and the description of the findings is thick, rich, rooted in context, and supported by authentic participant data, all of which are central tenets of qualitative research (Merriam, 2009). Qualitative research, however, is multifaceted in nature and, as such, it is important to note the critical underpinnings of this study. With epistemological and ontological roots in critical theory (Giroux, 1983), critical researchers purposefully engage under-represented groups within the larger society in order to produce counter-narratives to dominant discourses and ways of thinking. In this sense, critical research aims to be transformative and to raise consciousness by making apparent both injustices and more equitable possibilities. This aligns well with this research, which questions the nature of teacher leadership often espoused through formalized, systems-driven teacher leadership programs. This research also aims to explore how such leadership actually played out in the working lives of teaching professionals, a group whose voice is often missing from the larger body of literature around this area of scholarship.

In order to garner information from those closest to the phenomenon of teacher leadership, a purposive sampling technique was used. Individual participants were chosen based on the nature of their TLLP project as assessed through an examination of a Ministry online database of former TLLP projects. Aligning with the vision of teacher leadership adopted in the study, sampling focused on projects that involved a teacher taking the lead with respect to the implementation of some sort of innovative pedagogy within the broader context of their school. It was thought that, due to the nature of their projects, these participants might have had more of an opportunity to expand their leadership into some of the more advanced roles and levels of engagement and would, therefore, be rich sources of data. Since the project was to be completed within the timeframe of a qualitative doctoral research course during the winter of 2012, six former participants were contacted through email, three of whom responded and agreed to participate in the study. It was decided that this was a manageable number of participants considering the brief time frame in which the study was to be completed.

In order to "enter into another person's perspective" (Patton, 2002, p. 341) and access the desired information, the primary data source for this study was semi-structured, individual interviews. In particular this technique was specifically employed so as to promote an atmosphere of comfortable conversation and provide flexibility in entertaining other questions that emerged as the conversations unfolded. Interviews were conducted using the online tool Skype due to the diverse geographic location of the participants. The sessions probed participants' motivations for becoming involved in the program, their personal understandings of teacher leadership, and the impact of the TLLP on their personal leadership development. Interviews were approximately 40 to 60 minutes in length and were recorded using the software program Audacity and later transcribed by the researcher. Participant checks were used to confirm content accuracy in the transcriptions, which were initially coded using a pre-designed scheme based on Harris' (2002) framework and the major research question. For instance, when participants talked about leveraging their expertise or facilitating the professional growth of others, this was coded as "mediating." These larger categories were later re-coded into smaller sub-themes using open coding to thematically categorize perceived limitations or supports regarding particular leadership roles. However, since this research is primarily concerned with roles of leadership that transcend the traditional purview of the classroom, the analysis omits both Harris' (2002) brokering role and Bronfenbrenner's microlevel of the classroom. Final project reports were also collected from all participants. These reports served as secondary data sources and were used to gather background information about the projects and ascertain challenges experienced by participants that may not have been discussed in the interviews.

Results

In terms of the Harris' (2002) framework, participants reported leadership experiences that fall within all three categories (participative, mediating, and foraging relationships) that are the focus of this study. However, the level of engagement in those experiences somewhat varied across the data. The results also indicate that participants who

were keen to sustain leadership roles upon completion of the TLLP faced numerous challenges and roadblocks and, as a result, all three participants vocalized feelings of discouragement, frustration, and disappointment. This was particularly the case in terms of engagement beyond the meso-level of the school. That being said, all of the participants continue to demonstrate teacher leadership in some way, some three years after their project's completion. These results are further detailed below, presented on an individual basis using pseudonyms. Summary charts, which outline the kinds of roles and the depth of engagement in those roles, are also presented for each participant. Lastly, an analysis of the results across participants is presented, which also outlines implications for both the TLLP and teacher leadership in general.

Marilyn

An experienced teacher of almost thirteen years, Marilyn completed her TLLP project in 2007-2008 as part of the first cohort of the program. Receiving over \$20,000, Marilyn's used her TLLP project to become a certified trainer for a literacy program that was being used in her school to engage struggling readers. After her own training was complete, Marilyn ran a three-day training session attended by 17 teachers from across her district, and she continues to train teachers in her own school as new staff members arrive each year. Marilyn explained, "I've always taken initiative to get involved in those sorts of opportunities – doing PD with staff, being department head, being a teacher mentor – I've always tried to take on a leadership role." Following from this, it felt natural for Marilyn to take on the role as project leader for the TLLP and become a program trainer.

Under her guidance, a number of current staff members have incorporated the literacy program into their teaching, and each year Marilyn trains new staff members who are interested in the program. Moreover, as a result of her teacher seminar at the board level and her presentation at a provincial conference, the program is now being used in a number of schools both in her own board and a second board in a different area of the province. She states:

The TLLP was an opportunity to take what I know was actually working in a classroom, that I'd had experience working on, and that people in my own board didn't have any experience with, and to be able to bring that to a wider audience.

Furthermore, it was evident that Marilyn felt she was an important part of the changes that occurred in her school. This was primarily expressed when she discussed the future of the program for current students as Marilyn's school was slated for closure at the end of the school year. According to Marilyn, she would like to train teachers at the students' new schools. She says, "We're now looking at how do we get our program out to other schools. There may be an opportunity for me to work with them."

Marilyn considers herself a resource person for trained teachers at her school and at other schools who rely on her for support with the implementation of their program. She commented, "[A] number of the schools ended up trying to implement the program following my training and so I continue to be a support for them either through phone or email and classroom visits if they wanted them". She talked about the relationships she built with educators outside of her own school as a result of her training program; commenting that she had made connections with a number of "teachers I probably wouldn't have otherwise been able to connect with." She did, however, discuss her frustration regarding a perceived lack of support from her school board:

I feel that I was limited in the sense that it [the project] didn't extend beyond that one particular moment in time. There was this sense that we completed it and that was it done and there has been no particular follow through or follow up.

Thus, any work in this area that Marilyn now engages in is a by-product of the training she had previously delivered, as she has not been asked to present to additional schools in her board. As previously discussed, Marilyn also expressed interest in becoming a resource person for the schools that will house the program's current students once her own school closes. According to Marilyn, "It's possible but it's a matter of the board taking the initiative and requesting the training." She was hopeful, but not confident, that such a request would be made.

Kathy

Kathy is a seasoned teacher of almost twenty-five years and, like Marilyn, completed her TLLP project during the first cohort in 2007-2008. Valued at \$15,000, Kathy's TLLP was a partnership project with another teacher in her school. The project focused on student critical thinking as part of a global citizenship program that culminated in the staging of a mock United Nations with four additional grade eight teachers and their students. Initially Kathy and her partner had sought funding from the school board, who, in turn, advised them to apply to the TLLP. Kathy was the team leader and, during implementation, she was the resource person for the program within her own school. When asked if she thought of herself as a teacher leader, she explained that she has long been recognized as a leader: "I'm always searching for new ideas. Teachers are coming to me and asking, what are you doing, how are you doing this?"

With respect to getting other teachers on board, she commented, "[I]t was educating the others on what we were doing, why we were doing it, and what they needed to do...I saw that as my responsibility as team leader to be a part of those conversations." Unfortunately, her colleagues were not inspired to take the reins and run the program on their own; consequently, as Kathy laments, when she moved into a system level position the following year, the model UN project suffered. She commented:

The TLLP opened our eyes to thinking big and thinking on a larger scale – not just what can I do in my classroom, but how can I engage the grade-level or the school? We had plans to try and expand it to more than just our school by my job changed and it was hard to maintain momentum.

She also noted curricular changes as impeding the project, which originally ran the whole year and culminated with the geography unit in May. The order of the units has since been re-organized and the geography unit is to be completed before the first reporting period, which impacted the time-line for the project. She did state, however, that the focus on critical thinking, the crux of the model UN, has continued, even under new administration and a number of staffing changes within the grade level itself.

According to Kathy, partnering with teachers in her school was a positive experience, stating, "I definitely have closer relationships with them and they certainly appreciate my leadership and look to me to do things but they don't necessarily want to do all the extra work that's involved." She noted that she continues to collaborate with her project partner on other projects, even though she is no longer at Kathy's school. Those collaborations include an online project on the use of wiki's in the classroom and the development of a board-wide program about incorporating the arts across the curriculum.

Kathy also felt that her work with the TLLP was integral in landing the system level position she attained the following year. In that position, she travelled to schools across Ontario to study student work habits and assist classroom teachers in better understanding student learning needs. Since returning to teaching, she has been designated a grade level leader and a literacy leader in her school, describing herself as "the kind of teacher that always takes risks by challenging myself with new things."

Despite these offshoots, Kathy did articulate that she would like to have received some follow-up from the board regarding her TLLP project, noting that she and her partner were not asked to present their project at other schools or to the board. She commented:

The board controlled the application; you submit to the board and if the board think it's good enough then they send it on to the Ministry. So they play that middleman role in the application but then they just seem to drop out of it. I would have liked them to ask us to present the project to someone in the end, even just for the accountability...I wondered afterwards, did the project just disappear into a black hole into our board?

Veronica

Veronica first began teaching high school in 2005 after a number of years working as an instructor at the post-secondary level. Completed as part of the second TLLP cohort in 2008-2009, Veronica's \$20,000 project stemmed from her school's need for teacher training in interactive whiteboard technology. According to Veronica, most teachers in her school were using the technology as 'glorified blackboards'. Finding teacher training from the board not readily available, Veronica decided she wanted to become a trainer:

I had paper work from the TLLP program, so I said, I want to do this - I want to get my certification. I want to be the resource person at not only in my own school, but I want to be the resource person for schools in the western side of our school district...because we are all facing the same problems - we ask for training and we don't get it.

Through the TLLP she has delivered training to teachers in her own school and continues to provide training to new teachers each year. This has had a positive influence on many teachers, and the whiteboards are now "used more to their true potentials because they [the teachers] now have the tools and understand how it works and what they could do with it rather than just using it as a glorified blackboard," she comments.

Although she considered herself to be somewhat of a teacher leader prior to her TLLP involvement, she has "definitely become more of a technology guru in the school" and serves as the 'go-to person' for interactive whiteboards and computers in general. Like Marilyn, Veronica has also trained other teachers in her board and, as a result, has influenced practice beyond her own school. In fact, for Veronica, this outreach component of her TLLP project was an integral element in terms of her impetus for applying to the program. She states:

Part of the motivation for going forward with the TLLP was not only to try and increase our student engagement but we weren't getting the services we needed from our board and people were clambering for this training.

Unfortunately, Veronica's desire for such outreach has been somewhat thwarted, as her board no longer grants leave requests for her to continue to train other teachers in the board. This has been very discouraging for Veronica, especially in light of the TLLP's emphasis on sharing exemplary practices. She states, "One of the messages that came across was sharing – not being like oh it's in my classroom, mine, mine, mine...but actually take it out there. This is what sort of left me with a bitter taste in my mouth." She discusses the increased cost efficiency in having her provide training to surrounding areas rather than having trainers "drive from board office, which is seven hours, and stay overnight," describing her frustration as "running into a brick wall every time."

Veronica's passion for leadership, however, now sees her working closely with the adult learning centre in her community. As evidenced in the following passage, this is a role in which she takes great pride:

V: Interestingly enough, I have been leveraged by the adult learning centre in town...they came to me and said they wanted to see an interactive whiteboard. So, after school hours, I had them come and I demonstrated what it was able to do. They then acquired funds to buy the technology for the adult learning centre and approached me to go and train their literacy people.

I: How did you get release time to do that?

V: That was done on my own time and it was volunteer work. I thought that was really neat on their part so I freely gave of my time.

She now acts as a resource person for the centre and describes their interactions as "a great relationship." Veronica also worked with a developer of French resources and presented workshops around the Smartboard as a tool for literacy development at two provincial conferences. Moreover, she comments that she has continued to develop relationships with teachers she met through her training sessions and her presentations. According to Veronica, their

relationship has “gone beyond the TLLP” and has extended to the exchange of resources and teaching tools in other curricular areas.

Analysis and Discussion

As illustrated in Leadership Roles and Depth of Engagement of former TLLP Participants (Table 1), for the participants in this study, it is apparent that their participation in the TLLP afforded them an opportunity to engage in various teacher leadership roles both in and beyond their own classrooms. They influenced the teaching practice of others through participative leadership roles, acted as experts and served as the resource person for others in mediating roles, and networked and built relationships with educators, in Veronica’s case, community agencies. Moreover, these were experiences that all three participants felt they would not have been privy to had they not received funding from the TLLP and, in Kathy’s case, were viewed as opening the door to a new job at the system level.

Table 1: Leadership Roles and Depth of Engagement of former TLLP Participants

| Participant | Participative | Mediating | Relationships |
|-------------|---|---|--|
| Marilyn | Provided training to staff at onset of project. Trains new staff members at the start of each new school year (mesosystem). Schools within and outside of her district have adopted the program after Marilyn presented at a provincial conference and delivered training sessions to teachers across her board (exosystem & macro-system). | Provides support to teachers within and beyond her own school who are utilizing the program in their own classrooms (mesosystem & exosystem). | Has developed strong relationships with school staff as an offshoot of being the resource person for the program (mesosystem). Has connected with teachers all over her board and the province as a result of her training sessions and conference presentations (exosystem & macro-system). |
| Kathy | Brought additional grade-level teachers into the fold of the project and worked with them as team leader (mesosystem). Has worked on a board-wide project providing PD to teachers around integrating the Arts (exosystem). Engaged with teachers around the province as part of the Student Work Study initiative, which explored student work habits to inform teacher practice (macro-system). | Provided support to other teachers engaged in the project in her school for the duration of the project. Now serves as grade-level and literacy leader in the school (mesosystem). Acted as a resource person for classroom teachers as part of the Student Work Study initiative (macro-system). | Has developed stronger relationships with her TLLP partners; still collaborates with one of them on other projects (mesosystem). Credits her work with the TLLP as helping her attain her system-level role; now connected with teachers around the province (macro-system). |
| Veronica | Provided training to teachers in her own school and at other schools in her district during the tenure of her TLLP (mesosystem & exosystem). Presented workshops to other teachers at two provincial level conferences (macro-system). | Is the “go-to” person in the school, not only for smartboards but also for all things technology (mesosystem). Works with the local adult learning centre to train instructors on the use of Smartboards (macro-system). | Has developed a network of colleagues within and beyond her school board where there is two-way exchange of resources and ideas (exosystem & macro-system). |

In terms of the depth of engagement, in many instances participants were able to extend their leadership roles beyond the meso-level of the school and into the levels of exosystem and even the macro-system. For Marilyn and Veronica, this was achieved through delivering training sessions and presentations to teachers both within their districts and at provincial conferences. For Kathy, deeper levels of engagement accompanied her new position as a Student Work Study teacher. In most cases there was a logical progression of leadership; workshops were delivered, the participant then became the resource person, and relationships and additional collaboration followed. In this sense, projects with built in outreach components seemed to provide more opportunity for higher depths of engagement in all three leadership roles. This is evidenced by the limited experiences of Kathy during the TLLP as compared with the richness of the leadership roles assumed by Veronica and Marilyn during their projects. The perseverance and internal drive of the participant also seems to have influenced participants' abilities to transcend traditional views of the role of teachers. Veronica, for instance, is determined to become a resource for other educators and continues to try and find ways to make that happen. Kathy also took it upon herself to extend her leadership by taking on a system level role as a work-study teacher. On the other hand, Marilyn expressed disappointment that she had not been asked to continue to provide her services but has not sought out such roles for herself either.

Lastly, with respect to sustainability, all three participants in this study continued to be teacher leaders in some form or another years after their TLLP had been completed. In some cases, they have taken on new formal roles such as lead teacher. In other instances, they continue to be viewed as experts in their respective areas and are sought out by colleagues and peers across their boards (and in some cases, the province). However, this has primarily been done without the support of their school districts, which all three participants identified as not taking an active interest in the project beyond the initial stages. Marilyn and Veronica, for instance, have both expressed a strong desire to take on more sustainable mediating roles within their respective boards but have been unsuccessful in securing these opportunities. Furthermore, all three participants indicate that the board's response to their projects has affected their view of the TLLP's ability to empower teachers as change agents. For example, while Marilyn comments that the program did empower her during the TLLP project, she noted, "In terms of allowing it to be a sustainable agent for change, I don't see that." Likewise, Veronica, who had the most issues with the board, revealed that she has twice thought about submitting a second TLLP application, but her previous experience has soured her from doing so.

Conclusions and Implications

The purpose of this study was to determine the extent to which TLLP participants experience leadership roles that extend beyond their traditional purview of the classroom. The study also explored the transferability of those leadership roles into participants' daily teaching lives after their TLLP project had been completed. Data from the study illustrates that although all three participants experienced deep engagement in a variety of leadership roles during the implementation of their TLLP projects, continuing to engage in such roles upon completion of the program proved to be more difficult. In particular, participants reported a lack of support on the part of the school board, which hampered and constrained the continuation of their capacity for leadership growth. This is a significant finding of this study as it suggests that, while programs like the TLLP are an attempt to acknowledge and value the expertise and contributions of teachers to the broader context of schooling, cultural norms, top-down hierarchies, and historical views of the teacher as implementer continue to circumscribe the conditions within which such programs take place. In this sense, a board's view of what constitutes teacher leadership may differ from that of a particular teacher who is eager to lead change. Further to this, even if a board did value genuine teacher innovation and leadership, the push for fiscal restraint, coupled with tight restrictions on budget allocations, often leaves them with little flexibility in terms of continuing to support the leadership growth of teachers once external funding for a particular project has been exhausted. This resistance to the TLLP on the part of some school boards was also noted in a more formal evaluation of the TLLP that was carried out after this study had been completed (Campbell, Lieberman, & Yashkina, 2013). In that study it was recommended that the TLLP team continue to emphasize the importance of teacher-led professional learning in their work with system leaders.

The findings of this study are of particular relevance to planning committees who organize and develop teacher leadership programs as well as progressive school boards who are genuinely interested in promoting real change in

school leadership development. In the case of the TLLP, the school board's only involvement in the process is as an initial vetting committee for proposals, and there is no formal mechanism to develop stronger relationships between TLLP participants and their school boards. Since fostering a culture of sharing is an important part of the TLLP, a natural extension of this would be to include a board-wide sharing component whereby boards invited TLLP participants to present their projects and network with other like-minded individuals who may be interested in picking up or carrying the torch. In light of these results, additional research with larger numbers of participants is suggested in order to further examine the impact of the TLLP on the promotion of meaningful and sustainable teacher leadership in Ontario. Finally, as Campbell, Lieberman and Yashkina (2013) first suggested that the perspectives of Ontario school boards be examined with respect to both the TLLP and teacher leadership in general so as to gather additional insights into the "brick walls" that seemed to exist between the participants in this study and their respective school boards.

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