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A Mixed Methods Investigation of Administrators' and Teachers' Perceptions of Teacher Leadership

Jori S. Beck
Old Dominion University, jbeck@odu.edu

KaaVonia Hinton
Old Dominion University, khintonj@odu.edu

Peter D. Wiens
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

Brandon Butler
Old Dominion University, bmbutler@odu.edu

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Authors: Jori S. Beck (Old Dominion University, KaaVonia Hinton (Old Dominion University), Peter D. Wiens (University of Nevada, Las Vegas, & Brandon Butler (Old Dominion University)

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Abstract

Teacher leadership has received attention for empirical and practical reasons. However, despite the evolution of the concept over the last several decades, there is still dissonance regarding the concept of teacher leadership. This study was grounded in the theory of professional identity to understand how administrators and teachers conceptualize teacher leadership. We studied the perceptions of administrators and teachers about teacher leadership using a survey and interviews. While there was some overlap in how administrators and teachers perceived teacher leadership, administrators viewed teacher leadership as occurring outside of the classroom while teachers located it inside of the classroom. Teachers also valued formal and informal mentoring. We provide implications for research and practice based on these findings.

Keywords: teacher leadership, teachers' perceptions, principals' perceptions

A Mixed Methods Investigation of Administrators' and Teachers' Perceptions of Teacher Leadership

Around the world, socio-political forces are shaping schools and the roles of teachers. Most recently, there has been increased interest in teacher leadership (TL) both within schools and empirically (Liljenberg, 2016; Muijs et al., 2013; Nguyen et al., 2019; Torrance & Forde, 2017; Wenner & Campbell, 2017). This is partially due to the changing role of building-level leaders and headteachers and the ensuing interest in distributed leadership (Levin & Schrum, 2017; Liljenberg, 2016; Muijs et al., 2013) to mitigate the weight of these increasingly complex roles. Empirically, there is interest in TL for its ability to influence student learning (Ingersoll et al., 2017). Angelle and Teague (2014) have also found a relationship between TL and collective efficacy, but it is unclear whether TL fosters collective efficacy or vice versa. While the need for TL is clear, the issue of conceptualizing TL remains even after decades of research.

The research on TL shows that both formal and informal roles are widely accepted (Muijs et al., 2013; Nguyen et al., 2019; Wenner & Campbell, 2017). Hunzicker (2017) claimed, 'Conceptions of [TL] are trending away from formal titles and positions to embrace a more informal, integrated approach' (p. 1). She also noted that TL is increasingly recognized as a stance, or way of thinking and being. Smulyan (2016) championed the notion of TL as stance and conceptualized it as a 'direct challenge to the prevalent discourses and policies that currently frame teachers' work' (p. 9). With this much dissonance regarding the role or qualities of teacher leaders in the empirical literature, we were curious to see how this manifested within our home state of Virginia—particularly the perceptions of building-level leaders and teachers because these perceptions can influence how teacher leaders perceive themselves (Stryker & Burke, 2000). For example, if administrators view and utilize teacher leaders as quasi-administrators this

may influence their ability to earn the trust of their teacher colleagues whom they may need to coach or otherwise support. Indeed, social context is a mitigating factor for TL (Davis & Leon, 2009). Thus, understanding these varying perceptions has implications for practice and policy—both the ways in which TL roles are designed as well as the supports for teacher leaders. Strengthening TL could mean academic growth for students (Ingersoll et al., 2017). The research question guiding the current mixed methods study was, How do administrators' and teachers' perceptions of TL compare and contrast? To provide further context for our study, we begin by reviewing the research on TL.

Literature Review

Conceptualizing Teacher Leadership

The five waves of teacher leadership (Levin & Schrum, 2017) are a useful way to begin conceptualizing TL in light of the messiness of the concept. Specifically, there has been an evolution from formal TL roles to informal TL roles, including *teacherpreneuers*. In the first wave of TL, formal roles such as department or grade-level chair were recognized. Davis and Leon (2009) situated this wave in the 1980s and further described TL during this time as, 'primarily an individual role-based activity concerned with maintaining efficient and effective educational programs in schools' (p. 272).

New, formal roles emerged in the second wave such as curriculum facilitator or lead teacher (Levin & Schrum, 2017). This wave was generated during the educational reform movement that was spurred by the publication of *A Nation at Risk* in which there was increased scrutiny and concern about student learning (Davis & Leon, 2009). Davis and Leon noted, 'In this vein, [TL] became synonymous with instructional leadership' (p. 272). They further highlighted that TL was individualized and role-based at this time.

The third wave generated mentoring and advising roles (Levin & Schrum, 2017), and TL shifted from being outside of teachers' work to a part of it (Davis & Leon, 2009). Furthermore, the third wave saw TL become less hierarchical and a catalyst for systemic change in schools. The fourth wave was denoted by distributed leadership (Levin & Schrum, 2017). In the fifth wave, teacherpreneurs emerged as educators who remain in the classroom part-time but take on leadership and advocacy roles outside the classroom. Thus, both formal and informal roles are relevant to TL and have been embraced since the emergence of TL in the 1980s.

Yet, there are scholars who suggest conceptualizations of TL are still evolving and view leadership as an obligation to diverse students and to ensuring equity, social justice, and democracy (Bradley-Levine, 2018; Milner et al., 2015; Robinson & Ross Baber, 2013; Smulyan, 2016). For example, Milner and colleagues (2015) maintain that addressing the needs of diverse students 'requires school leaders to develop professional identities that support diversity, equality (when appropriate), equity, and inclusiveness' (p. 86). Similarly, Smulyan (2016) noted that a teacher leader 'coalesces around being a professional, an intellectual, a fierce advocate for students and colleagues who ensures that everyone has the opportunity to learn and grow, and a collaborative member of a community dedicated to civic and social justice' (pp. 16-17). Recent conceptualizations of TL emphasize a commitment to acknowledging and combating racism and other oppressions and advocating for marginalized students (Bradley-Levine, 2018; Rojas, 2018).

Teacher Leader Roles

A variety of TL roles have also been identified in this body of scholarship. Roles are important to understand for their relationship to conceptualizations of teacher leadership; for example, in each of the five waves of TL described above, TL roles were shaped by the context

of the concept at the time (e.g., the first wave included formal roles while the ensuing waves grew to include more informal roles). In their synthesis, York-Barr and Duke (2004) identified different formal roles that teacher leaders take on based on the research they reviewed, and these roles informed the creation of our instrument. Thus, we present them here in their entirety. York-Barr and Duke organized these roles according to dimensions of practice: (a) coordination, management; (b) school or district curriculum work; (c) professional development of colleagues; (d) participation in school change/improvement; (e) parent and community involvement; (f) contributions to the profession; and (g) preservice teacher education. Harrison and Killion (2007) identified 10 roles for teacher leaders, but it was not clear what evidence these roles were based on. These roles were quite different from those presented by York-Barr and Duke (2004) and include: (a) resource provider, (b) instructional specialist, (c) curriculum specialist, (d) classroom supporter, (e) learning facilitator, (f) mentor, (g) school leader, (h) data coach, (i) catalyst for change, and (j) learner. Harrison and Killion (2007) emphasized that teachers can demonstrate leadership in multiple, overlapping ways.

Liljenberg (2016) conducted case studies of three schools in Sweden and their TL practices. They demonstrated how teacher leaders—including team leaders, learning leaders, development leaders, and instructional specialists—held hierarchical positions within the school, but their agency was often undermined when principals asked them to perform management tasks, thus reinforcing unidirectional, or top-down, leadership. This study conveyed the importance of context in determining not only what types of TL roles are needed, but also how these are enacted. Liljenberg concluded that ‘the potential for teacher leadership has not been fully exploited’ (p. 37). In sum, these three articles offer a global look at how TL has been conceptualized within various roles.

Characteristics of Teacher Leaders

To carry out TL roles, some researchers suggest teacher leaders must possess certain characteristics, qualities, traits, and/or dispositions, particularly the ability to influence others (Angelle & Schmid, 2007; Berg & Zoellick, 2019; Danielson, 2007; Dohlen & Karvonen, 2018); collaborate (Carver, 2016; Krisko, 2001; Taylor et al., 2011; Von Dohlen & Karvonen, 2018); take initiative (Cosenza, 2015; Danielson, 2007; Fairman & Mackenzie, 2014); advocate for change (Bradley-Levine, 2018; Carver, 2016; Danielson, 2007; Scribner & Bradley-Levine, 2010; Rojas, 2018; Smulyan, 2016); and model professionalism, including teaching expertise (Angelle & Schmid, 2007; Cosenza, 2015; Fairman & Mackenzie, 2014). Teacher leaders are also viewed as enthusiastic/passionate (Angelle & Schmid, 2007; Danielson, 2007; Carver, 2016); confident (Danielson, 2007; Poekert et al., 2016); and open-minded (Danielson, 2007; Fairman & Mackenzie, 2014).

Angelle and Schmid (2007) noted that of the 65 rural teachers and principals asked to define TL in their study, 'most frequently mentioned personal characteristics' (p. 784) such as being positive, dependable, charismatic, and driven. Similarly, Krisko (2001) presented a profile of teacher leaders that included several characteristics: 'creative, efficacious/effective, flexible, lifelong learner, finds humor, takes risks, intrapersonal sense, and interpersonal skills' (p. 9). These traits facilitate a teacher leader's ability to influence others. While TL might very well be an 'umbrella term' (Neumerski, 2012; Taylor et al., 2011) that encompasses numerous roles, responsibilities, and behaviours, the literature also reveals few scholars have considered teachers' and administrators' own perceptions (or profiles) of TL (Angelle & DeHart, 2011; Brooks et al., 2004).

In this manuscript, our focus was on administrators' and teachers' perceptions of TL specifically. Thus, it is important to provide an operational definition of perception. According to Munhall (2008),

> Perception, which is mediated through the interconnectedness of mind and body, is an individual's access to experience and interpretation in the world … Perception is like a set of lenses through which an individual views reality. These lenses evolve from perspectives of location, subjectivity, particularity, history, embodiment, contradiction, and the web of teachings imparted to the individual. (para. 2).

Thus, administrators' and teachers' perceptions of TL are informed by complex systems and experiences. We used the theory of professional identity to ground the current study.

Theoretical Framework

The current study is grounded in the theory of professional identity (Stryker & Burke, 2000). Specifically, we use Stryker and Burke's definition of identity to refer to 'parts of a self composed of the meanings that persons attach to the multiple roles they typically play in highly differentiated contemporary societies' (p. 284). Although identity theory began with a focus on individuals' self-structures, the theory has evolved to recognize and include society's influence on behaviour. Stryker and Burke have merged the two strands of identity theory to recognize both the internal and external elements of identity theory which is most relevant for the current study. Specifically, we were interested in role identity,

> Social structure is made up of interconnecting positions and associated roles, each linked through the activities, resources, and meanings that are controlled mutually or sequentially. In addition to the roles themselves, each role or set of roles is embedded in

> one or more of a variety of groups that provide context for the meanings and expectations associated with the role. (p. 289)

This has implications for TL because each teacher leader is situated within a school and division that shapes their work. How their administrators and colleagues perceive them will also shape their professional identity in addition to their beliefs about the roles.

Some researchers have begun to explore the concept of professional identity as it relates to TL. Wenner and Campbell (2018) explored how two teacher leaders participated in TL and how their identities were shaped by communities of practice. The authors argued that understanding the function and type of community of practice would facilitate clarity in identifying and explicating theories about productive TL; supporting and making these theories explicit in the expertise and performance of teacher leaders; and creating tools that support the codification, transmission, and storage of this knowledge. They identified ‘”thick” and “thin”’ (p. 10) teacher leader identities in their study and concluded that teacher leaders with thick teacher leader identities may be more effective. Lack of teacher leader identity can come from internal forces such as self-doubt and negative self-perceptions and/or from external factors such as peer and administrator responses and expectations (Russo-Netzer & Shoshani, 2018; Sinha & Hanuscin, 2017). Thus, it is important to understand the perspectives of faculty and staff within a school and district to understand how TL is enacted—or not. Growing in teacher leader identity is an evolving, iterative process that requires the appropriate setting/context, time, practice, reflection, and collaboration (Angelle & Schmid, 2007; Carver, 2016; Poekert et al., 2016; Sinha & Hanuscin, 2017; Smulyan, 2016). Next, we elaborate on the methods we used to investigate our research question.

Methods

We chose a partially mixed concurrent dominant status design (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2009) for this study in order to examine our research question from multiple angles and achieve the widest understanding possible. According to Leech and Owuegbuzie, 'A partially mixed concurrent dominant status design involves conducting a study with two facets that occur concurrently, such that either facet has the greater emphasis' (p. 268). We used two methods of data collection: a mixed methods survey and follow-up interviews. Thus, the qualitative data were dominant in our design which is also reflected in our findings. The qualitative data were analysed separately from the quantitative data, but the two are reported together in the findings section to show how they complement and contrast with one another. Below, we elaborate on the research context, participants, methods of data collection, and data analysis more specifically.

Research Context

The U.S. state of Virginia was the setting for the current study and is the context within which most of the research team operates. While neighbouring states such as North Carolina have created TL professional standards and licensure endorsements, Virginia has not yet done this work. Thus, we wanted to better understand the degree of interest in TL throughout the state. Virginia is divided into eight superintendent's regions which we used for data collection purposes as we describe below. These regions loosely map onto the geographic features of each respective region; for example, Region 2 is the Tidewater region and is the area near the coast of southeast Virginia. We emailed leadership in each school division[1] in the state to solicit their participation in this study.

Participants

[1] Virginia uses the term *school division* instead of *school district*.

For this study, 20 school divisions agreed to participate. These participating divisions were situated in superintendent's regions 1, 2, 3, 6, 7, and 8. The last two superintendent's regions, regions 4 and 5, included school divisions that either declined to participate, denied our IRB application, or did not respond to our email to participate. In one instance, a school division asked us to make substantial project changes so we declined their participation. We emailed school division leadership four times between April 2018 and December 2018 regarding participation to avoid end-of-year state testing windows. We purposely did not name the school divisions represented in this study to protect their confidentiality.

In our recruitment email to potential participants, we invited all teachers and administrators to participate in the survey. In an effort to encourage a variety of responses, we did not qualify teacher leaders in a certain way (e.g., formal or informal roles, TL as stance), but trusted that both those who identified as teacher leaders and those working in schools would be able to recognize TL. In all, 122 administrators (15.3% of the study sample) and 676 teachers (84.7% of the study sample) participated in the survey. Table 1 provides the racial and ethnic identities of the participants who responded. Additionally, 86 of these participants identified as men (10.8%), 438 identified as women (54.9%), and 2 identified as non-binary (0.3%). Tables 2 and 3 provide the ages of responding participants along with their years of experience in education, respectively. Participants could elect to participate in an interview through indicating their interest on the survey. In total, we conducted 31 interviews with seven school administrators/central office personnel and 24 teachers/instructional specialists.

Instruments

The quantitative instrument used in this study was created to address voids in the TL literature. Specifically, we wanted to address the need for exploring varying concepts of TL.

Participating administrators and teachers were provided with questions that were similar in content but tailored to their positions and included topics such as types of TL positions, training for TL positions, and diversity in TL positions. For the analysis in this study, we selected the block of items that ask participants to identify characteristics of teacher leaders. As shown in Appendix A, participants were provided a list of 11 qualities (e.g., mentor, learning facilitator, data coach, etc.) and marked whether or not these qualities were important to teacher leadership. Each survey included 25 items and used a 5-point Likert scale with the following anchors: (1) *never*, (2) *almost never*, (3) *sometimes*, (4) *often*, and (5) *always* (see Appendix A for the items analysed for this study). The survey was vetted by experts in TL who are actively researching this concept. The interview protocol was aligned in content to the survey, but provided participants the opportunity to expand on their answers (see Appendix B for the interview protocol). Interviews were semi-structured (Merriam, 2009) so that the research team collected similar data across participants but had the autonomy to ask follow-up, clarifying questions when necessary. In all, we collected 16 hours of audio (966.5 minutes) and 339 pages of transcript data. Both surveys and interviews are often used to study perceptions.

Data Analysis

Quantitative. To answer the research question, we conducted two different analyses. To begin, we examined the qualities teacher leaders should embody as shown in Table 4. We calculated descriptive statistics to understand how teachers and administrators viewed these qualities as necessary for TL. Then we calculated analysis of variance (ANOVA; Hinkle et al., 2003) to understand if these differences were statistically significant. Next, we used responses from this question to calculate the total number of qualities participants thought teacher leaders should have. Using this new variable, we examined overall trends in the participants using

descriptive statistics. Finally, we calculated descriptive statistics on the total qualities selected by participants as well as an ANOVA to understand if there were statistical differences between teachers and administrators. All quantitative analyses were conducted using SPSS v.24.

Qualitative. We used Saldaña's (2009) guidelines for coding data multiple times. Specifically, we coded qualitative survey and interview data from administrators and teachers iteratively. The first two authors of this manuscript began this process by individually coding all of the administrator and teacher survey data. After we each had a sense of the data and emergent codes as a result of our individual coding, we met to talk about what we saw in the data and created a codebook of 24 codes (see Table 5). We used structural codes, descriptive codes, in vivo codes, and values codes. This process of analyst triangulation was iterative; the first two authors talked through the application of the codebook before coding independently and reviewing and commenting on each other's work. This process was repeated until all data were coded to the agreement of the first two authors. The first author then used the first round of coding to generate themes for the findings and write up the report. The second author reviewed and confirmed this analysis.

Reliability and Validity

We used multiple approaches to ensure the reliability and validity of this study. To ensure the content validity of our study, we asked two nationally recognized experts in TL to evaluate our instrument. We see the credibility of our interpretation of the qualitative data as an issue of validity (Maxwell, 2013). The main approach we used to ensure the validity of this interpretation was analyst triangulation (Patton, 2002). This approach helped us to apply the codebook consistently throughout the data analysis process which was extensive. All codes were negotiated and agreed upon by the first two authors of this manuscript. Finally, our qualitative data were

rich: we had 786 qualitative survey responses and 16 hours of audio which translated to 339 pages of transcript data.

Findings

In this section, we report the findings related to our research question: How do administrators' and teachers' perceptions of TL compare and contrast? We report quantitative and qualitative findings together to convey a holistic picture of the views of teachers and administrators respectively.

Important Roles of Teacher Leadership: Quantitative Results

We began our quantitative analysis by examining descriptive statistics for participants' perceptions of the important roles of TL. Results of this analysis can be seen in Table 4. The most commonly selected role was mentor, which was selected by 84.6% of participants. The least commonly selected role was data coach, which was only selected by 28.7% of participants.

Next, we examined responses by group (administrator and teacher; see Table 4). There was agreement between administrators and teachers for five of the roles and disagreement for the other six. Administrator responses ranged from 85.6% (mentor) to 53.5% (data coach). Administrators ordered the importance of these roles as follows: mentor, learner, school leader, instructional specialist, learning facilitator, catalyst for change, classroom supporter, champion for diversity, resource provider, curriculum specialist, and data coach. Teachers selected roles from mentor (84.4%) to data coach (24.1%) in a different order from the administrators as follows: mentor, learner, classroom supporter, resource provider, learning facilitator, school leader, champion for diversity, instructional specialist, catalyst for change, curriculum specialist, and data coach.

Finally, we examined the number of roles that administrators and teachers selected for TL. For all participants, the mean score for roles was $M = 7.17$ (minimum = 0, maximum = 11, standard deviation = 2.67). For administrators, the mean was $M = 7.82$ (SD = 2.63) and for teachers, $M = 7.04$ (SD = 2.66). One-way ANOVA indicated that this was a statistically significant difference ($F = 6.51$, $p = .01$).

Administrators' Perceptions: Qualitative Findings

Through the qualitative data analysis, we generated an explanation about what administrators and teachers valued, respectively, regarding TL. Based on the emic codes we generated, administrators most often cited leading beyond the classroom, being student-centred, serving as a role model, and taking on formal roles. For administrators, teacher leaders worked beyond their classrooms to exert influence in their buildings. One administrator whom we interviewed thought of her school's teacher of the year when we asked her how she conceptualized TL, 'It's that concept of like looking at the micro and the macro levels. She takes initiative to understand how her part fits in with the big picture.' Another administrator we interviewed described what leading beyond the classroom looks like specifically, 'I think that teacher leaders need to be in a position to support other teachers or less experienced teachers with how they can help students with calming down techniques and self-regulation strategies and that type of thing.' Leading beyond the classroom also included collaborating with colleagues as another administrator explained, 'But when you see someone who's willing to just share and collaborate, to me that shows signs of teacher leadership right away. Because you're not isolating yourself. You're seeing that in order to be successful we have to all work together toward that common goal.' Thus, administrators positioned teacher leaders outside of the classroom and, more specifically, as leaders who supported their peers.

Administrators also noted it was important for teacher leaders to be student-centred. One administrator summed up consensus on this point when she noted, ‘I think a good teacher leader is someone who really has to understand that this job is about putting children first and what's best for students first.’ This was reiterated across many of the surveys and interview transcripts we analysed. Another administrator framed this concept within self-efficacy:

> It really is this concept of having a strong internal locus of control. It’s the self-efficacy of it that she really does believe that she is the primary factor in student achievement. It doesn’t matter what kids she gets, what neighbourhood they come from, what reading level they’re on when they walk in the doors in September. She’s going to get them where they need to be, and there are not going to be any excuses about it.

For administrators, the ultimate goal of TL was supporting students.

Within the administrator data, we also noted that this population reiterated the significance of teacher leaders serving as role models. This included both serving as an example in the building, but also modelling particular practices when called upon. One administrator explained the latter:

> I think [TL] really starts with understanding and modelling and utilizing best practices on your own. I think some of the teacher leaders that I’ve watched grow into more formalized roles were already leading in a way that they may not have even recognized just by the really strong and sound practices that they were modelling (sometimes not even intentionally) on a day-to-day basis.

Another administrator explained how this played out in a STEM initiative, ‘So even within those categories that are really pre-K to 12 implementation, identifying teachers who have really strong practices in any of those areas who can serve as models and then eventually be grown as

coaches.' Thus, administrators saw teacher leaders as both informal and formal role models, including those who could model practices.

The final element that administrators identified as central to TL was formal roles. Formal roles took a variety of forms, including committee membership, department chair, and other roles that took place outside of the classroom. One administrator explained how she conceptualized formal roles within TL,

> And they [teacher leaders] might become more formal on it, formalized through committee leadership, through mentoring at the grade level, mentoring at the building level, sitting on committees like curriculum, pacing, benchmarks. But I do believe it starts at that grade level, and the first step may be [serving as] on grade-level chair, you know?

Another administrator identified several formal roles and noted that some were paid while some were unpaid TL positions:

> So formally, obviously my department chairs are teacher leaders. I've got committee chairs that are teacher leaders. PLC leaders. They may not be in charge of your department, but you're in charge of your grade-level content. Obviously I've got coaches, activity sponsors, and all of those. I mean, we've tried to build this whole school program. And so, knowing that that's our mission, it's not just about the instruction in the classroom. It's really about developing the child. So all of those kind of paid and unpaid supplementary roles are important.

To summarize, administrators consistently situated TL outside of the classroom and identified teacher leaders as student-centred role models in their building. Administrators identified formal

roles for teacher leaders outside of the classroom. Next, we elaborate on teachers' perceptions of TL.

Teachers' Perceptions: Qualitative Findings

Teachers also valued leading beyond the classroom, being student-centred, serving as a role model, and taking on formal TL roles. However, teachers noted the importance of mentoring and leading from the classroom, which administrators did not have a strong consensus about. Teachers viewed leading beyond the classroom just as the administrators did. This included collaborating with colleagues and even the community as one teacher explained:

> Being visible and being out where parents and communities see you I think is also another part of leadership … being involved with the PTA. Just being a part of the school culture, not just what's going on in your classroom. There are a lot of really great teachers who do amazing things in their classrooms, but that's all they do. So I think … we're all kind of PR people for public school. So the more we can do that, the better.

Another teacher distinguished between TL and administration:

> I think it is someone who is a leader not only in the classroom but in the school atmosphere. A lot of people think that [TL] means moving on and becoming a principal, and I don't see it that way at all.

Thus, teachers extended TL beyond their classrooms and schools to their communities as well.

When teachers we interviewed spoke about being student-centred, they mainly focused on instruction,

> People who [are] … not just teaching a lesson, but thinking outside the box. What kind of resources, what kind of grants can we bring into the school? And how can we get these kids to click and really respond to the material and get excited about learning?

Another teacher noted that teacher leaders are experts in their classrooms, ‘And even leading student groups. Because not always but very often the teacher leaders are the ones with exceptional classroom management, classroom styles, and ways to engage kids.’ A third participant identified the social-emotional skills that made teacher leaders successful with students, ‘They have a strong rapport. They also have an empathy, compassion for what a student may be going through, not just what their grades are. Learning about them on a personal level.’ For teachers, being student-centred meant teaching the whole child.

Like administrators, teachers also recognized that teacher leaders serve as role models for their peers, ‘They might just be the people who are setting a good example and kind of paving the paths for their peers and happy to answer questions or provide examples of how you might want to approach things.’ Another teacher extended this idea and noted that teacher leaders serve as role models for the students as well as teachers,

> Being a good role model. Not just for the students but for other teachers. You know, there’s all the basic stuff. Showing up to work, being on time, participating in all the things that we do, whether it’s dressing up like this or that or showing up at events.

Like the administrators, some teachers noted that being a role model also meant modelling instructional practices in the classroom, ‘Helping their colleagues, but also modelling—whether it’s modelling a lesson or modelling a curriculum or a format.’

Teachers also listed a variety of roles teacher leaders adopted from committee work to more formalized and monetarily incentivized positions like department chair or athletic director. One teacher illustrated this diversity of positions in her response about TL positions she enjoyed,

> I would say other than just being a lead social studies teacher for a year previously at my previous school, really my current job, in which I’m leading PLCs, facilitating weekly

> planning meetings with K through 5 grade levels. Coaching—one-on-one coaching. Leading learning labs and just helping to facilitate an environment in which teachers are free to talk to one another and us as the curriculum team about student work and delving into why students are doing what they're doing.

One teacher noted that the idea of roles was central to TL,

> I think it's more than just being a teacher. I think you need to step into other roles. I think, sometimes, teachers just stick with one position and don't really immerse themselves in anything else in the community or the school.

Thus, the teachers in this study associated roles with TL as well.

Based on the frequency of responses, it is worth noting that teachers also noted mentoring and leading from the classroom as essential elements of TL. These were concepts administrators did not note as frequently. Teachers recognized that teacher leaders mentored a variety of people in these roles, including students, teacher candidates, new in-service teachers, and even other teacher leaders. For example, one teacher described how she mentored teacher candidates, teachers pursuing National Board for Professional Teaching Standards certification, and a teacher who was new to her building. Teachers noted that mentoring was both formal and informal. One teacher described her formal mentoring roles and preparation for the role,

> I am the lead clinical faculty for [university name redacted] in my building. So I'm the one who places all the student teachers and recommends staff to go train for clinical faculty. I am actually also clinical faculty at [university name redacted] … So I've been through their training program for clinical faculty as well.

Other teacher participants noted that the role of mentor was often informal, ‘I don't think it has to be that you go to a class to be able to be a mentor to do that. I think it can be just anybody who feels they're drawn to help someone in the field of teaching.’

Finally, it was important to teachers that a teacher could be a leader in the classroom—not just outside of it. This was often recognized as the duality of teaching *and* leading within and beyond the classroom as this teacher noted,

> An educator who is dedicated to simultaneously teaching her/his own students, developing new ideas, new methods, and pursuing education in the classroom with her or his students alongside desiring to bring that knowledge to other teachers so that they can succeed along with the teacher leader.

Another participant elaborated on this point by indicating that every teacher was naturally a leader,

> All teachers have to be leaders, at least in their very own classroom. So I truly believe that every teacher is, in one way or another, a leader of some sort. As far as their abilities and the things that they’re able to do with their students, and kind of the direction and the tone and the pace of their room.

The teachers who participated in this study conceptualized TL much like the administrators did: leading beyond the classroom, being student-centred, serving as a role model, and taking on formal roles. However, unlike administrators, they also noted that TL includes both formal and informal mentoring and could be situated in the classroom. We unpack the implications of these findings next.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore how TL is conceptualized within the Commonwealth of Virginia, with particular attention to differences between administrators' and teachers' perceptions. This has implications for professional role identity (Stryker & Burke, 2000): the way administrators and teachers conceptualize TL will influence how teacher leaders identify and understand their roles as well as the types of roles administrators support, embrace, and make possible. If there are discrepancies between these conceptualizations, it could create conflict for teacher leaders. The quantitative findings revealed a surprising amount of overlap in how administrators and teachers conceptualized TL and that both groups valued mentoring and instructional leadership. However, administrators valued roles such as school leader and data coach more than teachers who, instead, saw importance in roles such as classroom supporter and resource provider. The qualitative findings revealed a similar overlap in administrator and teacher perceptions regarding TL as both groups noted the importance of teacher leaders being student-centred, taking on formal roles, and serving as role models. However, teachers identified leading from the classroom and mentoring as more important to them than administrators did. Perhaps most interesting, both administrators and teachers located TL outside of classrooms although administrators emphasized this more. Our study is aligned with previous research on TL that shows that both formal and informal roles are embraced (Muijs et al., 2013; Nguyen et al., 2019; Wenner & Campbell, 2017). Particularly, previous studies have found that teachers and administrators define TL in ways similar to those we studied. For example, the participants in Angelle and Teague's (2014) study defined teacher leadership as encompassing being a decision maker, role model, intermediary, and visionary. Katzenmeyer and Moller (2001) described TL as focusing on teaching and learning rather than overall school management. Similarly, Consenza (2015) found that TL was perceived as collaborating, sharing best practices, taking action, role

modelling, and performing formal roles. Learning more about how teachers and principals perceive TL is important, especially because, as Angelle and Teague (2014) pointed out, their voices have largely been muted in discussions about TL even though how they interpret leadership is important for school improvement.

External perceptions of teacher leader roles will affect how teacher leaders develop and how effective they are as teacher leaders. Each context is unique; for example, in parts of Canada and New Zealand, teachers participate in decision making around summative assessments and there are high levels of trust in schools and teachers' professionalism (Edwards, 2017). This is generally not true within the United States where teachers have been scrutinized and held publicly accountable for centuries (O'Day, 2002). Moreover, the needs of students at the early childhood level are quite different than the needs of adolescents. Thus, teacher leader positions must be carefully crafted to meet the needs of the instructional context and learners and will inherently be tied to the socio-political context as well. Indeed, while not consistent, some of our participants confused TL with administration, and some even felt as though TL was a ruse or illusion.

Conclusion

We encourage school personnel to expand beyond formal roles and to consider the notion of TL as stance (Smulyan, 2016) and how TL can be used for diversity and social justice initiatives. None of our participants mentioned how TL roles can be used to support such initiatives, yet the disproportionalities and injustices in schools have been well documented (e.g., Milner et al., 2019). Moreover, Wenner and Campbell (2017) have cited this as an area of growth in the TL literature. Over three decades ago, The Holmes Group (1986) called to diversify the

teaching profession through providing different paths in the teacher workforce. While progress has been made, there are exciting innovations yet to come.

Declaration of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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Table 1

Participant Demographics by Race and Ethnicity

Racial/Ethnic Group	All Sample	Sample Administrators	Sample Teachers	All Virginia Teachers*
Asian American/Asian/Asian Pacific American/Pacific Islander/Other	3 (0.4%)	0	3 (0.4%)	2290 (2.2%)
Bi-Racial/Bi-Ethnic/Multi-Racial/Multi-Ethnic	81 (10.2%)	11 (9.0%)	70 (10.4%)	1153 (1.1%)
Black/African/Black American/African American/French or English Speaking Caribbean Islander/Other	44 (5.5%)	14 (11.5%)	30 (4.4%)	13768 (13%)
Indigenous/Native American/American Indian/Alaskan Native/Other	2 (0.3%)	0	2 (0.3%)	173 (0.2%)
Latin@/Mexican/Mexican American/Chica@/Puerto Rican/Central American/South American/Spanish or English Speaking Caribbean Islander/Hispanic/Other	3 (0.4%)	0	3 (0.4%)	3362 (3.2%)
White/European/White American/European American/Caucasian/Other	388 (48.6%)	61 (50.0%)	327 (48.4%)	85112 (80.4%)
Total	521 (65.3%)	86 (70.5%)	435 (64.3%)	105858 (99.9%)
Missing	277 (34.7%)	36 (29.5%)	241 (35.7%)	48 (0.04%)

*Virginia Department of Education, 2021

Table 2

Participants' Ages

Age Range	All Participants	Participant Administrators	Participant Teachers
20-29	60 (7.5%)	1 (0.8%)	59 (8.7%)
30-39	164 (20.6%)	25 (20.5%)	139 (20.6%)
40-49	144 (18.0%)	33 (27.0%)	111 (16.4%)
50-59	115 (14.4%)	17 (13.9%)	98 (14.5%)
Over 60	39 (4.9%)	11 (9.0%)	28 (4.1%)
Total	522 (65.4%)	87 (71.3%)	435 (64.3%)
Missing	276 (34.6%)	35 (28.7%)	241 (35.7%)

Table 3

Participants' Years of Experience in Education

Years of Experience	All Participants	Participant Administrators	Participant Teachers
0-5	75 (9.4%)	0	75 (11.1%)
6-10	88 (11.0%)	6 (4.9%)	82 (12.1%)
11-20	213 (26.7%)	40 (32.8%)	173 (25.6%)
21-30	112 (14.0%)	28 (23.0%)	84 (12.4%)
31-40	30 (3.8%)	8 (6.6%)	22 (3.3%)
More Than 40 Years	8 (1.0%)	6 (4.9%)	2 (0.3%)
Total	522 (65.4%)	88 (72.1%)	438 (64.8%)
Missing	276 (34.6%)	34 (27.9%)	238 (35.2%)

Table 4

Percent of Participants Selecting Qualities for TL

	Administrator	Teacher
Mentor	85.6	84.4
Learner	83.3	82.5
School Leader*	80.0	64.3
Instructional Specialist*	76.7	57.4
Learning Facilitator	76.7	68.8
Catalyst of Change*	72.2	56.5
Classroom Supporter*	68.9	81.2
Champion for Diversity	65.6	59.9
Resource Provider*	62.2	74.1
Curriculum Specialist	57.8	51.1
Data Coach*	53.5	24.1

*Differences between teachers and administrators were statistically significant ($p < .05$).

Table 5

Example Codes

Code	Definition	Example
Student Centred	Serving students specifically. Students are the mission.	"Modelling respectful behaviour for others and supporting students in their growth process." "A person that teaches students the importance of education."
Role Model	Serving as a role model or leading by example.	"Someone who serves as an example and guides his/her students and other teachers."
Formal Role	This code is only used when the name of the roles are used or if a committee is mentioned. For example, department chair, professional development, PLC	"Serving in a leadership role with peers such as mentor, lead teacher, professional development presenter."
"Go-To Person"	Someone who is sought out by colleagues	"Teacher leadership is being a go-to in the building/district, willing to help students and colleagues as much as possible, taking opportunities to enrich lives of students--even if it seems to go above the call of duty."

Appendix A

Quantitative Survey Item Included in the Analysis[2]

What positions, titles, and/or responsibilities are associated with teachers in leadership roles in your school building or school division?

_____ Mentor (new or novice teachers)

_____ Peer Coaching or Modeling (veteran teachers)

_____ Professional Development of Colleagues (i.e., creating and delivering professional development sessions)

_____ Department Chair Leadership

_____ Instructional Support Specialist

_____ Data Team Leader

_____ School-Wide Coordination (e.g., master scheduling, event planning, monitoring school-improvement efforts, other administrative tasks)

_____ School- or District-Level Curriculum Writing

_____ School Improvement (i.e., participating in school-wide decisions, serving on school-level committees, collaborating for school improvement, facilitating professional learning communities/teacher learning communities, conducting action research)

_____ Contributing to the profession (i.e., attending workshops, being advocates at the local, state, or federal level for education)

_____ Resource Teacher (e.g., gifted, special education)

_____ Content specialist (e.g., math specialist, reading specialist, literacy coach)

_____ Other teacher leader positions, titles, and/or responsibilities not listed here (list and describe as many as you have): _____

_____

_____

[2] This item was identical for both teachers and administrators.

Appendix B

Interview Protocol

1. Tell me about your background and how you came to be a teacher/administrator.

3. What do you like best about your job?

4. How do you define teacher leadership? What is your definition based on?

5. Picture a teacher leader. What qualities do they embody? What roles, responsibilities, and tasks do they take on?

6. What teacher leadership opportunities have you enjoyed? Or, What teacher leadership opportunities exist in your school district?

7. Have you ever participated in teacher leadership training? If so, what was it like? Who offered it?

8. Has your school or district ever offered teacher leadership training? If so, what was it like? Who offered it?

9. What are your greatest needs related to teacher leadership personally and as a school/division?

10. In your school/division, do you think teacher leadership opportunities are open to all regardless of ethnicity, race, or gender? Why or why not?

11. If you were creating your ideal teacher leadership program, what would it look like?
   a. Degree or certificate program? How many credit hours?
   b. What topics or course content would be covered?
   c. What would be the delivery format?

12T. In our survey results, teachers ranked the following three topics in order of preference – (1) Coaching, (2) Supervision, and (3) Working with Exceptional Learners (i.e., ELL, gifted, special education). How do you see these areas as important to teacher leadership?

13A. In our survey results, administrators ranked the following five topics in order of preference – (1) Coaching, (2) Data Literacy, and (3) Supervision. How do you see these areas as important to teacher leadership?

14.

a. What is your age?

b. How long have you been in education?

c. How do you identify ethnically? Gender?

d. What type of school or district do you work in (i.e., urban, suburban, rural, Title I, etc.)?

e. What do you teach?