

## **Teacher Leadership: More than Just a Feel-Good Factor?**

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*This article provides a critical analysis of the teacher leadership literature. It considers teacher leadership within the context of contemporary leadership theory, focusing particularly upon distributed leadership. The article explores different interpretations and definitions of the term “teacher leadership” and considers the implications for professional practice. Drawing upon recent reviews of the literature, it focuses upon the impact and effects of teacher leadership at three levels: the school, teacher, and student. It highlights some of the barriers to teacher as leaders and some of the ways in which teacher leadership can be developed and supported. The article concludes by outlining future directions and challenges for research in this field.*

### INTRODUCTION

It seems that no modern concept has been more powerfully received in the consciousness of those concerned with school reform and improvement than leadership. The contemporary literature highlights and reinforces the importance of leadership in generating and sustaining school development and change (Fullan, 2001; Day & Harris, 2003). Effective leadership, primarily in the guise of the school principal, has long been identified with school success (Edmonds, 1979; Hallinger & Murphy, 1985; Purkey & Smith, 1983; Murphy, 2002). Over the last three decades, the sheer volume of literature on the subject is testament to its popularity and its veracity in the face of some strong opposition. For example, there are those who suggest that the popularity of leadership “is no proof of anything” and that to take an a priori assumption of the existence of leadership is “a poor place to begin”

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(Lakomski, 2005, p. 3). Similarly, Alvesson and Sveningsson (2003, p. 377) argue: "it seems very difficult to identify any specific relationship, behavioral styles or an integrated coherent set of actions that correspond to or meaningfully can be constructed as leadership as important or intended." Yet despite such criticism leadership remains firmly center stage in contemporary discussions about organizational change and development.

Recently there has been a broadening of leadership theories away from the traditional view that leadership equates with individual role or responsibility. Current theorizing about leadership reinforces the view that leadership is not the preserve of one individual but is a "social influence process whereby intentional influence is exerted by one person (or group) over other people or groups to structure the activities and relationships in a group or organization" (Yukl, 1994). It would seem that the "post corporate" organization is one in which leadership is not identified with the qualities of an individual but as behavior that facilitates collective action towards a common goal. There is a recognition that emerging conceptions of leadership "stress the need to enable entrust and empower personnel" and that successful organizations depend on multiple sources of leadership (Bishop et al., 1997, p. 77). In short, current efforts to redefine leadership *are rooted in notions of distribution* and in the acknowledgement that leadership permeates organizations rather than residing in particular roles or responsibilities (Smylie, 2005). The concept of teacher leadership therefore closely aligns with contemporary discussions about "distributed leadership" insofar that it is neither predominantly position nor authority based. Instead leadership is an organizational characteristic or property that is interactive in design and relational in form (Harris, 2005). By implication it is leadership that is widely shared or distributed throughout the organization.

## DISTRIBUTED LEADERSHIP

Distributed leadership is seen as a quality of the organization, it is a form of *social influence* that goes beyond individuals and implies collective agency (Ogawa & Bossert, 1995). Work by Spillane et al. (2001) suggests that distributed leadership is a way of understanding leadership that focuses upon interaction and the exploration of complex social processes. It implies that the practice of leadership is one that is shared and realized within extended groupings and networks (Spillane et al., 2003; Harris, 2004; Gronn, 2000). In this sense, leadership is best understood as "practice distributed over leaders, followers and their situation" (Spillane et al. 2001, p. 13). This distributed view of leadership "incorporates the activities of multiple groups of individuals in a school guiding and mobilizing staff in the process of instructional change" (Spillane et al., 2001, p. 13).

Derived from cognitive and social psychology, distributed leadership theory underscores how social context influences human interaction and learning. It implies a form of “collaborative individualism” where individuals work collaboratively to act upon and transform systems. Other researchers have labeled this type of leadership “constructivist leadership” (Lambert, 1998), where leadership is about constructing meaning and knowledge collectively and collaboratively. More recently, Crowther et al. (2009, p. 38) have argued for “parallel leadership—a process whereby teacher leaders and their principals engage in collective action to build school capacity. It embodies mutual respect, shared purpose and allowance for individual expression.” Crowther et al. (2000) suggest a division of leadership responsibilities where principals assume primary responsibility for strategic leadership and teachers assume primary responsibility for pedagogical or instructional leadership.

Implicit within the current discourse about leadership theory is the idea that leadership is something many people are able to exercise and that leadership “is not the realm of certain people in certain parts of the organization” (Ogawa & Bossert, 1995, 225). As Lakomski (2005, p. 57) summarizes: “the weight of the leadership argument has been re-located from its over reliance on the leader’s influence to determining relevant variants of leader influence, to findings substitutes for it and to arguing for distributed leadership practice.” Teacher agency, instruction and collaboration are implicit within the emerging models of educational leadership, even though this connection is rarely made. For example, the distributed leadership literature has not explicitly acknowledged the idea of “teacher leadership,” despite sharing a similar theoretical and conceptual terrain (Harris & Muijs, 2004).

While the idea of teacher as leaders may not be new, it is evident that the DNA of distributed leadership has much in common with teacher leadership as teachers are increasingly assuming more leadership functions at both the instructional and organizational levels. The idea of “teacher as leader” has not only gained widespread popularity in recent years but has also become gradually embedded in the language and debate concerning organizational change and improvement. The ascendancy of teacher leadership has been prompted, in part, by new understandings about the relationship between leadership and organizational change. As Murphy (2005, p. 10) highlights “the idea of teacher leadership is often caught in the collision between the two strategies of achieving reform; one resting on heightened involvement and commitment of participants and one relying on intensified control of participants work.” Also, contemporary interest in teacher leadership stems from the fact that its central tenet aligns with broader discussions of professionalism and by association a professional model of change premised upon teacher enquiry and knowledge generation (Elmore, 1990).

Consequently, a large body of literature has emerged over the last three decades which has focused exclusively on research and practice related to

teacher leadership. This article draws upon two major reviews of the teacher leadership literature to evaluate and assess the empirical strength and robustness of this knowledge base (York-Barr & Duke, 2005; Muijs & Harris, 2003). Initially, it considers different interpretations and definitions of the term “teacher leadership” and subsequently explores evidence relating to the impact and outcomes of teacher leadership. It highlights some of the barriers to developing and supporting teacher leadership in schools and concludes with suggestions for further research in the field.

## DEFINING TEACHER LEADERSHIP

It is evident from the international literature that there are overlapping and competing definitions of the term “teacher leadership.” Recent reviews of the literature (Muijs & Harris, 2003; York-Barr & Duke, 2004) have reinforced that many conflicting and competing definitions of the term prevail and persist. As Wasley (1991, p. 147) observed, “the whole issue of defining teacher leadership is problematic.” Similarly, York-Barr and Duke (2005, 260) note: “In writing about teacher leadership, many authors readily assert its importance but usually fail to define it.” Leithwood and Duke (1999, 45) state: “It is important to be clear from the outset that what has been learned about leadership in schools over the last century has not depended on any clear, agreed upon definition of the concept, as essential as this would seem at first glance.” Inevitably, the lack of a precise definition has resulted in teacher leadership being associated with a wide range of activities, roles, and behaviors. As a consequence, teacher leadership has become an “umbrella phrase,” often meaning different things in different settings.

Although various aspects of teacher leadership are highlighted in the literature there are some identifiable core components that delineate this particular form of leadership. Murphy (2005, p. 15) suggests that teacher leadership has an instructional component, a relational component, and an enabling component. Teacher leaders are chiefly concerned with securing enhanced instructional outcomes, generating positive relationship with staff and students, and creating the enabling conditions for others to learn. Little (1988, p. 84) suggests that “teachers who lead leave their mark on teaching. By their presence and their performance, they change how other teachers think about, plan for and conduct their work.” This view of teacher leadership is one that is commonly reflected in the literature and involves teachers leading colleagues with a focus on improving instructional practice.

In their work, Katzenmeyer and Moller (2001, p. 17) define teacher leaders as “teachers, who are leaders within and beyond the classroom, who identify with and contribute to a community of teacher learners and leaders, and influence others towards improved educational practice.” Boles and Troen (1994, p. 11) characterize teacher leadership as a form of “collective

leadership in which teachers develop expertise by working collaboratively.” Muijs and Harris (2003) suggest that there are four discernable and dimensions of the teacher leadership role which distinguish it from other forms of leadership. The first dimension concerns the way in which teachers work with and across school boundaries and structures to establish social linkages within the community (Acker-Hocevar & Touchton, 1999). This *broker-ing role* remains a central responsibility for the teacher as leader as it ensures that links within and across schools are in place and that opportunities for meaningful development among teachers are maximized. A second dimension of the teacher leader role focuses upon *participative leadership*, where teachers work collegially with other teachers to encourage the examination of instructional practices (Wasley, 1991).

A third dimension of teacher leadership in school improvement is the *mediating role*. The literature suggests that teacher leaders are important sources of instructional expertise and information because they demonstrate high levels of instructional expertise (Snell & Swanson, 2000). The final, and possibly the most important dimension of the teacher leadership role, is *forging close relationships* with individual teachers through which mutual learning takes place. The evidence shows that as leaders, teachers build trust and rapport with colleagues, establish solid relationships, and influence school culture through these relationships (Little, 1990).

Other writers have identified further dimensions of the teacher leadership role, such as undertaking action research (Ash & Persall, 2000), instigating peer classroom observation (Little, 2000), or contributing to the establishment of a collaborative culture in the school (Lieberman et al., 2000). Of these roles, mentoring, induction and continual professional development of colleagues are considered to be crucially important for school development and change. In one of the most extensive studies on the work of teacher leaders, Lieberman, Saxl, and Miles (2000) focused on what teachers actually did when they assumed leadership positions designed to provide assistance to other teachers. The authors found that the work of lead teachers was varied and largely specific to the individual context of the school. The authors concluded that restructuring school communities to incorporate leadership positions for teachers necessitated teacher leaders taking certain actions. These included: placing a nonjudgmental value on providing assistance, modeling collegiality as a mode of work, enhancing teachers' self-esteem, using different approaches to assistance, making provisions for continuous learning and support for teachers at the school site, and encouraging others to provide leadership to their peers.

Silva, Gimbert, and Nolan (2002) describe the evolution of teacher leadership in three distinct waves. The first wave consisted of a time when teachers served in formal roles (e.g., department heads, pastoral leaders). In the second wave, teacher leadership was intended to capture the instructional expertise of teachers by providing them with staff development or

curriculum development roles. In the third wave, teachers are viewed as central to the process of generating organizational development and change through their collaborative and instructional endeavors and efforts. In their review of the literature, Leithwood and Duke (1999) identified six categories of leadership: transformational, moral, instructional, participative, managerial and contingency. Looking at each category, it appears that teacher leadership is most closely related to instructional and participative forms where leadership equates with the “behaviors of teachers as they engage in activities directly affecting the growth of students” (Leithwood & Duke, 1999, p. 47).

In summary, there are a number of important things to highlight about the definition of teacher leadership. Firstly, teacher leadership is associated with the creation of *collegial norms* among teachers that evidence has shown can contribute to school effectiveness, improvement and development. Second, teacher leadership equates with giving teachers *opportunities to lead*, which research shows has a positive influence upon the quality of relationships and teaching within the school. Third, at its most practical level, teacher leadership means teachers *working as instructional leaders* influencing curriculum, teaching and learning. Finally, teacher leadership is associated with *re-culturing schools*, where leadership is the outcome of the dynamics of interpersonal relationships rather than just individual action.

There is an implicit assumption made in much of the literature about the positive impact of teacher leadership upon individual and organizational outcomes. The proposition that teacher leadership is essential to school development and improvement is one worth exploring, as it has been argued that the “evidence of such effects, especially at the levels of classroom practice and student learning are sparse” (York-Barr & Duke 2005, p. 282). The next section considers the evidence from the literature about the impact of teacher leadership at the level of the organization and the individual. The literature is interrogated to ascertain what empirical evidence exists to support the impact of teacher leadership at the school, teacher and student level.

## THE IMPACT OF TEACHER LEADERSHIP: THE SCHOOL LEVEL

A number of writers maintain that the teacher leadership movement is replete with “transformational potential” with major benefits to the school, the teachers, and students who learn there (Hinchey, 1997; Rettalink & Fink, 2002). It has been asserted that through teacher leadership...“teachers can make a major difference to the personal and interpersonal capacities of themselves and their colleagues, to pupils’ learning and to the organizational structures and cultures of their schools” (Frost & Durrant, 2003, p. 4). However as Murphy (2005, p. 48) notes, empirical evidence to support such assertions remains “*limited in quantity*.” What is more worrying, however,

is the fact that the available empirical evidence is mixed and includes some evidence of the negative effects of teacher leadership, at least in the form of associated opportunity costs.

Looking initially at the impact of teacher leadership upon the school level, it is clear that the findings from the literature are both highly variable and inconsistent. Some studies indicate strong school-level effects (Griffin, 1995) while others indicate the negligible influence of teacher leadership upon the school level. The greatest support for a relationship between teacher leadership and organizational change can be located within the school effectiveness, improvement, and reform literature. Here evidence suggests that generating teacher leadership, with its combination of increased collaboration and increased responsibility, has positive effects on transforming schools as organizations (Hargreaves, 1991; Little, 1990, 2000; Rosenholz, 1989). In the most effective schools, Pellicer et al. (1990) found that instructional leadership was a shared responsibility of teachers and principals. Other studies also report positive effects of teacher participation in decision making, such as increased teacher motivation and decreases in teacher absenteeism (Rosenholz, 1989; Sickler, 1988).

Weiss et al. (1992), in their longitudinal case studies of six schools, found that while implementing reform went more slowly where leadership was shared with teachers, it was generally accepted and implemented by all, while in schools with non-shared management, resistance continued. Griffin (1995) also found that the introduction of teacher leadership and the expansion of shared leadership encouraged innovation and had positive school-level effects. In their study of school restructuring, Pechman and King (1993) found teacher leadership to be one of the factors affecting successful school reform. Similarly, Davidson and Taylor (1999) found that strong teacher leadership could mitigate the negative effects of frequent principal change in a restructuring school.

Recent research has highlighted that an organization's ability to improve and sustain improvement largely depends upon its ability to foster and nurture professional learning communities or "communities of practice" (Morrissey, 2000; Holden, 2002). Linked to the idea of communities of practice, school improvement advocates have suggested that schools should operate as a professional learning community. Harris et al. (2002, p. 3) suggests "professional learning communities lead to strong and measurable improvements in students' learning. Instead of bringing about 'quick fixes' or superficial change, they create and support sustainable improvements that last over time because they build professional skill and the capacity to keep the school progressing." This idea of professional learning communities implies a commitment to teachers sharing learning and working collaboratively. It also embraces the notion of teacher leadership, as it is assumed that teachers will be the catalysts for change and development within a professional learning community. A defining message in the literature is that

teacher leadership contributes to school development and improvement by “building institutional capacity” (Smylie, 1995, 4). While it would be hard to imagine how school rejuvenation might occur without the involvement, support and leadership of teachers, a causal relationship is assumed rather than proven.

In summary, the literature confirms the positive effects of teacher collaboration upon an organization’s capacity to develop and change. Where teacher leadership manifests itself in the development of trusting and collaborative relationships with colleagues, there is some evidence that it will positively influence school culture and can contribute to instructional and organizational improvement.

### THE IMPACT OF TEACHER LEADERSHIP: THE TEACHER LEVEL

By far the greatest supporters of the idea of teacher leadership are teachers themselves. Indeed the literature would confirm that the most discernible and powerful effect of teacher leadership is on teacher leaders themselves. Evidence exists to support the assertion that as teachers lead, they grow in leadership skills and organizational perspectives (Ryan, 1999). Research findings also suggest that empowering teachers to take on leadership roles enhances teachers’ self-esteem and work satisfaction, which in turn leads to higher levels of performance due to higher motivation, as well as possibly higher levels of retention in the profession (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001; Ovando, 1996).

Some studies found a direct relationship between teacher leadership and motivation. In their study of seventeen teacher leaders, Lieberman et al. (2000) reported that the teachers felt the experience had improved their confidence in their own abilities, and had taught them to motivate, lead and encourage other adults. Similarly, in their survey of forty-two teacher leaders, O’Connor and Boles (1992) reported improved self-confidence, increased knowledge, and an improved attitude to teaching, though on the negative side they saw the high amount of time spent on their leadership roles as detracting from time spent in the classroom. Smylie’s (1994) review further points to the psychological and motivational benefits of teachers taking on leadership roles. However, other work has revealed inherent tensions in balancing the “leader versus teacher” role and has highlighted how peer relationships can be strained when teachers take on leadership responsibilities (Cooper, 1993; Wasley, 1991; Little, 1995).

As highlighted earlier, the nature and quality of leadership within schools has been found to be an important condition for maximizing school effectiveness and improvement. Yet the relationship between teacher leadership and teacher effectiveness is generally implied in the literature rather than confirmed. The evidence shows that schools where achievement is



higher tend to be more confident in allowing teachers to take on leadership roles. As one US study showed, improving student outcomes appeared as a condition for, rather than a result of, teacher leadership (Dickerson, 1992).

More recently, the Gatsby Teacher Effectiveness Project in England demonstrated that teacher involvement in decision making offered a good proxy for teacher leadership and as a proxy, it was always moderately or strongly related to teacher effectiveness (Harris & Muijs, 2005). The analysis also demonstrated that there was an indirect relationship between teacher involvement in decision making and teacher effectiveness. It also provided evidence to suggest that teacher leadership led to improved self-efficacy and self-esteem and that this impacted positively upon a teacher's effectiveness.

Teacher leadership has been reported to have effects on teacher practices at the classroom level. Research by Ryan (1999) revealed a high level of perceived impact on instructional practices of colleagues. Smylie's (1994) review of redesignated teacher work and its effects on classroom practice drew two primary conclusions. First, that change in classroom practices was more likely to occur among those teachers whose work was redesigned, i.e., the teacher leaders, and second, changes in classroom practice were more likely to occur when initiatives were collective, as opposed to individual.

In summary, there is evidence that teacher leadership is positively related to changes in teachers' classroom practice and their instructional effectiveness. The literature reinforces that teachers can positively influence the instructional practice of their colleagues. However the most consistent and unequivocal message from the literature is of the positive effects of teacher leadership on the practices and self-esteem of the teacher leaders themselves.

#### THE IMPACT OF TEACHER LEADERSHIP: THE STUDENT LEVEL

The third, and some would argue most important, link in the chain of relationships with teacher leadership is its connection with student learning outcomes. Various writers have discerned the benefit of teacher leadership on enhanced student learning (Darling-Hammond et al., 1995; Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001, pp. 85–86). However, the empirical basis for such claims remains somewhat modest. York-Barr and Duke (2005) found only five studies that directly examined the effects of teacher leadership on students. The first, conducted by Ryan (1999), studied three schools where it was found that the teacher leaders were perceived to be having a positive effect on students because they influenced the instructional practices of colleagues and were involved in school-level decision making. The second, by Louis and Marks (1998), did not discern a direct relationship between

teacher empowerment and student learning but strongly supported the argument that empowerment did positively influence teachers' efforts to improve instruction. The third, by Taylor and Bogotch (1994), found no significant difference in terms of student attendance, achievement or behavior between schools with high degrees of teacher participation in decision making as opposed to schools with low degrees of teacher participation in decision making. The other two studies were large scale quantitative studies conducted by Leithwood and Jantzi (1999; 2000). These studies explored the effects of school and teacher leadership on students' engagement with school. This study reported no statistically significant relationship between teacher leadership and student engagement. However it did conclude that teacher leadership outweighs principal leadership effects before taking into account the moderating effects of family educational culture.

In contrast, other studies have shown a more positive relationship between teacher leadership and student learning outcomes. Research by Silns and Mulford (2002) concluded that student outcomes are more likely to improve where leadership sources are distributed throughout the school community and where teachers are empowered to lead. Similarly, a study of eighty-six US middle schools found that both teacher professionalism and collegial leadership were positively related to improved student outcomes. Other work by Lemlech and Hertzog (1998) has suggested that encouraging teachers to take on leadership roles positively affects self-efficacy and behavior, which subsequently influences student learning outcomes. Recent research by Harris and Muijs (2004) found an indirect relationship between teacher involvement in decision making and improved student outcomes.

In summary, the direct link between teacher leadership and student outcomes is far from clear or proven. What the literature does confirm is that where teacher leadership work is focused upon the classroom rather than the organizational level and where instructional improvement is at the heart of the work of teacher leaders, there is greater chance of a positive impact upon student learning outcomes. On balance it would appear from the literature that teacher leadership can be advantageous to the individual teacher and to varying degrees their schools and students. However, this literature also shows that there are a number of barriers that need to be overcome and preconditions that need to be met to ensure that teacher leadership functions effectively (Vail & Redick, 1993). The next section considers these barriers and facilitating factors.

## BARRIERS TO TEACHER LEADERSHIP

The literature reveals that there are a number of barriers that make teacher leadership more difficult to realize in practice (Katzenmeyer & Moller,

2001). In their study of seventeen teacher leaders, Lieberman et al. (2000) found that the egalitarian ethic of colleagues was one of the main barriers perceived by these teachers, and often left them feeling isolated from colleagues. Troen and Boles (1992) found that the female teachers they studied experienced a loss of connectedness to peers when engaging in teacher leadership. Little (2000) tested acceptance of leadership by colleagues among 282 teachers in six schools and found that acceptance was hesitant, but not hostile. While teachers were happy to acknowledge a hypothetical master teacher's skills (i.e., a highly effective teacher), they did not support truly assertive behavior of this teacher towards colleagues.

The literature also points towards "top-down" management structures in schools as a major impediment to the development of teacher leadership, as they militate against teachers attaining autonomy and taking on leadership roles within the school. Wheatley (2000), looking at business organizations, points to fear and uncertainty leading to an overemphasis on control as the prime mechanism in maintaining bureaucratic and hierarchical structures in organizations. A concomitant of this is that teacher leadership roles cannot successfully be imposed by management. Wasley (1991) reiterates that teachers need to be involved in the process of deciding on what roles, if any they wish to take on, and must then feel supported by the school's administration in doing so.

Much of the research evidence concerning teacher leadership points to the importance of shared norms and values, and collaborative practice between teachers, to the organization. Lonquist and King's (1993) study showed that a lack of trust between staff meant that a professional learning community failed to develop. The evidence suggests that teacher leadership not only flourishes most in collaborative settings, but one of the tasks of the teacher leader should be to encourage the creation of collaborative cultures in school, and to develop common learning in schools (Caine & Caine, 2000; Little, 2000).

The success or otherwise of teacher leadership within a school can also be influenced by a number of interpersonal factors, such as relationships with other teachers and school management (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001). The importance of these is evident, both with respect to teachers' ability to influence colleagues and with respect to developing productive relations with school management, who may in some cases feel threatened by teachers taking on leadership roles. There may also on occasion be conflicts between groups of teachers, such as those that do and do not take on leadership roles, which can lead to estrangement among teachers (Clemson-Ingram & Fessler, 1997; Lieberman, 1988). Overcoming these difficulties will require a combination of strong interpersonal skills on the part of the teacher leader and a school culture that encourages change and leadership from teachers. In their study, for example, LeBlanc and Skelton (1997) reported that teachers experienced conflicts between their need for achievement and leadership

and their need for affiliation and belonging to the peer group, but these were alleviated when job satisfaction was high and teacher collaboration institutionalized.

As well as strong interpersonal skills, other characteristics have been associated with the effectiveness of teacher leaders. Lieberman et al. (2000) identified six main clusters of skills in their study of teacher leaders: building trust and rapport with colleagues, being able to undertake organizational diagnosis through data collection, understanding and managing change processes, being able to utilize resources (people, equipment) in the pursuit of common goals, managing their work, and building skills and confidence in others. In their study of ten middle school teachers, Snell & Swanson (2000) found that teachers emerged as leaders if they developed high-level skills in the areas of expertise (strong pedagogical and subject knowledge), collaboration (working with other teachers), reflection on their own practice, and empowerment of themselves and others.

### FACILITATING TEACHER LEADERSHIP

The literature suggests a number of ways in which teacher leadership can be developed and enhanced in schools. Firstly, it suggests that time needs to be set aside for teachers to meet to plan and discuss issues such as curriculum matters, developing schoolwide plans, leading study groups, organizing visits to other schools, collaborating with higher education institutions (HEIs), and collaborating with colleagues. Ovando (1994) found that having time for teacher leadership tasks was a crucial element of success in schools where teacher leadership was being implemented. Other studies in this area have concluded that teacher leaders tend to take on additional roles without eliminating other responsibilities or compensating for the added demands made by engaging with school leadership (Griffin, 1995; Whitaker, 1997). Consequently, principals and those in senior leadership roles need to ensure that overload and role conflict are avoided through providing adequate time for the leadership tasks required.

Second, the literature suggests that there needs to be rich and diverse opportunities for continuous professional development for teacher leadership to flourish. The evidence would suggest that professional development for teacher leadership needs to focus not just on the development of teachers' skills and knowledge, but also on aspects specific to their leadership role. Skills such as leading groups and workshops, collaborative work, mentoring, teaching adults, action research, collaborating with others, and writing bids need to be incorporated into professional development (and indeed initial teacher training) to help teachers adapt to the new roles involved (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001).

Third, for teacher leadership to become truly transformative the literature indicates that structured programs of collaboration or networking need to be set up to ensure that teacher leaders can fully develop their leadership potential (Clemson-Ingram & Fessler, 1997; Gehrke, 1991). Through collaborating with teachers in other schools, engaging in trials of new teaching approaches, disseminating their findings to colleagues, and engaging in action research the potential for teacher leadership has been shown to be significantly enhanced (Darling-Hammond et al., 1995). Such activities have been identified in helping to develop teachers' confidence and reflection on their practice (Romerdahl, 1991; Munchmore and Knowles, 1993).

Work by Little (1995) suggests that where teachers learn from one another through mentoring, observation, peer coaching and mutual reflection, the possibilities of generating teacher leadership are significantly enhanced. However, while it could be argued that teacher leadership brings its own rewards through enhanced effectiveness, a sense of collegiality, and improved teaching practices, the literature suggests that it will remain a marginal activity within schools unless specific forms of remuneration are put in place to actively encourage teachers to engage in leadership tasks.

## FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The teacher leadership literature points enthusiastically towards the highly beneficial effects of teacher leadership. However, the empirical evidence upon which to base some of these claims remains modest. While the teacher leadership literature is vast with over hundreds of potential sources for consideration, including books, articles chapters and other media, both reviews of the literature highlight the same limitations with this particular body of knowledge (York-Barr & Duke, 2005; Muijs & Harris, 2003). First, the field is dominated by largely qualitative small-scale studies that favor self reporting and employ convenience samples. Data collection in the majority of these studies has been undertaken through interviews and in some cases, survey work. Second, there are only a few large-scale quantitative studies. These studies reflect some of the methodological difficulties in trying to quantify and measure a complex phenomenon such as teacher leadership. Third, many accounts of teacher leadership are nonempirical and tend towards the descriptive rather than the analytical. Fourth, there are few attempts at theorizing; only a small number of studies offer a theoretical perspective. Finally, the sheer diversity and inherent variability of the literature makes comparisons across studies and any metaanalyses difficult to make.

Despite the general limitations of the literature, there is sufficient evidence to support certain assertions made about teacher leadership. There *is* substantial evidence to suggest that teacher leadership can

have a positive impact on teachers' self-efficacy, instructional knowledge, and professional relationships. The evidence would also support the positive benefits to other teachers of teacher leadership and endorse a strong relationship between teacher leadership, in the form of involvement and decision making, and organizational development. Where the literature is less convincing is in the relationship between teacher leadership and student learning outcomes. There are many well-reasoned assertions and some empirical studies that focus upon this relationship, but the evidential base is simply not extensive enough or sufficiently robust to warrant such claims. Part of the problem resides in the methodological difficulties inherent in charting a causal link to student learning outcomes. Another problem lies in the complexity and diversity of the construct of teacher leadership and the way it might be operationalized for measurement purposes. As York-Barr and Duke (2005, p. 286) point out, "in the absence of a valid definition, measurement and analysis are problematic."

Since Smylie (1995) offered his assessment about the quality of research and writing within the teacher leadership field, the interest in teacher leadership has burgeoned and the literature has expanded. However, it would seem that certain research gaps remain. Hallinger and Heck (1996) have identified certain "blank spots" (i.e., shortcomings in the research) and "blind spots" (i.e., areas that have been overlooked because of theoretical and epistemological biases) in the wider leadership literature. It surely remains of deep concern that relatively few studies of teacher leadership have focused on the relationship between teacher leadership and student learning outcomes, difficult though this may be to undertake. This remains both a blind spot and blank spot in the contemporary teacher leadership literature. It is also a serious gap in knowledge. There are others. For example, we do not know the ways in which teachers positively influence instructional and organizational development; the existing studies are not fine grained or detailed enough. We do not know how teacher leaders are best prepared for their role or which models of teacher development are the most effective in generating teacher leadership. Finally, we do not know what combination of teacher leadership offers the most powerful platform for organizational change and development. Despite these omissions in knowledge, it is unlikely that the idea of teacher leadership will lose its powerful grip upon the imagination of teachers and administrators, first because it encapsulates so many strongly held beliefs about education as a shared and democratic process. Second, because the "teacher leadership equals improvement" equation is difficult to counterargue, it seems like common sense. Therefore future empirical studies are needed that go beyond purely descriptive accounts of teacher leadership to look at its effects and impact, particularly upon student learning. Without such studies there is a danger that those who believe

teacher leadership to be little more than a feel-good factor might in time, by default, be proved right.

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