Sustainable Teacher Leadership[12]

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Abstract	Article Info
This report describes how teacher leadership is represented in the official documentation of key educational stakeholders in Alberta, Canada. Six themes emerged from the researchers' document analysis: foundational understandings; student diversity; innovative curriculum and student engagement; community engagement; 21st century competencies; and reflection and professional learning. Analysis of the idealized themes resulted in the identification of issues that may challenge teacher leaders. It is unlikely that teacher leaders can demonstrate competence in every theme area. Teacher leaders must necessarily prioritize some professional commitments in order to work sustainably. Several considerations were derived from the inherent tensions. The considerations were used to derive a composite profile of teacher leaders with the capacity to serve, influence, and thrive.	

Introduction

Definitions of teacher leadership continue to evolve. One description is that it is the school-wide influence that can be exercised by teachers, not in formal leadership roles (Harris & Jones, 2019) who engage with school restructuring and interdisciplinary curriculum planning (Little, 1995). Another is that teacher leadership is the result of the shifting of power and control to teachers who are supported by principals so that leadership is reciprocal and inclusive of all adults in a school (Lambert 2003, 2007). Harris (2003) suggested that teacher leadership can be viewed as distributed leadership that allows school staffs to share a sense of agency and purpose. York-Barr and Duke (2004) described teacher leadership as the influence of teachers on members of school communities to enhance teaching and learning with the goal of improved student learning and achievement. More recently, Wenner and Campbell (2017) described teacher leaders as teachers who continue with classroom-based responsibilities while also fulfilling leadership responsibilities in the larger school community.

The International Study of Teacher Leadership (www.mru.ca/istl) is a multi-stage, mixed-methods study that is being conducted in ten countries. The research team seeks to contribute to the wider understanding of teacher leadership and of how professional development and university programs might contribute to teacher leadership knowledge and skill development. The primary research question for the study is *How is teacher*

leadership conceptualized and enacted, and what are the implications for educational stakeholders? This report summarizes how teacher leadership is represented in the official documentation of key educational stakeholders in Alberta, Canada, and it highlights the tensions and key considerations inherent in the diverse perspectives represented in a sample of stakeholder documents.

Study Relevance

Multiple researchers share the understanding that teachers are a key factor in school improvement (Andrews & Conway, 2018; Campbell, Lieberman, & Yashkima, 2015). Even though there may be a dearth of evidence linking teacher leadership directly with student engagement (Mulford, 2008; Scott Williams, Lakin, & Kensler, 2015), we know that teachers' capacity to influence educational improvement is enhanced through professional collaboration and open communication among members of school communities (Smylie & Eckert, 2018). Indeed, it is clear that school-wide alignment of educational goals, community support, and classroom practices depends upon teachers and principals taking shared responsibility for pedagogical development and implementation (Conway & Andrews, 2016). Unfortunately, the lack of clarity about the theoretical base of teacher leadership, its actual meaning, and how it is enacted may limit its utility (Margolis & Huggins, 2004).

Related Literature

The challenges facing schools underscore the importance of principals and teachers collaborating effectively. However, successful collaboration is dependent upon the capacity of principals to

disengage from managerial approaches to their leadership and upon leadership development opportunities for classroom teachers.

Principal Considerations

A frequent observation about teacher leadership development is that it cannot be particularly effective without principal support which can be eroded in the context of a hierarchical school culture (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Principals may need their own forms of professional development in order to become more collaborative and confident in nurturing teacher leadership (Andrews & Conway, 2018; Smylie & Eckert, 2018). As Fullan (2014) emphasized, principals need to learn how to facilitate leadership by teachers.

Andrews and Conway (2018) described the leadership-focused relationship between principals and teachers as parallel leadership. This is a process involving principals and teachers in collective action to support school-wide capacity building (Conway & Andrews, 2016; Crowther, Kaagan, Ferguson, & Hann, 2002). Andrews and Conway (2018) stated that parallel leadership is characterized by mutualism—shared trust and respect—between formal leaders and teacher leaders, and by a shared purpose and substantive amounts of freedom for individual expression and action. Conway and Andrews (2016) also noted how parallel leadership can become the foundation for school-wide pedagogical development and implementation.

Cautionary Considerations

The education literature is replete with descriptions of what Fullan (2014) called the "wrong drivers" for managing change. He listed the negative features as "accountability, individualistic solutions, technology, and fragmented strategies" (Fullan, 2014, p. 25). Stoll, Brown, Spence-Thomas and Taylor (2015) suggested that

accountability frameworks may constitute a challenge to school improvement. Holloway, Nielsen, and Saltmarsh (2018) shared a host of cautions related to their examination of distributed leadership. For instance, they described the focus of teacher leaders on accountability-related tasks rather than meaningful relationships. They highlighted the time limitations that curtailed teacher leadership initiatives and cautioned that mandated distributed leadership was perhaps founded on a managerialist mentality unsuitable for school contexts. In addition, they described the lack of appropriate professional development opportunities for teacher leaders and how teacher leaders felt undervalued and overloaded.

Formal and informal leaders in education are right to deploy every possible strategy to ameliorate the challenges facing schools. As Angelle and DeHart (2016) stated, multiple reform policies have altered important dimensions of the education system. They suggested that teacher leadership is but one mechanism that can be utilized to address educational change. Further, they noted that the attributes of teacher leadership, such as collaboration and shared leadership, can produce positive benefits for members of school communities.

Teachers and Teacher Leadership Development

Before teachers can take full advantage of their unique role in shaping meaning for the children and adult members of school communities, they need to engage in professional learning with their colleagues (Andrews & Conway, 2018; Stoll, Brown, Spence-Thomas, & Taylor, 2015). Teacher leaders should be able to participate in formal and informal teacher development activities (Campbell, Lieberman, & Yashkina, 2015) that develop their capacity to collaborate, exercise inventiveness, and become improvement

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oriented (Smylie & Eckert, 2018). In fact, Angelle & DeHart (2016) called for pre-service teachers to be exposed to leadership training prior to their first appointments in schools, while Smylie and Eckert (2018) suggested that teacher leadership development initiatives be differentiated according to "intellectual, social and emotional, and psychological maturity" (p. 560), so that leadership can be nurtured at all career stages.

It is worth noting that providing opportunities for teacher leadership development does not mean that teachers necessarily will engage (Smylie & Eckert, 2018). In fact, as York-Barr and Duke (2004) observed, there are numerous inhibitors on teachers' engagement in leadership development. These include the traditional individualism of the teaching profession and active discouragement from peers when teachers emerge as significant influencers within their school communities. Even the usual shortage of time available outside of class to participate in formal and informal leadership development activities can discourage teachers at all career stages.

Method and Analyses

"Content analysis has been defined as a family of procedures for studying the contents of written or transcribed texts which enables the researcher to include large amounts of textual information and systematically identify its properties...." (Klenke, 2016, p. 94). To conduct the document analysis reported here, the researchers created tables using the attributes of teacher leadership identified in an earlier review of literature (Webber, 2018).

Then, a sample of public documents shared by some of the significant educational stakeholders in the province of Alberta was accessed. As each source document was reviewed, the researchers

pasted key quotes into the table under the relevant teacher leadership attribute. Nineteen documents or web pages were reviewed (see appendix), selected to profile the perspectives of some of the main educational partners in Alberta.

Applying coding strategies suggested by Saldana (2009), the researchers selected 335 direct quotations that they grouped under the teacher leadership attributes. The 335 direct quotations were summarized as 148 descriptive data points. The researchers sorted the 148 data points into common groupings, arriving at six emergent themes. In turn, the themes were divided into sub themes.

Findings

Six themes emerged from the researchers' analysis of documents that expressed the views of key educational partners in relation to the attributes of teacher leadership. The themes offer a complex composite profile of teacher leadership expectations in the Alberta context.

Foundational Understandings

The *foundational understandings* theme was comprised of five subthemes inherent in provincial educational organizations' stated views about all teachers with an implicit stronger emphasis for teacher leaders.

One subtheme was the *professional* component of teacher leadership that included, for example, respecting the legitimate authority structure in a school community: "The teacher criticizes the professional competence or professional reputation of another teacher only in confidence to proper officials and after the other teacher has been informed of the criticism, subject only to section 24

of the Teaching Profession Act" (Alberta Teachers' Association, 2019a, para 14). Further the Code of Professional Conduct reminds teachers that they "may not accept pay for tutoring a pupil in any subjects in which the teacher is responsible for giving classroom instruction to that pupil" (Alberta Teachers' Association, 2019a, para 7).

The *legal* dimension of teacher leadership was central to the foundational theme. Examples of legal responsibilities for teacher leaders are the expectations that: "The teacher may not divulge information about a pupil received in confidence or in the course of professional duties except as required by law or where, in the judgment of the teacher, to do so is in the best interest of the pupil (Alberta Teachers' Association, 2019a, para 6).

There also is a *skills* subtheme apparent in educational organizations' public documents. For instance, teacher education students are required to demonstrate success within higher education—significant because of the university-based venue for Bachelor of Education programs in Alberta. For example, teacher candidates at the University of Calgary (2020b, 2020c) learn to integrate STEM concepts and design-based thinking in curricular planning and teacher candidates at Mount Royal University (2020a, 2020b) engage in a school-based professional inquiry in their final capstone course.

A *values* subtheme also was evident. That is, an understanding emerged that teacher leaders should communicate high expectations for all students (Alberta Government, 2020) while concurrently believing that "all children can learn and reach their full potential given opportunity, effective teaching and appropriate resources" (Alberta Learning, 2004, p.1). Further, teacher leaders "collaborate

with the school community to create and implement a shared vision for student success, engagement, learning and well-being" (Alberta Education, 2018a, p. 5).

Finally, there is a strong expectation that teacher leaders will have a rich grounding in their teachable subjects and in pedagogy (Mount Royal University, 2020a; University of Calgary, 2020a, 2020c). Examples of other areas that fall within the *knowledge* subtheme are "brain development training to help staff understand how brain development influences learning and to inform best practices" (Calgary Catholic School District, 2019, p. 15) and knowledge related to First Nations, Metis, and Inuit communities (Alberta Teachers' Association, 2019b).

Student Diversity

Teachers in Alberta are expected to demonstrate the capacity to function effectively with a high level of *student diversity* (Alberta Education, 2019a). Teacher leaders are those who manifest a skill and knowledge set that inspires and influences their colleagues in unusually productive ways. For instance, teacher leaders will help to "determine the most enabling placement in a manner consistent with provincial special education policies, in consultation with parents, and based on current assessment data" (Alberta Learning, 2004, p. 10) for students with special needs.

A second dimension of the student diversity theme is student *mental health and wellness*. The understanding that the mental health and wellness of students is a priority is demonstrated at the ministry level (Alberta Government, 2018) in documents such as *Creating Welcoming, Caring, Respectful & Safe Learning Environments* and in the strategies of school districts such as the Calgary Catholic School

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District (2019, p. 14) which details its *Student Wellness: Mental Health and Resiliency Strategy.*

Foundational knowledge of First Nations, Metis, and Inuit is a focus in the Alberta education system. This component of student diversity is reflected in the policy documents and goals statements disseminated by school districts (e.g., Foothills School Division, 2019), and the teachers' union (Alberta Teachers' Association, 2019b). Most teacher preparation programs in the province have a mandatory course to prepare new teachers to meet the competency identified in the Teaching Quality Standard: "A teacher develops and applies foundational knowledge about First Nations, Metis, and Inuit for the benefit of all students" (Alberta Education, 2018b, p. 6).

There is strong evidence of a common focus on *cultural diversity* in the public documentation of provincial education organizations. For instance, cultural diversity is prominent in the professional standard that teachers must meet (Alberta Education, 2018b) with indicators that requires "honouring cultural diversity and promoting intercultural understanding" (p. 4) and "incorporating students' personal and cultural strengths into teaching and learning" (p. 6).

The Programs of Study (Alberta Education, 2019b), the curriculum framework that all Alberta schools must follow, require teachers to facilitate intercultural awareness among their students. For example, the English Language Arts Program of Studies (Alberta Learning, 2000) lists a general outcome: "respect others and strengthen community" with specific outcomes including "appreciate diversity…relate texts to culture…use language to show respect" (p. 86).

Alberta Education (2016) articulates school protocols relating to *sexual and gender diversity* in *Guidelines for best practices: Creating*

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learning environments that respect diverse sexual orientations, gender identities and gender expression. This document details the responsibility of schools to respect "students and staff who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, two-spirit, queer, questioning, and/or gender-diverse" (p. 2). Best practices include respecting an individual's right to self-identification, respecting privacy and confidentiality, minimizing gender-segregated activities, providing safe access to washroom facilities, ensuring dress codes respect gender identity and expressions, and fostering healthy school relationships to nurture belonging.

21st Century Competencies

The public documents examined in this study emphasized three critical areas for teachers to address as *21st century competencies*.

First, there is a strong need for teachers who can facilitate *engaged citizenship.* The Programs of Study (Alberta Education, 2019b) state clearly that the purposes of schooling include exploration of political and social issues that will lead to the development of responsible, contributing citizens who are life-long learners.

Other goals statements in the documents that were reviewed implied that facilitating an engaged citizenry depends upon the development of specific *student competencies*. For instance, Alberta Education (2019c) stated that competencies are "combinations of attitudes, skills and knowledge that students develop and apply for successful learning, living and working" (para 1) including:

- Critical Thinking
- Problem Solving
- Managing Information
- Creativity and Innovation

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- Communication

- Collaboration

- Cultural and Global Citizenship

- Personal Growth and Well-Being

The Programs of Study (Alberta Education, 2019b) also call on teachers to facilitate student perseverance and risk taking in the context of an *uncertain future*. This is a skill set that Alberta teacher education programs also seek to develop in prospectiv teachers. The Rocky View School District (2019) aspires to "engage students as co-designers of their learning, empowering them to follow their passions and challenging them to new heights, …mov(ing) beyond classroom walls to the natural world, building sites, farms, engineering firms, hospitals, zoos, museums and theatres" (para. 14-15).

Innovative Curriculum and Student Engagement

According to the Alberta educational stakeholders whose public documents were reviewed, teacher leadership has strong curriculum and student engagement components. While all teachers are expected to plan for and engage students, teacher leaders engage in collaboration to invite innovative curriculum and student engagement beyond their own classrooms.

The Teaching Quality Standard (Alberta Education, 2018b) calls on teachers to "build student capacity for collaboration" and to design learning experiences that are "varied, engaging, and relevant to students" (p. 5). The Programs of Study (Alberta Education, 2019b) ask teachers to attend to children's curiosity and to facilitate student teamwork. Collectively, these documents suggest that teacher leaders have an enhanced capacity to facilitate *innovation and engagement*.

Teachers who develop and lead inventive pedagogies will employ a range of *non-traditional instructional strategies*. They will use digital technology appropriately and stay abreast of emerging technologies with the potential to enhance knowledge and skill development (Alberta Education, 2018b). Innovative teachers also will expand students' understanding of literacy beyond text to include viewing and representing to "understand the ways in which images and language may be used to convey ideas, values and beliefs" (Alberta Learning, 2000, p. 3).

A key element of innovation and student engagement is teachers' responsibility for monitoring student progress frequently and accurately in order to "engage students to reflect on their learning" (Alberta Assessment Consortium, 2017). That includes involving students and parents in assessment strategies and communicating effectively with relevant members of the school community (Alberta Education, 2004).

Community Engagement

A central element in teacher leaders' influence is engagement with community members and organizations in a manner that goes far beyond the classroom. The influence of teacher leaders is evident in their collaboration with *community agencies*.

School districts in the Calgary area collaborate with a number of community agencies. For example, the Foothills School Division (2019) and Calgary Catholic School District (2017a, 2017b) involve school students of various ages in extensive partnerships with community organizations, as do Rocky View Schools (2019). For example, the Rocky View Schools (2020) *Building Futures* program connects high school students with homebuilders. Clearly, successful

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community engagement depends upon robust inter-agency *relationships* that are predicated on collaboration among parents, teachers, administrators, and community members.

Reflection and Professional Learning

The significance of *personal reflection* for teachers and, even more so, for teacher leaders is evident in a number of stakeholder documents. The Teaching Quality Standard (Alberta Education, 2018b) emphasizes teachers' responsibility to engage in career-long learning and critical reflection. The Alberta Teachers' Association Code of Professional Conduct (2019a) calls on teachers to hold themselves and their schools to a high professional standard.

An impetus for personal reflection can be the constructive *feedback and evaluation* that teachers receive as part of performance reviews. "Teachers have the right to fair and reasonable evaluation of professional performance and have the responsibility to give sincere consideration to any suggestions for improvement" (Alberta Teachers' Association, 2018b). Further, all teachers are required to use the Teaching Quality Standard (Alberta Education (2018b) as the basis for their annual professional growth plan (Alberta Teachers Association, 2020).

It was evident in the documents reviewed for this study that *ongoing professional development* is a fundamental responsibility of teachers generally and teacher leaders especially. The Leadership Quality Standard (Alberta Education (2018a) offered the view that teacher leaders should be supported by formal leaders as they engage in improving leadership, teaching, and learning. The Alberta Teachers' Association's Annual Report (2018a) described a wide range of professional development opportunities that teachers are

encouraged to access. The opportunities included Alberta Teachers' Association library materials, international exchange programs, teachers' conventions (required of all teachers), and subject area specialist councils. School districts such as Rocky View Schools (2019) support teacher development through school and district communities of practice that involve face-to-face meetings and online sharing and reflection. The University of Calgary (2020d) offers a host of professional undergraduate and graduate programs in face-to-face and online formats so that ongoing professional development is eminently accessible to teaching professionals.

Discussion

The document analysis findings reflect the views of teacher leadership that are explicitly and implicitly communicated in the public documents of key educational partners in Alberta. When the profile of teacher leadership portrayed in official documents was examined carefully, several issues emerged that may challenge teacher leaders to consistently demonstrate the attributes of teacher leadership.

Professional Tensions

Teacher leaders play an important role in upholding professional expectations and responsibilities. However, parents may be skeptical of educational initiatives such as inquiry-based learning or be reluctant to examine their personal views regarding gender diversity; teacher leaders must balance those community expectations with their professional judgments. In addition, teacher leaders may feel the need to express strong views during staff decision-making discussions and perhaps feel conflicted when they need to respect the

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decisions of principals and other administrators, or counter the dominant views held by other teachers.

Other tensions may emerge in relation to influencing colleagues whose competence may compromise student learning, resulting in strained relations with both teachers and administrators or even damage to the teacher leader's acceptance and credibility within the school. Similarly, teacher leaders may experience uncertainty and conflict in relation to their professional role and their personal role as parents if their own children encounter questionable teaching at school. In those circumstances, teacher leaders may grapple with conflicts related to their personal views, confidentiality, and professional codes of conduct.

Curricular Tensions

The expectation that teacher leaders will facilitate innovative approaches to curriculum that optimize student engagement and learning requires them to navigate several challenges. For instance, teacher leaders who seek to implement a pedagogy that builds on student curiosity may perceive themselves to be impeded by the mandated provincial program of studies. At other times, teacher leaders' possible focus on student collaboration and teamwork may conflict with the learning and achievement goals held by individual students and their parents.

Colleagues with whom teacher leaders wish to collaborate may not have the skills needed to implement an innovative pedagogy nor the motivation to develop the necessary skills. Large class sizes and complex learners may demand more teacher time than is available to meet learner needs successfully. Digital tools that teacher leaders believe are necessary for preparing students for the 21st century may

not be sufficiently accessible. A focus on interdisciplinary learning has many benefits, especially fostering the ability to see interconnections among topics, but can limit the acquisition of key disciplinary concepts.

Community Tensions

The reality of schools in Alberta, particularly those in urban centers, is one of significant cultural diversity. As a result, teacher leaders may find it difficult to maintain a focus on the collective welfare of learners and on the implementation of the mandated curriculum that can be perceived to conflict with student and parent expectations, e.g., the role of women in society which is more conservative in some traditional societies. Learners with special needs of varying complexity may overwhelm the capacity of teacher leaders and their colleagues in terms of demands on their time and expertise.

Classrooms may be comprised of large proportions of students with several linguistic backgrounds, all working to gain proficiency in verbal and written English or French, resulting in teachers with little or no time and energy to attend to issues affecting the broader school community. Teacher leaders may struggle with their own or colleagues' access to the cultural knowledge that will enable them to meet the Teaching Quality Standard that requires them to develop and apply basic knowledge about First Nations, Metis, and Inuit cultures in their schools.

Teacher leaders who strive to establish and maintain safe and respectful learning environments will be impacted by the variation in student wellness manifested in Alberta schools. Some students who are struggling with a range of mental health and trauma issues may exhibit behaviors that create discomfort and discord among students

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and their families. As a result, teacher leaders need to find ways to help community members who may not understand mental health challenges or may fear for the welfare of their own children if they are alarmed by classmates' threatening or violent conduct.

Political Tensions

Within the findings of the document analyses is a host of implicit political tensions. For instance, concurrent with calls for educators to prepare students for 21st century living is the recognition that rapid change within Alberta—social, political, economic, technological, environmental—has led to levels of uncertainty and ambiguity that challenge teacher leaders' intentions to plan carefully and nurture stability. Issues such as school choice—characterized in Alberta by a range of schooling formats such as public, private, Catholic, charter, and home—may cause teacher leaders to engage in the defense of their preferred educational infrastructures and to attack perceived competitors. Ongoing power struggles between provincial policy makers and the teachers' union in areas such as salaries, revisions to the Alberta Program of Studies, disciplinary actions in instances of teachers' unprofessional conduct, and standardized assessment programs highlight the critical need for teacher leaders with enough social and political acumen to collaborate effectively with local and provincial educational partners.

Personal Tensions

An obligation to serve students, schools, and the profession is stated explicitly and implicitly in the documents reviewed for this study. Professionalism is key to meeting the formal and informal expectations of teachers in Alberta. However, there are tensions that teacher leaders must personally consider.

For example, maintaining the highest priority on students and their learning is at the forefront of the obligations of all teachers. While teacher leaders should aim to stay professionally current, there are limits to what is feasible within the time constraints of a classroom teacher's daily work. As well, teachers have a professional duty to reserve time to reflect on their work and to engage in life-long learning. Additionally, teacher leaders should take time to nurture their career trajectories.

Demands also are placed on teacher leaders' time because of their participation in community affairs. Their time also is required by family and personal commitments. Teacher leaders must find a way to handle the time and energy demands that exceed the professional service of most classroom teachers.

Professional Learning Tensions

Finally, teacher leaders are expected to be champions for career-long learning, deep reflection, and seeking feedback to improve their practice. However, there is an ongoing debate about the value of mandated professional development over self-directed goal-setting and learning. Limited time, access, pressure to obtain credentials, and struggling to collaborate with resistant colleagues are all factors that can constrain the professional development choices that teacher leaders can make.

Achieving a Balance

The descriptions of teacher leadership shared in this report are idealized statements that vary according to the organizations that produced them and all have significant inherent inhibitors. What was obvious, however, was the low likelihood of any teacher leader

demonstrating notable competence in all of the theme areas. Thus, teacher leaders must necessarily seek a sustainable balance in their commitment to the multiple educational priorities that compete for their attention.

Table 1 portrays teacher leader considerations in relation to each of the six themes found in the documents that were analyzed for this study. The list is a summary of how teacher leaders may choose to navigate the tensions associated with their roles.

Table 1.

Teacher Leader Considerations

Foundational Dimensions	Serving as an influencer, not an authority
	Manifesting enhanced social and political acumen
	Communicating skillfully
	Being a reliable confidante
Innovative Curriculum & Student Engagement	Planning teaching and learning that is provocative
	Building collaborative teams
	Creating nurturing organizational cultures
	Breaking boundaries
Cultural Diversity and Student Learning Needs	Maintaining an influential teaching presence
	Respecting human dignity
	Finding knowledgeable cultural guides
21st Century Competencies	Navigating change
	Focusing on competencies while content changes
	Embracing ambiguity
Community Engagement	Prioritizing learning
	Fostering critical thought
	Balancing formal and informal learning
	Expecting turbulence
Reflection and Professional Learning	Anticipating career stage variation
	Regulating the flow of professional development
	Working mainly with adopters, not resisters
	Accessing atypical professional learning opportunities

Composite Teacher Leader Profile

The considerations in Table 2 were used to derive (infer) a composite profile of teachers with the capacity to serve, influence, and thrive as teacher leaders.

Service

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A commitment to principled service to the school communities is a guiding force for teacher leaders. They attend first to their primary roles as teachers who strive to nurture learning for all students. They prioritize learning for their students and also for their colleagues and themselves. They expect career-stage variation in their capacity to serve and they trust the process of ongoing professional growth during the ebb and flow of service that occurs throughout their professional and personal lives. Rather than engage in unsustainable overload at certain points in their careers, they are able to achieve a sustainable, longitudinal balance of school, community, and personal commitments. They judge their professional contributions by the magnitude of career-long influence rather than on episodic metrics.

Influence

Teacher leaders understand the value and impact of informal influence versus formal leadership. They embrace the role of influencer over that of an authority, and accept the ambiguity related to that positioning. As an influencer, teacher leaders can function as reliable confidantes who sustain a caring professional culture. They foster critical thought and serve as collaborative team builders, both of which are critical contributions to professional learning communities. Further, teacher leaders are lifelong learners who appreciate the importance of self-regulating the flow of professional development. Teacher leaders are enthusiastic in their engagement with traditional professional learning offered by schools, universities, and professional organizations. However, they also demonstrate astuteness in their ability to perceive, take advantage of, and plan atypical professional learning opportunities that are life- and career-changing.

Leadership

Teacher leaders are portrayed in the research literature primarily as informal leaders rather than individuals who occupy formal leadership positions in schools. However, the documents reviewed for this study contained multiple descriptions of leadership that could be and often are used in both of the educational leadership and the teacher leadership literature. The interpretation offered here is that the descriptions of leadership shared in the literature related to teacher leadership and to educational leadership are significantly different in tone and nuance. For example, both teacher leaders and formal leaders are described as skilled communicators but even a cursory interrogation of that term suggests that communication by a formal leader is infused with the authority of title and position while communication by informal teacher leaders relies more on the impact of influence and service.

Informal Power

Teacher leaders rely heavily upon social and political acumen to achieve influence. They are adroit at navigating change without the type of (and perhaps the burden of) power associated with formal leadership. They work almost exclusively with willing participants during curricular and organizational change. Possibly because of their informal leadership roles, teacher leaders can serve as boundary breakers who can navigate relatively smoothly within and across school and community groups. They possibly are more free than formal leaders to push the boundaries of curriculum and pedagogy because they are less constrained by perhaps more stringent community expectations for principals. Notably, teacher leaders have the potential to be perceived as more respectful of human dignity than formal leaders due to not being associated with the wielding of

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the formal power of position that may be understood to be challenging or intimidating.

Conclusion

This report of is intended to highlight what stakeholder organizations say they think teacher leadership should be. It is an early report from the *International Study of Teacher Leadership* that indicates how teacher leadership is conceptualized in formal organizational statements. It also identifies a set of tensions that teacher leaders in Alberta are likely to encounter. Finally, it offers a general profile of teacher leaders who wish to function effectively and sustainably in Alberta.

Future reports will add depth and breadth based on additional data that are being gathered in a sequence of interviews, questionnaires, case studies, and oral histories. The intent is to juxtapose (1) what educational organizations *say* in their public documents, with (2) what teacher leaders *will share in private* conversations and questionnaires, with (3) what they *actually do* in schools, with (4) how they *reflect* on being a teacher leader near or after retirement. The overall goal is to contribute to the understanding of teacher leadership and to offer a thick, rich description of the lived experience of teacher leaders.

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