Master's Students' Perceptions toward Teacher Leadership

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Abstract. This study investigated master's level student perceptions of teacher leadership attributes, roles, and responsibilities upon completion of an online Master of Arts in Education, with a concentration in teacher leadership, at a large public university. As an inductive, qualitative case study, responses to an open-ended questionnaire were analyzed with coding schemes to establish patterns and trends using grounded theory to categorize responses. Deductive coding schemes were used to establish theories comparing the teacher leadership competencies established by the Center for Teacher Quality, National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, and the National Education Association (2014). Findings indicate alignment to the literature on teacher leadership, specifically with clarity around teacher leadership competencies.

Keywords: Teacher leadership; teacher development; teacher leadership competencies; instructional leadership; advocacy leadership.

Introduction

Teacher leadership remains at the forefront of conversations in teacher education, as it has policy implications for teacher recruitment, retention, and effectiveness (Brandt, 1990; Carr, Herman, & Harris, 2005; Ingersoll & Merrill, 2010; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Across the United States, experts have recognized the importance of teachers as leaders, with one state in particular measuring effectiveness by the extent to which teachers demonstrate leadership as a key professional competency (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2013). With many southern states eliminating master's level pay for teachers; however, graduate programs have seen a decline in enrollment across one state's university system (Bonner, 2016).

In spite of state-level graduate enrollment decreasing, one program has seen a significant increase in master's enrollment in elementary education with a focus in teacher leadership. Recent program improvement findings have found that teachers desire leadership opportunities without having to be school

administrators (Greene, Zugelder, Warren, & L'Esperance, 2018). Therefore, a master's degree in teacher leadership fulfills the purpose of personal and professional growth for students in this study.

The purpose of the study was to determine the perceptions of master's level students related to teacher leadership. The study sought to investigate perceived student understanding of professional roles for teacher leaders, attributes of effective teacher leaders, how teacher leaders can engage in advocacy and policy leadership, and how students' views of teacher leadership changed after completing the MAEd Program in Elementary Education. Findings have potential to inform the broader population of teacher education programs in the areas of teacher leadership and provide additional understanding of teacher development. Finally, results have implications for improving the MAEd program at the targeted institution, identifying potential gaps in teacher leadership competencies.

Context of the Study
The College of Education at the targeted institution is public university in the United States which employs 200 faculty and staff, serving more than 3,000 students annually. The Master of Arts in Education (MAEd) is a program spanning five academic departments, offering specializations for nine teaching areas. The specialization in Elementary Education is housed in the Elementary Education and Middle Grades Education Department. At the time of this study, the MAEd in Elementary Education program required a minimum of 36 semester hours, with nine hours of concentration in one of five areas: a) academically gifted, b) content pedagogy, c) teacher leadership, d) early childhood, and, e) teaching English as a second language. Students in this study were enrolled in the teacher leadership concentration area.

The MAEd program is an online program, where students complete all coursework through distance education. Admission into the program requires completion of a teacher education program and evidence of a state-issued teaching license. While most students enrolled were from the geographic region near the university, program enrollment represented all major regions of the state. Since students enrolled in the program were also licensed teachers, the terms students and teachers are used interchangeably when referring to the participants, or respondents, in this study. A student cohort completed the program in five consecutive academic terms, just over one calendar year.

Students in the teacher leadership concentration completed coursework related to the professional roles of teacher leaders, as well as how to apply leadership in the classroom, school, community, and profession. Leadership competencies, defined by the Center for Teacher Quality, National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, and the National Education Association (2014), were addressed throughout the program concentration. Program faculty cross-walked the teacher leadership competencies with each course's objectives and key assessments.

Literature Review

The review of related literature on teacher leadership provided direction for the methods in this study. Research areas included a collective definition of teacher leadership, roles, responsibilities, and attributes. The authors' theoretical paradigm was aligned with the concept of leadership identity (Day & Harrison, 2007), professional capital (Hargreaves & Fullen, 2012), and Vygotsky's (1978) theory on sociocultural learning.

Teacher leadership attributes and skills. Kouzes and Posner (2017) found in more than three decades of research on leadership that the number one reported desired characteristic that stakeholders look for in a leader is honesty, where leaders demonstrate trustworthiness. Trust is the essential element necessary for productivity because it forms the foundation for all aspects of an organization. However, as found by Moye, Henkin, and Egley (2004), trusting relationships form from healthy interpersonal interactions. While social interactions can have an impact on trust development, teacher leaders should frame their interactions in the context of their school environment to build a sense of professional trust and confidence among their colleagues (Handford & Leithwood, 2013; Price, 2015).

Leadership attributes were measured by Mills, Huerta, Watt, and Martinez (2014) in a study of teachers and principals who engaged in the Advancement via Individual Determination (AVID) program in one United States school district. The researchers used an instrument developed in a prior study (Watt, Milles, & Huerta, 2010), in which principals selected teacher leaders to facilitate the AVID program. Mills, Huerta, Watt, and Martinez (2014) surveyed both teachers and principals to determine the most favorable leadership attributes teachers should have when functioning in a formal role as a teacher leader. These included personal attributes, professional growth and development, classroom environment, and school or district environment.

The highest-ranking personal attributes identified by teachers included behaviors such as collegiality with others, open communication, and creative problem solving; principals preferred the same attributes, but also desired strong organizational skills and the perceived respect of other teachers (Mills et al., 2014). Professional growth and development attributes equally identified by teachers and principals included growing and developing others and providing mentoring for other teachers. Maintaining high standards for students, effective classroom management, and demonstration of varied instructional methods were rated as important for classroom environment attributes. Finally, shared decision making, encouraging other teachers to do their best, and helping the principal to promote teaching and learning were identified as the most desired school or district environment attributes.

Teacher leadership competencies. Teacher leadership in the broadest sense has been defined as teachers holding an important position at the core of schools (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). The Center for Teaching Quality, National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, and National Education Association (CTQ,

NBPTS, & NEA, 2014) collectively identified competencies for teacher leadership to include three major domains: a) instructional leadership, b) advocacy and policy leadership, and, c) association leadership. The overarching competencies, applying to all three domains, include skills such as reflective practice, communication, interpersonal effectiveness, and group processes. The teacher leadership competencies stemmed from the Teacher Leader Model Standards (Teacher Leadership Exploratory Consortium, 2012).

Importantly noted by the CTQ, NBPTS, and NEA (2014) is that teacher leadership should be viewed as multi-dimensional, taking many shapes and definitions depending upon the connections made with colleagues and other stakeholders. A key domain within the overarching competencies is reflective practice, where teachers who engaged at the highest levels of teacher leadership demonstrate leadership at greater scale for their respective organizations and beyond. At minimum, however, teacher leaders must have a strong sense of self awareness, recognizing strengths and areas for improvement as individual professionals, aligned with additional research on leadership development (Day & Harrison, 2007; Smylie & Eckert, 2017).

Instructional leadership. In the area of instructional leadership, most mentions of relate to the notion of principals and their increasing responsibility as the curriculum leader of a school (Hallinger, 2011; Rigby, 2014; Shaked & Schechter, 2018). Neumerski (2012) dissected elements of instructional leadership, whereas the principal, instructional coach, and teacher all play critical roles within a school, while the school principal relies on the strengths of all to shape the instructional momentum. Instructional leadership involves multiple perspectives among multiple players (Leithwood, Harris, & Hopkins, 2008).

CTQ, NBPTS, and NEA (2014) included the areas of coaching and mentoring, facilitating collaborative relationships, and community awareness as key competencies for instructional leadership. Teachers with more advanced demonstration of instructional leadership connect with colleagues based on strengths and needs and can recognize qualities of effective mentors. Additionally, instructional leaders create opportunities for others to build leadership skills.

Advocacy and policy leadership. Advocacy and teacher leadership can take on many faces. Teacher leaders can advocate for policy, for effective teaching and learning practices (Smylie & Eckert, 2017), student populations (Ault, Bausch, & Ackerman., 2018; Davey, 2000; Khalfia, 2013), or the profession itself (Ingvarson, 2011; Wenner & Campbell, 2017; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Advocacy practices have implications on policy development. CTQ, NBPTS, and NEA (2014) define policy leadership as teachers being willing to serve in local, state, or national means.

Policy actions can vary, based on the ways in which teachers engage to make change. Malsbary (2016) demonstrated one example of how teachers' refusal to implement district testing attempted to influence district policy in a New York

City school district. The school-level refusal was an effort of recruiting like-minded education professionals and community stakeholders, bringing attention to the issue. In turn, the district removed the test, shaping district-level policy.

Goldstein (2008) documented four early childhood teachers who used their professional judgment to interpret policies under No Child Left Behind, but were given autonomy by their school and district to do so without enforcing district-level compliance practices. This example set a tone that educators, when perceived as experts in their field, (Warren & Sugar, 2005) can shape and drive policy.

Similarly, Coburn (2001) showcased how reading teachers shaped reading policies for their local professional communities, as they were seen as experts in their field. This notion was accepted as a practice of teachers influencing policy, rather than teachers engaging in compliance to policy enacted upon them. What mattered most in this study was the alliances teachers made based on pedagogical values and beliefs they held as reading teachers. The act of association is a strategy shaping teacher leadership.

Association leadership. Association is another forum by which teachers can influence policy, because they possess the skills to understand how to guide influential and collaborative action (CTQ, NBPTS, & NEA, 2014). The association can take on formal membership as a professional organization or could be considered informal alliances for a particular cause (Bolman & Deal, 2010; Trinidad, 2018). CTQ, NBPTS and NEA (2014) described teacher leaders at the highest end of the spectrum as brokering their collective power to influence policymakers.

When teachers engage in informal association, they have potential for collective empowerment, where they initiate innovation in teams (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). The collaborative teams take ownership of the innovation, because of the discourse that it belongs to everyone. Consequently, when innovations prove successful, the dissemination and influence outside of the team, to other schools or districts, take on another advanced form of association leadership.

Teacher leadership roles. Teachers, by nature of their position are change agents, within and beyond their classroom walls (Darling-Hammond & Sykes, 2003). Danielson (2007) argued that teacher leadership is not always confined to formal roles, adding to the idea that teachers can be leaders both inside and outside of their classrooms. Establishing the importance of building teacher leaders, Printy and Marks (2006) confirmed the declaration that principals cannot improve instruction without the help of capable teacher leaders. Warren and Sugar (2005) contended that while principals are leaders, so are their teachers, as they are the experts in their classrooms. York-Barr and Duke (2004) found that teacher leadership role opportunities have potential to create a platform for expanding expertise in teaching and learning.

Theoretical Framework

Warford (2011) reimagined Vygotsky's (1978) theory on the zone of proximal development. Warford's (2011) model is defined as the zone of proximal teacher development. The definition posed that, as teachers combine their internal personal and professional beliefs and values about education, combined with opportunities to reflect on new experiences, their zone of proximal teacher development would shrink. This connection of theory and practice would help shape a new professional identity.

As teachers progress along the continuum of teacher leadership competencies, their stages of development can influence their position of effectiveness (CTQ, NBPTS, & NEA, 2014). As they develop more leadership skills, they move from a sense of understanding to a state of modeling and exemplifying transformational leadership practices. As lifelong learners, they gain more self-efficacy and confidence (Bandura, 1997). In turn, they influence individuals and groups for greater change.

According to the CTQ, NBTS, and NEA (2014) teacher leadership competencies, teachers' levels of competency can be categorized into four stages of development: a) emerging, where a baseline understanding or familiarity with the competency is beginning; b) developing, where teachers move beyond self and can reflect on how their actions influences others; c) performing, where they engage in acts of teacher leadership; and d) transforming, where their actions have evidence of demonstrated impact. Quality of experiences matter more so than quantity; therefore, various stages of teacher leadership competencies may exist depending upon stages of career development, knowledge of self, and opportunities for leadership.

Research Methodology

The MAEd Program Questionnaire was distributed to a convenience sample of all 31 MAEd students at the time of program completion, as a qualitative research design, to inform quality program enhancement. The instrument was created by MAEd program faculty and vetted by faculty outside of the department, but within the College of Education. Students received the questionnaire via the university's course support software, Banner. Students were not required to complete the questionnaire and all responses were voluntary. Extra credit points were awarded to students who completed the survey.

Participants. All students possessed a license in Elementary Education issued by the state department of education. Of the 31 students in the study, 22 had zero to three years of teaching experience at the time of admission into the program. There were 10 of the 22 who were not practicing teachers, as they enrolled in the master's program immediately upon completion of their undergraduate degree in Elementary Education, choosing to wait until completion of the degree to pursue a teaching position. Conversely, 21 of the 31 students were practicing teachers. Three students had four to eight years, two students had nine to 13 years, and three students had 14-20 years of experience.

The questionnaire sought to answer five open-ended questions, including:
1) What did you learn about the variety of professional roles teacher leaders could pursue?
2) How has your view of teacher leadership changed over the course of your work in our program?
3) What are the most important skills you believe are necessary to be an effective teacher leader?
4) What did you learn about how teacher leaders apply advocacy leadership in the classroom, school, community, and profession?
5) What did you learn about how teacher leaders apply policy leadership in the classroom, school, community, and profession?

The questions were constructed related to findings from the literature review and were aligned with the CTQ, NBPTS, and NEA (2014) teacher competencies. Of the 31 possible participants, 27 completed the questionnaire. All data collection included student self-reporting. Each set of question responses was classified as a single data set, analyzed independently from the other sets during the time of analysis. Some data sets were quantifiable, as applicable, and highlighted in the results.

Limitations. Responses were self-reported by students, representing a snapshot of their perceived understanding at a point in time. Reflections were cumulative and did not capture benchmarks of perceptions at various points in time. In a sample size less than 30, responses cannot be generalizable to the broader population without further study and replication (Mertler, 2016). This study yielded qualitative findings; however, such findings often demonstrate limitations in generalizability to larger populations because the sample size is not large enough.

Results and Discussions
Responses to each question were coded by question, based on patterns and themes that emerged through theoretical sampling (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The authors employed constant comparative data analysis to first identify tentative categories for each research question until themes emerged to establish substantive theories (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Starting with open coding, ongoing analysis of common themes were refined to establish grounded theory. Research questions were also analyzed with deductive coding, as applicable, to establish theories in the responses related to the literature review.

What attributes do master's level students identify as important for teacher leaders? To answer this question, responses to question 3 of the MAEd Program Questionnaire were analyzed. Open coding began with an inductive mode of data analysis to cluster data together (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Coding resulted in ten initial categories of key words, with at least five or more responses to establish a category (See Table 1).

Collaboration was the next most common category with key words of collaborate or collabortion mentioned 18 times. With 15 times mentioned each, categories of trustworthiness, empathy, and initiative also emerged throughout the responses. Organized, passionate, and flexible were categories that each had 12 mentions of related key words. The least common categories were knowledgeable and confident, although each were found nine times in the responses.

Table 1: Initial categories by key words

Category	Frequency	Key Words
Communication	66	Effective, crucial conversations, respectful, listening, tone, speaking
Collaboration	18	Collaborate, collaboration
Trustworthy	15	Trust, respect, integrity, honest, reliable, loyalty
Initiative	15	Willing, determined, initiative
Organized	12	Goal-setting, time management, organized, prepared
Passionate	12	Committed, advocate
Flexible	12	Open-minded, willing to learn
Knowledgeable	9	Knowledgeable
Confident	9	Confident

The authors analyzed the key words again for each category to determine potential for overlap of themes among the key words. Elements of key words, such as respectful, reliable, open-minded, flexible, and prepared could have been related to the category of collaboration. Similarly, key words such as goal-setting and committed could also have overlapped with the categories of initiative and organized. Therefore, additional themes were established to group categories by attributes related to disposition or skill, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Attributes by disposition and skills

Attributes	Categories	Disposition or Skill
Advocate	Passionate	Both
Collaborative	Collaboration, Flexible	Both
Communication Style	Communication, Empathy	Both

Dependability	Trustworthy, Initiative	Disposition
Preparedness	Organized, Knowledgeable	Skill
Presence	Communication, Confident	Disposition

Disposition, as demonstrated in Table 2, is defined by the authors as innate behaviors, where skills are defined as learned attributes. However, the authors acknowledge all attributes could be innate or learned, depending upon context. Three categories could be dispositional or skill, meaning evidence of the disposition may help enhance the behavior as a skill. Conversely, lack of evidence of the behavior may yield the need for more teaching of the skill.

As an attempt to code responses with deductive mode, the researchers grouped key words by teacher leadership competencies defined by CTQ, NBPTS, and NEA (2014). Themes included: a) overarching competencies, b) instructional leadership, c) advocacy and policy leadership, and, d) association leadership. Grouping by deductive mode tested the data to determine evidence of responses grouped by attribute themes, related to the alignment of program coursework to the teacher leadership competencies. Categorized attributes were analyzed against the teacher leadership competencies to test for evidence among responses. Table 3 shows a crosswalk of the student perceptions from this study to the teacher leadership competencies.

Table 3: Crosswalk of attributes and teacher leadership competencies

Attribute	Teacher Leadership Competency
Advocate	Advocacy & Policy Leadership
	Association Leadership
Collaborative	Overarching Competencies
	Instructional Leadership
Communication Style	Overarching Competencies
	Instructional Leadership
Dependability	Overarching Competencies
Preparedness	Overarching Competencies
Presence	Overarching Competencies

Which professional roles in teacher leadership do master's level students identify as potential career paths? To answer this research question, Item 1 on the MAEd Program Questionnaire was used to analyze responses. Responses were analyzed by open coding to establish categories. The most common

category was to lead from the classroom, such as being a grade level team leader or leading students within the classroom. There were 18 mentions of words related to the category of curriculum or instructional specialist, providing leadership at a school or district level. Advocacy was mentioned 15 times, with examples of advocating for self as a professional, advocating for other teachers in need, or advocating for students. The least common role mentioned was to become an administrator, appearing only twice. Table 4 demonstrates the professional roles that emerged as themes in responses to Item 1 on the questionnaire, with frequency of mentions throughout the responses and example evidence.

Table 4: Professional roles for teacher leaders

Professional Role	Frequency	Example Evidence
Advocacy	15	Self-advocacy, teacher advocacy, student advocacy
Administrator	2	Principal, assistant principal
Advanced Graduate Education	6	Earn PhD, continue graduate school
College/University Teaching	5	Professor, community college
Curriculum or Instructional Specialist	18	Curriculum director, resource teacher
Lead from Classroom	19	Grade level team leader, lead students
Unknown	9	Do not know

In what ways do master's level students perceive teacher leaders to engage in advocacy leadership? To answer this research question, responses to Item 4 on the MAEd Program Questionnaire were analyzed for patterns and trends to establish themes. Open coding was used to analyze each response until themes emerged. Key words included advocacy for students, professional beliefs, staff, and curricular changes. Additional categories included maintaining positive collaboration and communication, as well as staying updated in research and methods. Table 5 provides example evidence by categories through inductive coding.

The most common responses were related to advocating for students and staff. There was evidence of advocating for research-based practices in teaching and learning, but from the perspective of learning more about research-based strategies to become better informed for the sake of student needs. There was some evidence in the responses of association leadership (CTQ, NBPTS, & NEA,

2014), while this was not explicitly asked in the questionnaire. An example response included:

> "…*serve various organizations…and advocate for the rights of teachers…*"

In what ways do master's level students perceive teacher leaders to engage in policy leadership? Research question four was analyzed with the same methods as research question three; however, responses to Item 15 on the MAEd Program Questionnaire were used to find patterns and trends in the data. Open coding was used to analyze each response until logical themes emerged by categories. Table 6 demonstrates categories by inductive coding.

Table 5: Advocacy leadership categories (inductive coding)

Advocacy Action	Example Evidence
For students	Student needs, give voice to learners, empowering leaders, creating student leaders, do what is best for students
For staff	Overcome concerns with staff, stand up for co-workers, supportive to colleagues, lead committees
For community	Participate in community, lead for a cause, school community events, invite community leaders, increase access
For collaboration and communication	Maintain positive dialogue, no complaining, open communication, crucial conversations, effectively communicate, professional learning communities
For curriculum and instruction	Effective teaching strategies, research-based strategies, inventive thinking
For professional values and beliefs	Stand up for beliefs, ethically responsible
For the profession	Advocate for the profession, understand policy, improve education quality, serve organizations

Table 6: Policy leadership categories (inductive coding)

Policy Leadership Action	Example Evidence
For students	Classroom policies & procedures, safety, meet needs of every student
School improvement	School policies & procedures, implement positive school change, influence colleagues
Engage community	Educate community, stakeholder-specific

	messaging
Advocacy	Convincing others, advocate for education, advocate for change
Systemic improvement	District curriculum team, serve on state policy teams, professional development needs

Policy leadership referring to influencing students, school improvement, and school district improvement were common themes that emerged in the responses. The most common theme that emerged was the understanding and improving of policies, advocating, and doing what is best for students. The category of understanding and improving policies was further refined to distinguish between the improvement of policies within the classroom, school, community, or school system.

Examples of policy leadership in the classroom included refining student procedures and policies to meet student learning needs. Examples related to improving policies in the school referred to assisting the principal in reinforcing rules or procedures by influencing colleagues. Advocacy leadership appeared in this research question again, by advocating for student needs. Policy leadership was mentioned through advocacy by influencing stakeholders from the community, becoming more informed, and engaging with policy makers.

There were six responses that explicitly stated uncertainty about policy leadership. One example included:

> *"I am unsure what policy leadership refers to."*

Other examples of policy leadership included:

> *"…a challenging task…no easy way to apply policy leadership…"*

> *"…limited knowledge of how teachers apply policy leadership…"*

In what ways did master's level students' view of teacher leadership change after completing the MAEd program? Item 12 on the MAEd Program Questionnaire was used to answer the fifth research question. Responses were analyzed using open coding to establish patterns and trends in the data. Table 7 shows the categories that emerged from what MAEd students indicated as a changed view of teacher leadership after completing the program.

Table 7: Changed views of teacher leadership

Category	Frequency	Example Evidence
Administration	8	Roles other than administrators
Anyone can lead	32	Even beginning teachers
Helping others	11	Serving, working alongside,

		mentoring, mentees
Influence	28	Beyond classroom, within classroom, within community
Varied roles	18	Many roles, teacher leadership is broad, formal or informal

Overwhelmingly, responses that generated the most patterns related to the notion that any teacher can be a leader. There were 32 mentions related to this category. Responses that stood out particularly included:

> *"Even as a beginning teacher I can have an impact as a teacher leader in my school."*

> *"I now see ways that I can [take on] leadership positions…in my school."*

The second most common category was the influence teacher leaders can take on many different roles, both inside and outside of the classroom. With 28 mentions, the category included responses such as:

> *"…leadership can be seen in the classroom, school, district, state, or even country."*

This was confirmed by another response:

> *"I did not realize that teacher leadership had so many roles."*

While behaviors of teacher leaders were identified as a changed view, 11 responses specified the realization that teacher leaders are helpful to others. Key words such as serving, working alongside, and mentees are examples of evidence to generate this category. Finally, while not the most common category, there was explicit mention of learning that leadership is more than just becoming an administrator. This is exemplified with such responses as:

> *"…can be a leader in many different capacities…"*

> *"…do not have to have a 'title' to always lead…"*

> *"…could be a leader without having an [administrative] position…"*

Responses to the open-ended questionnaire indicated that student perceptions of teacher leadership attributes confirmed findings from the literature review. The two most important attributes identified by the MAEd students were communication and collaboration, specifically with attributes related to being respectful, possessing good listening skills, and the ability to have crucial conversations (Handford & Leithwood, 2013; Mills et al., 2014; Patterson, Grenny, McMillan, & Switzler, 2002). MAEd students also identified trustworthiness as a top characteristic important for teacher leaders (Kouzes & Posner, 2017). Responses referred to both dispositions and skill sets necessary for teacher leaders, also aligned with the CTQ, NBPTS, and NEA (2014)

recommendations for teacher leadership competencies, including attributes such as dependability, preparedness, and presence. Additionally, attributes aligned with all four major teacher leadership competencies, which may be the intentionality of aligning the competencies across all of the MAEd program coursework. There was; however, little explicit mention to association leadership (CTQ, NBPTS, & NEA, 2014). The lack of understanding policy leadership may also have been related to implicit engagement of policy, whereas, students created an advocacy project in one particular course.

The frequency of responses related to professional roles for teacher leaders revealed that most students recognized teacher leaders could function in leadership capacity without having to leave the classroom. The least common response was the desire to become a school administrator. These responses were parallel to the review of literature on teacher leadership roles, where teachers can be leaders from the classroom, advocating for students, other teachers, and the profession (Coburn, 2001; Danielson, 2007; Goldstein, 2008; Harrison & Killion, 2007; Malsbury, 2016; Warren & Sugar, 2005). The analysis of responses was also aligned with the notion that teacher leadership takes many shapes and definitions, while teachers can exhibit multiple roles, depending upon context (CTQ, NBPTS, & NEA, 2014; Mangin & Stoelinga, 2008; Sterrett, 2016). The desire for teaching at the university or college level appeared to have alignment with the desire to lead while upholding the function of teacher.

Responses related to curriculum or instructional specialists appeared to showcase the desire to maintain teacher roots while demonstrating greater impact on the school and community, influencing more teachers for change. Similarly, advocacy was a professional role indicated in the top tier of responses. The desire for impact beyond the classroom walls, through the lens of advocacy, indicated the need for students to have voices through teachers as advocates. Additional examples of greater impact included the desire to improve the quality of the teaching profession for teachers, school communities, and to demonstrate attributes of influential collaboration and communication for positive change (Ault et al., 2018; Davey, 2000; Khalfia, 2013; Ingvarson, 2011; Smylie & Eckert, 2017).

Policy leadership included the notion of making change for the profession by influencing legislators and district-level leaders; however, most reference to policy leadership was grounded in shaping policies that benefited the context of the school for students and teachers, such as enhanced classroom procedures or school-wide policies that would lead to positive school change (Coburn, 2001; Goldstein, 2008; Malsbary, 2016). Policy leadership beyond the school level did not emerge as a common theme in the study.

Aligned with Bandura's (1997) notion of self-efficacy is that, with increased knowledge and experience, there is increased confidence in one's ability. Furthermore, Warford's (2011) expansion of Vygotsky's (1978) paradigm of zone of proximal development was evident in the results of this study, especially with the most common discovery of MAEd students declaring that all teachers can

lead, regardless of their stage of development. Changed views of teacher leadership also showed that teacher leaders are influential, shaping change within the classroom and beyond with other colleagues and in the community.

Stages of teacher development did not appear to explicitly emerge in the responses of this study. The open-ended questions may have inadvertently steered participant responses away from indicating how stages of development may have related to the answers given. There was no attempt to ask participants to self-assess where they would have classified themselves within the teacher leadership competencies and related developmental stages. Additionally, while some responses suggested mention of teacher leadership attributes in confidence, aligned with findings from the literature review (Day & Harrison, 2007; Smylie & Eckert, 2017), there was lack of explicit mention related to self-awareness, a key attribute connected to the overarching competencies of teacher leadership outlined by the CTQ, NBPTS, and NEA (2014).

Recommendations for future research. While the results of this study confirmed findings from the literature review, there is a need to explore responses deeper to further triangulate the data. A next step in this study would be to engage participants in semi-structured focus group interviews to provide the research with additional understanding of responses, leading to solid saturation of findings (Forsey, 2012). Furthermore, an exploration of where teachers in this study could be categorized in stages of development may help broaden the understanding of emerging teacher leaders. Finally, an examination of self-efficacy and the identified roles of teacher leaders as desirable pathways for professional growth may lead to additional findings for this study. While this study was a single case at one institution, replication may add to the rigor of findings for the overall benefit of research on teacher leadership.

Conclusion

This study sought to investigate the teacher leadership perceptions of master's students after having completed a program strategically aligned with pre-identified teacher leadership competencies. Since teacher leadership continues to be defined broadly (York-Barr & Duke, 2004; Wenner & Campbell, 2017), categories of competencies may help to close the gap in teacher leader role ambiguity and create unique specializations in teacher leadership to be implemented either in the classroom or to the broader contexts of school and community.

Teacher leadership is a multi-faceted concept and is often based on context, taking shape as situational needs emerge in a school, district, or state. For more than a decade, findings on the roles of teacher leadership indicate that teachers have the ability to engage in leadership at multiple levels, either from within their own classrooms or beyond. By virtue of their daily functions, teachers are indeed leaders, as indicated by the findings of our study. Therefore, continued self-discovery and examination of innate and learned abilities to maximize their leadership skills is necessary for aspiring teacher leaders. Teacher education programs have the ability to draw on the development of teachers and to help

them find their niche as leaders using roles and attributes that both capitalize on their strengths and challenge them in areas for growth.

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