A Vibrant and Empowering Context for Teacher Leaders[1][2]

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Abstract

This report describes the results of a series of interviews with educators in an independent school for students with unique learning needs that is characterized by a pervasive positive school culture, clear mission, and high levels of teacher participation in decision making. Researchers noted the collective understanding among teachers and administrators of the work of teacher leaders. There was a strong sense of community interdependence and collaboration that fostered teacher leadership. Strong structural support enabled teacher leaders to exercise influence beyond their classrooms. Teachers reported a strong sense of freedom and high levels of administrator trust. Teachers felt that they needed to establish a base of school-based experience in order to emerge as leaders. Other observations included high levels of teacher professionalism, collective expectations that teachers would maintain ongoing readiness to learn on the job, contagious enthusiasm, and deep commitment to the school community. Challenges to teacher leadership included a sustainable workload, altered collegial relationships, alignment of grassroots initiatives with school priorities, and pressure to meet parent expectations. Teachers recognized the fragility of their positive school culture and celebrated their professional autonomy. Teachers and administrators understood that their school must operate in a way that led parents to want to enroll their children. Finally, the researchers considered succession planning, along with the skills and knowledge that could lead to similarly high levels of innovation and success in other schools.

Keywords: teacher leader, school culture, teacher professionalism, organizational support

Introduction

This report shares the findings of research conducted in a large urban K-12 independent school in western Canada that serves students with unique learning needs. As the two researchers interacted over several years with the teaching and administrative personnel in the school, they became keenly aware of the pervasive positive school culture, unusually clear school vision of formal and informal leaders, and the numerous examples of teacher involvement in, for example, goal setting, curriculum development, student assessment, and professional development.

As a result of their concurrent involvement in the *International Study of Teacher Leadership* (www.mru.ca/istl), the researchers invited interested members of the school to join them in the exploration of their study's primary research question: *How is teacher leadership conceptualized and enacted and what are the implications for educational stakeholders*? The invitation led to the researchers participating as observers in a major strategic planning event involving school personnel, board members, parents, and community representatives. Subsequently, the researchers conducted interviews with school community members: teachers, administrators, and individuals in related professional roles.

The researchers asked teacher leaders about their understandings of teacher leadership and their motivations for assuming leadership roles. They explored the values and beliefs that teacher leaders held about their work. The interviews delved into the political dimensions of teacher leadership and also addressed the informal and formal development that each participant had experienced at different career stages. The teacher leaders described their influences on school culture and school change. They were also asked to analyze the balance between the autonomy of teacher leaders and the school's priorities.

Rationale

The value of leading in schools by employing the construct of *community* has been dominant in the educational administration and leadership literature for decades. Harris (2002) wrote about the strong connection between school improvement and belonging to a professional community. Lambert (2003) shared the importance of "reciprocal, purposeful" (p. 423) learning among students, colleagues, self, and the school community itself. Hord and Sommers (2008) wrote extensively about professional learning communities but cautioned that they are described and defined in countless ways. Hord's (2015) description of a professional learning community was broad, perhaps necessarily so, given its complexity. That is, she described the value for educators of the time, trusting relationships, shared values, intentional learning among peers, and shared authority and decision-making.

Using Roy and Hord's (2006) concept of professional learning communities and Katzenmeyer and Moller's (1996) description of teacher leadership as a *sleeping giant*, Crowther et al. (2009) began researching and facilitating school improvement through an initiative called *Innovative Designs for Enhancing Achievements in Schools* (IDEAS), that continues in Australia to the present. Andrews et al. (2004) based IDEAS on the premise that "teacher leadership in its various forms constitutes the foundation for successful school revitalisation" (p. 11). Like Hord (2015), they shared the importance of collaboration, positive relationships, and alignment of vision and decision-making processes. IDEAS continues to be recognized as a valuable evidence-based approach to improving schools and student achievement (Gurr et al., 2022).

The potential of teacher leadership to enhance teaching and learning in school communities has influenced the development of teaching standards in wide-ranging locales such as Australia (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, 2018), South Africa (South African

Council for Educators, 2017), and England (Department for Education, 2011). That is, teacher leadership is an influential concept but, also like the term professional learning community, it is described in several comprehensive literature reviews as largely undefined (Nguyen et al., 2020; Schott et al., 2020; Wenner & Campbell, 2017). Angelle and Dehart (2016) shared about a dozen definitions of teacher leadership that are quite varied but with one common element, the idea that school leadership does not need to reside only in formal positions like the principalship.

In short, the value of shared leadership is not contested, nor is the understanding that it is manifested in a communal context. However, teacher leadership continues to intrigue practitioners, policymakers, and researchers. A more detailed description of the rationale for the study was provided by Webber (2021).

Guiding Concepts

The study was guided by the assumption that the primary function of teacher leadership is to facilitate *student achievement*. Other assumptions, related to a working definition of teacher leadership and the supports that nurture it, include collaborative school cultures and professional learning communities. Figure 1 depicts the guiding concepts.

First, York-Barr and Duke (2004) offered a summary definition of *teacher leadership* that was used in this study. They suggested that it is "the process by which teachers, individually or collectively, influence their colleagues, principals, and other members of school communities to improve teaching and learning practices with the aim of increased student learning and achievement" (p. 287-288). This definition aligns with Nguyen et al.'s (2020) observation that one of the main goals of teacher leadership is to "improve instructional quality, school effectiveness, and student learning" (p. 67).

Second, Murphy (2005) suggested that teacher leadership in support of student achievement is enhanced by school *support structures*. These include policies and practices that protect teacher leaders from risk and criticism. Support should be provided by formal leaders who create opportunities for teachers to expand their traditional classroom-based roles to include school-wide leadership responsibilities (Angelle & DeHart, 2016). Support also may include the application of parallel leadership, whereby teachers and principals collaborate to create a shared purpose (Crowther, 2002).

Third, teacher leadership requires a *school culture* characterized by trust and respect (Frost, 2008; Zepeda, 2019), collective action (Gurr, 2022), and shared responsibility (Woods & Roberts, 2019). Importantly, shared responsibility must be accompanied by safety for teacher leaders, particularly safety from some colleagues who may describe teacher leaders as aggressive and threatening (Dawson, 2014).

Fourth, Shen et al. (2020) identified a seven-dimensional framework for teacher leadership that included the development of *professional learning communities*. Roy and Hord (2006) described professional learning communities as based on common values, collective learning, and shared practices. Crowther (2009) added that teacher leadership in professional learning communities should be voluntary and incorporate unique skills and knowledge that lead to "mature teacher leadership" (p. 98).

Figure 1

Guiding Concepts
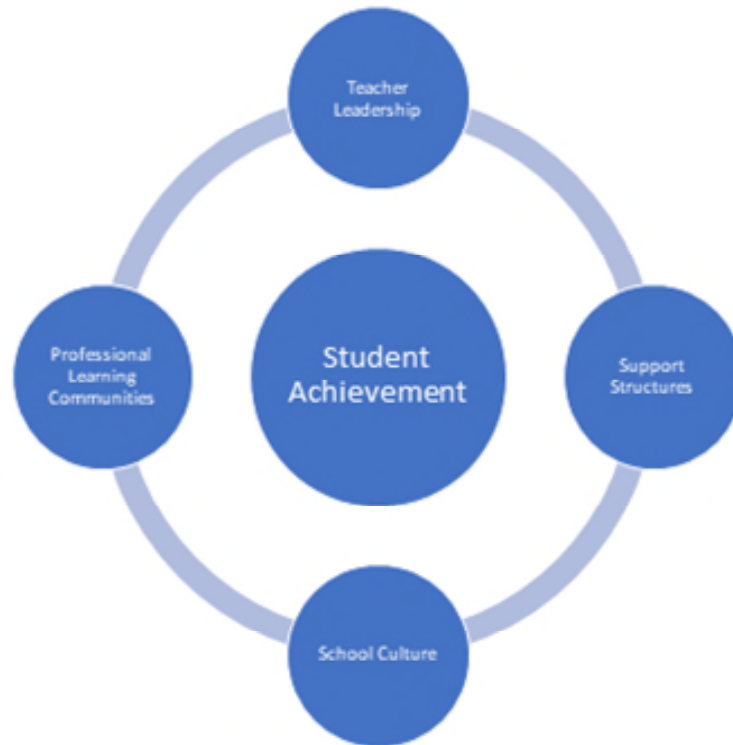
Methodology

The *International Study of Teacher Leadership* (www.mru.ca/istl) used a mixed-methods five-stage research initiative conducted in 10 countries. This report addresses Stage 3 only, which consisted of one-hour semi-structured interviews conducted individually with 13 members—11 women and two men—of one school community in western Canada. Participants ranged from early career to highly experienced, with most participants in a mid-career stage.

The interviews were preceded by the researchers' participation as observers in a full-day strategic planning event involving all school staff, school governance board members, and community representatives. The planning activity served the researchers as an immersive re-orientation to the school community and its priorities; it built on the researchers' previous

knowledge of the school gleaned from experiences there with pre-service teachers during their practicum assignments and with school personnel during their graduate programs.

Figure 2

Study Stages

Stage 1: Phenomenographic Component (Arden & Okoko, 2021)

Stage 2: Document Analyses (Webber & Nickel, 2021)

Stage 3: Interviews and Questionnaires

Stage 4: Case Studies

Stage 5: Oral Histories

The interview questions were derived from a literature review (Webber, 2021) and informed by Stages 1 and 2 of the study, a phenomenography (Arden & Okoko, 2021), and an analysis of documents related to teacher leadership shared publicly by educational organizations in Alberta, Canada, including the provincial department of education, the Alberta teachers' union, several school districts, and universities with initial teacher education programs (Webber & Nickel, 2021). Interview questions are shared in the appendix at the end of this report.

Because of COVID-19 pandemic restrictions, the interviews were conducted and recorded online using audio conferencing software. The audio recordings were transcribed, and the researchers coded the qualitative data separately. Subsequently, the researchers jointly used axial coding to derive six themes (Erickson, 1986; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 2002). The analyses were framed by the researchers' understanding of the school's strategic plan, mission, and goals.

The study was approved by the university research ethics board and by the school's leadership and research committee members. Interviewees each signed a release allowing their interview data to be incorporated into study reports.

Emergent Themes

The following themes are a composite of interviewees' interview comments. Identifying information has been omitted. The school has been given the name *Cypress School,* and all other names are pseudonyms.

Teacher Leadership Work

First, our interviews demonstrated that participants at Cypress School shared a collective understanding of the *work of teacher leaders*. Participants articulated the importance of teacher leaders contributing their strengths, providing informal support to colleagues by leading grade-level teams and committees, and advocating for students. Peer coaching, collaborative inquiry, mentoring, sharing, and organizing were all identified as ways teacher leaders supported their colleagues. New colleagues were introduced via a formal mentoring program to the unique needs of their student population and the "Cypress Way" to address those needs. Because collaborative contributions were highly valued, there was a sense of mutual accountability to one another.

Samantha described teacher leadership as "any time someone steps up with a strength of theirs ... a way they feel they can give back." By reaching out to colleagues, teachers build "this base level of trust amongst each other, and then grow those links so that it becomes a network instead of divisions" (Samantha). Kate echoed the importance of informal support to colleagues, particularly by opening one's classroom to other teachers when trying out a new approach. "Hey, here is what I am doing. Come and see. It may flop and it may be a win, but either way, there is some learning in it" (Kate).

Participants explained that teacher leaders must be advocates for their students and diligent in addressing parent concerns, particularly because the students at their school have identified learning needs. For example, Nathan said, "When somebody says, 'Well ADHD isn't a real thing,' you have got to be able to stand up to that … or you are almost silently or tacitly approving of that." Emma was proud of the difference their school made for students with special needs and amplified the importance of acting in the best interests of those students:

> When I see things that are inefficient, or a waste of time, or are not actually fundamentally addressing the needs of kids, it really, really gets me, so I feel like I have to be an advocate for them. ... If I see something that needs to change, I don't feel like I have a right to complain unless I can offer an alternative, and if I have an alternative, then I have a responsibility to do something about it.

All of these participants clearly took tremendous responsibility to ensure their school provided the best possible learning environment for their students and supported one another to achieve that aim.

Organizational Culture

Second, it was clear that the *organizational culture* of Cypress School created a strong sense of community interdependence and collaboration that fosters teacher leadership. Henry, one of the leaders in the school, explained, "High-performing organizations are nothing more than a set of concentric high-performing teams and you have to include, maybe first and foremost, teachers on those teams." Elaine, a teacher, described her experience of this administrative openness and trust: *"*I have felt supported by administration. ... I can be honest, they are solution-oriented, but also that I have the freedom in my classroom ... to try things I want to try." A flat hierarchy and autonomy were accompanied by an expectation that colleagues will conform to

school goals; new initiatives must be evidence-based, and results must be communicated because "we don't roll the dice with our kids. We don't test things that are unproven" (Emma).

This climate of openness made it possible for teachers to be enablers in a culture where "one person gets interested in something and somebody notices...and, before you know it, you have this trickle-down effect where you can have a really positive impact by just pursuing things that you are interested in, or passionate about" (Elaine). Participants described Cypress School as a safe place to try and fail. Fran said that teachers needed practice to develop the skill sets to be leaders because "If you don't fail, then you don't learn." To be sure, school culture can be tenuous, and Cypress School faced some challenges; however, on the whole, our participants seem to view the culture at Cypress School as hospitable to teacher leadership.

Structural Support

Next, our participants told us about *structural supports* that enable teacher leaders to thrive and have influence beyond their classrooms. Teachers have numerous opportunities to provide instructional support by leading work teams, facilitating professional development, participating in communities of practice, mentoring colleagues, and leading international studies. They valued how formal leaders recognize individual strengths and nudge teachers to share ideas and to "find their tribe."

Kate was part of a team of instructional coaches, a group of teachers who are released from classroom teaching to support other teachers. These instructional coaches organized teachers in professional development activities where teachers were challenged to improve their practice. Teachers in these coach roles provided an architecture of support that provided consistency and clarity to the teachers they supported. Kate explained that this structure "really does encourage them to take on new challenges and to shine when they can." Surely Kate was a leader to those

teachers through her role, but she also inspired those teachers to make a difference in the lives of their students and colleagues through innovative and collaborative professional learning and practices.

Danielle believed that "having established mentor-mentee relationships in the school...can really promote and contribute to the success of teacher leaders." Typically, mentor and mentee teachers shared a classroom and "having somebody that they are working with day in and day out… I think that is a huge support that doesn't exist in other schools" (Kate). Sometimes support emerged through informal collegial relationships. Cara described a colleague who empowered her:

She would be right there to help me make (my idea) larger and think bigger, and really pushed me to try and gather more ideas, more evidence and then where could this fit? So, she was more like that cheerleader champion of ideas, which is so beneficial to think, "Oh, maybe I do have something that I could say!" (Cara)

Several participants commented on professional development designed to facilitate "generative dialogue." Generative dialogue skills were considered integral to effective collaboration and drawing colleagues together to reach a common goal. Because leadership was an explicit priority at Cypress School, many of the staff were part of an "Emerging Leaders" program that included "people that have been school principals right down to second-year teachers…really diving into what does leadership mean to you?" (Tanya). By exploring their own perceptions of leadership, staff members were able to reflect on the skills necessary to be more effective leaders in the school regardless of their formal roles.

Key Learnings and Rewards for Teacher Leaders

Our interviewees highlighted several *key learnings and rewards* drawn from their formal and informal teacher leadership experiences. They reported a strong sense of freedom because

senior administrators trusted them to innovate to meet student needs. All felt more empowered and confident because of involvement in leadership activities.

Several participants conveyed how much they learned about effective communication through their experiences as teacher leaders.

When I first started my (leadership) role, I didn't listen terribly well. My orientation was to solve other people's problems, and I think that is a typical experience for people who are new in leadership roles. ... And then years later, I did some reading into generative dialogue, and how do you really get at the underlying issues? … They just need time to reflect and bounce ideas off of people, and sometimes, I just need to temper my enthusiasm! (Emma)

Kate had a similar experience of learning to be a better listener, "seeking to really understand where someone is coming from or the point they are trying to make, rather than just waiting to respond." She also felt it was important for her to help teachers build that listening skill set in collaboration meetings. Prior to her time at Cypress, Fran was an "outsider culturally" in a school; learning to gain the trust of her colleagues in that context contributed significantly to her subsequent leadership at Cypress School.

In addition to learning through teacher leadership experiences, our participants were rewarded by experiences that empowered them. Danielle was motivated to seek teacher leadership roles because she wanted "bigger challenges, wanting to try new things." Emma described herself as someone who was passionate about sharing learning. "If it is just for me, it is a waste of time. It has got to be something that is shared and communicated and improves things" (Emma).

While new challenges were motivating to our participants, they learned not to try to do everything but to do what is most meaningful. Fran's mentor reminded her to "'Pick one that you

think will have the biggest ripple and it will probably impact the other things.' And that has always sat with me, resonated with me in anything that I do —even as a leader—just pick one that has the biggest ripple" (Fran). The participants demonstrated that learning through teacher leadership could be demanding, but the rewards made the efforts worthwhile.

Career Progression

Regarding the *career progression* of teacher leaders, participants believed that typically teachers need to establish a base of experience to establish interpersonal skills and confidence. However, they admitted there are exceptions to this generalization. "I have seen first-year teachers who are really, really confident and have joined teams and led all kinds of work, and I have had twenty-five-year teachers who are pretty comfortable doing their own thing" (Tanya). Participants acknowledged that some teachers prefer lower profiles at times during their career; "Not everyone needs to be the superstar quarterback. Sometimes we need a benchwarmer" (Fran). Whether teachers faced additional personal responsibilities or simply needed more time to develop, it was acceptable to step back and take a "lower profile" or cycle out of leadership responsibilities for a time.

Our interview questions specifically asked about opportunities to develop teacher leaders in preservice education. Tracy suggested that learning to work collaboratively and to have tough conversations could be beneficial in teacher education because "there are a lot of people who don't know how to have a tough conversation, [and if they] were not done well, (they) could have extremely negative repercussions."

Opportunities to lead informally often prepare teachers for formal leadership later. For example, Danielle described how her experiences as a teacher leader gave her "the confidence and motivation to apply for some formal leadership positions" and this encouraged her "creativity and

ability to think innovatively." Our participants seemed to find the work intellectually intriguing, and it appeared their enthusiasm was contagious. They were helping to create a culture where teachers could develop leadership skills and establish fulfilling career trajectories.

Challenges to Teacher Leadership

While teacher leadership may be gratifying, it can also be depleting. Interviewees acknowledged that they needed to guard against *challenges* to the school's supportive culture, particularly with limits on personal capacity and sustainability.

> I feel like we do ask a lot of our teachers. ... Working with kids with LD brings a whole other layer of administrative tasks... every single student having an IPP, and every single student having parents that expect daily communication … When I first joined the organization, it was almost an expectation that you burn the candle at both ends because we had to be able to keep up with all of the demands of working with such a unique population. (Kate)

Kate spoke in the past tense, which may suggest the school culture now invites a more sustainable workload.

Formal and informal leadership work can alter interpersonal relationships with colleagues, especially if grade leaders feel vulnerable when they communicate administrative decisions to their colleagues.

> It can definitely have the effect of "shoot the messenger," especially as (grade) lead, because that is the liaison between the teachers and the principal and so if we get directives from above and you bring it back to the team and don't explain it well enough, then it can definitely be the, "What do you mean I now have to …?" (Cara)

Such impatience with conflicting points of view and apparent resistance can inhibit collaboration.

Helping colleagues to develop as teacher leaders requires skillful communication. Tanya described a teacher with tremendous knowledge but poor facilitation skills. "(Their) delivery comes across as 'you are going to do this, and you are going to do it my way.' So, we are working on how to engage people differently because they don't want to be told what to do. They want to be invited in to do the work." Fran wondered about her own tactful communication: "How do you give that constructive feedback in a place where that person receiving it knows that you still have that compassion for their situation, but I am required in my role to make sure you are giving it all?"

At times, it was difficult to manage the unique passion projects of many different teachers and align these initiatives with the school's strategic priorities. Cara described a project that did not get off the ground:

> (The idea) didn't spread as many people were hoping. We can't have twenty-seven different initiatives in a year, so I think it is just going to be harder to maintain that enthusiasm next year if we know that you can put in a ton of work, and it won't get to where you need to be. So, when it is set up as kind of an institutional level task, which I think is different from teacher leadership which is your own grassroots, wanting to move something forward. (Cara)

In Cara's view, teacher leadership needed to emerge from the teachers' ideas rather than top-down mandates. It seemed that teachers were encouraged to identify initiatives that would support the school's strategic goals and that grassroots problem-solving was encouraged. However, establishing a sustainable number of initiatives that aligned with the school priorities created tensions at times.

Finally, Nathan explained the pressure of meeting parent expectations in this independent school context: "You are also a business, and those parents are customers, so while they may not be experts on education, if what you are doing is not meeting their needs, they may not come back and you might not have a place to work anymore" (Nathan). Teachers had to be able to provide disgruntled parents with solid research to support new initiatives and convince them that the teaching strategies were appropriate and defensible.

Discussion

The profile of Cypress School that emerged from the interviews is exceptionally positive and, as one interviewee described it, "a good news story" that lends itself to appreciative inquiry (Cooperrider, 2013).

Many Strengths

Levels of professionalism in Cypress School are high and widespread. Interview participants spoke of their sense of mutual accountability for facilitating student learning and advocating on behalf of students with unique needs, the primary demographic that the teachers serve. Expectations for teaching performance are high and interviewees spoke about students from a nurturing perspective.

Structural support for teachers, formal leaders, and students is varied and effective. A clear conceptual framework for support, explicitly articulated by the formal leadership team, is tied closely to the school's strategic plan. It includes collectively designed year-long professional learning in areas such as student assessment. Elementary grade-level teams and secondary subject area specialists also participate in book studies and unit planning. Teams of in-school professionals provide students and teachers with consistent psychoeducational, pedagogical, and technological support.

Teachers at all career stages have numerous opportunities to learn leadership by providing leadership. In addition to professional development planning committees, teachers may work with colleagues to organize community-wide arts and sports programming for students and parents. They can elect to serve the broader community by collaborating with other teachers, students, and parents to organize fundraising events in support of health research, while concurrently incorporating opportunities for their students to learn organizational skills and to build expertise in event promotion, social media, and photography.

Commitment

Implicit in what interviewees told us about working in Cypress School was a strong investment in the success of the school community. There was an unstated understanding that teachers would maintain ongoing readiness to learn on the job. The organizational culture generated a contagious enthusiasm and commitment to shared leadership within classrooms and throughout the school community. Teachers seemed captivated and intellectually intrigued by their work with learners and colleagues. Teacher engagement was high because school priorities were informed by teachers who had a voice in the direction of the school and informed specific ways the school might achieve school priorities. Significantly, they frequently had the resources and professional learning to help them achieve those priorities.

Interviewees were high-achieving individuals who were full-time educators with completed graduate degrees or currently engaged in post-secondary studies at the master's and doctoral levels. Some individuals had backgrounds of success in highly competitive sports.

Interviewees explained that working at Cypress School developed their awareness that organizational cultures are fragile and require ongoing nurturing and high levels of professionalism. They reported their understanding that developing as teacher leaders sometimes

altered personal relationships with their peers in the school. They felt that their development as leaders and corresponding career trajectories warranted the time and effort required to succeed in the school. They understood that not every teacher can or wants to commit to leadership development at all career stages. They explained that it was okay to cycle in and out of demanding leadership roles according to the ebb and flow of their professional and personal lives.

Interviewees celebrated the professional autonomy associated with teaching in the school to pursue programming and learning interests, knowing that formal and informal leaders would support grassroots initiatives that aligned with the school mission and goals. They cautioned that the school culture allowed the generation of so many and sometimes competing professional interests that part of navigating the school culture included accepting that they had to establish personal priorities, and to let some interests wait until another year.

Educational Entrepreneurialism

Cypress School is an example of educational entrepreneurship (see Scott & Webber, 2013; Webber & Scott, 2008). It was founded by parents and community members 40 years ago for students with unique learning needs who perhaps were not finding the learning support they needed in other educational settings. This fulfills one of the key attributes of entrepreneurship in educational organizations, innovative behavior that demonstrates successful adaptation to changing conditions.

The school is based on networking that spans the school and the broader community. Teachers and students engage in community service that shares information and builds support. The school seeks guidance from individuals and organizations with expertise in meeting the needs of learners with special needs; this frequently takes the form of professional development led by highly regarded practitioners and researchers from national and international contexts. It also

incorporates a communication framework that involves synchronous and asynchronous communication among most school community members.

Educational entrepreneurship is about more than money, but Cypress School must maintain financial stability. The school receives some provincial funding, but it generates the majority of its operational revenue through tuition fees and external service contracts. The viability of many independent schools in the province can be a challenge but the longitudinal success of Cypress School has been substantial. Interviewees shared their acceptance that, as a competitive educational enterprise, it must operate in a way that makes parents want to keep enrolling their children. Similarly, educators must (and do) feel that their ongoing participation in the school community is rewarding professionally and part of a gratifying career trajectory.

Implications and Conclusion

The formal and informal leaders in Cypress School expressed a desire to explore the features that contribute to this vibrant school environment and support the researchers in action research (Lewin, 1946). As part of the process of ongoing school improvement, the questions in Table 1 may be important to consider. It is important to note that the questions are meant to inform the larger community of practitioners and researchers. As a result, the questions reflect important considerations for the Cypress School community members but also educators in other settings.

Table 1

Questions Related to Cypress School

Issues	Questions
Transferability	Which Cypress School attributes are transferable to other independent and public schools?

Which teacher leader skills and knowledge should be part of preservice teacher education?

Should informal leadership skills required by Cypress School be taught in graduate programs?

How should principal preparation reflect the strong formal leadership of Cypress School?

Sustainability	Can the skills and knowledge of teachers at Cypress School be taught?
	What hiring filters and teacher orientation practices make Cypress School possible?
	What is the minimal level of resources required to maintain Cypress School?
	How does Cypress School maintain the relevance of its strategic plan?
Succession	What succession plans will make the schools' long-term viability possible?
	What are the differences between the founders and operators of Cypress School?
	What skills and knowledge will be required of the next generation of Cypress School teachers?
Entrepreneurship	What factors in the educational community led to the formation of Cypress School?
	What were the skills and knowledge required to found Cypress School?
	Is innovation at this level achievable in public schools?
	Did the vulnerability of special needs students influence the emergence of the school?

One of the main goals of the *International Study of Teacher Leadership* is to inform educational stakeholders who seek to nurture teacher leadership for the reasons identified in the *Rationale* section of this report. It will be important to continue exploring the successes of teacher leaders in Cypress School and other institutions like it to determine transferability within Canada and to analyze contextualized teacher leadership in international settings.

Equally important, we learned from interviewees that teacher leadership is fragile and that planning for its sustainability is critical. It will be important to gather more detailed information about factors such as hiring, professional learning, and strategic planning. Professional learning aligned with teacher values is consequential because it helps them to align their practice with their "pedagogical mission in relation to the moral and social development of children" (Korthagen, 2013, p. 91). Also, succession planning is directly related to sustainability, so it will be informative to continue investigating strategies aimed at the long-term viability of the school.

Entrepreneurship is most often associated with private business enterprises. Cypress School is an independent school, so financial return is essential for the school to ensure quality programming. However, it is a non-profit organization that is based on four pillars related to maximizing academic performance, teaching academic and personal independence, promoting social responsibility, and developing student self-esteem and self-confidence. The founders and current operators of the school clearly feel compelled to build human and social capacity, and their creativity and innovation are evidenced in what we learned in our conversations with teacher leaders. Questions that merit ongoing research relate to how innovation in service of learning can be fostered in more schools for more learners.

A valuable outcome of Stage 3 of the *International Study of Teacher Leadership* was agreement of the school leaders and teachers to participate in a longer-term and more intensive

analysis of teacher leadership in Cypress School. As a result, the researchers are engaged in an immersive year-long study of the people and programs in the school. We are in the midst of examining how the structures that support teacher leaders at Cypress School intersect with the socio-emotional dimensions of teacher leadership. By developing a more detailed understanding of the structures and values that guide teacher leaders, the researchers will be able to share insights about teacher leadership within the research community. Concurrently, school community members will strengthen their already outstanding capacity to foster conditions for teacher leaders to emerge and excel.

The research that is currently in progress constitutes Stage 4 of the *International Study of Teacher Leadership.* The original study design envisioned Stage 4 as a case study, but it has developed some attributes of an educational ethnography. The current work does not fulfill adequately all the criteria of an ethnography outlined in the foundational writing of anthropologists George and Louise Spindler (1987). However, it begins to meet some of their criteria. It is contextualized, and it is prolonged and repetitive. We are relying on members of the school community for their views of teacher leadership based on their sustained experiences in their classrooms, offices, and meeting rooms. Our observations and interviews are generated *in situ,* and we know that some of the sociocultural knowledge affecting teacher leadership is tacit. Finally, we seek to learn from the teacher leaders in Cypress School in the most natural manner possible.

Appendix

Interview Questions

Conceptualizations of teacher leadership:

Do you think of yourself as a teacher leader? Why or why not?
Should all teachers be teacher leaders? Please explain.
Can you provide examples of teacher leadership experiences (yours and/or others)?
How do those experiences constitute teacher leadership?

What supports do you see for teacher leadership?
What obstacles do you see for teacher leadership?
Why do some teachers not step up?

Motivations for assuming teacher leadership roles:

Why did/would you choose to be a teacher leader?
When is the best time in your career to be a teacher leader?
Has your work as a teacher leader influenced your decisions about seeking formal leadership roles?

Values, beliefs, and attitudes about teacher leadership:

What are the main areas where you see teacher leadership being important in your educational community?
Is it safe to be a teacher leader? Please explain.
How does teacher leadership relate to school culture?
How does teacher leadership relate to school change and improvement?
What influences success as a teacher leader?
What brings you the most joy in your career?
Are there gender-related dimensions to being a teacher leader?
Political dimensions:
Is teacher leadership political? How?
Does teacher leadership have an activist dimension? How?
How much autonomy do teacher leaders have?
How autonomous should teacher leaders be within their communities?
How does teacher leadership relate to educator accountability (rights and responsibilities of teacher leaders)?

Informal versus formal development of teacher leadership:

How do teachers learn to become teacher leaders?
Did pre-service or in-service professional development help to develop your understanding of teacher leadership?
What types of professional development are needed to support teacher leadership?
Did you have teacher leader role models or mentors and, if so, how useful were they?
Have you made mistakes as a teacher leader? What did you learn as a result?

Meaning of teacher leadership:

What is a teacher leader?
How would you describe teacher leadership?
What advice do you have for teacher leaders?
Beginning teachers?
Experienced teachers?

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