

## PAPER DETAILS

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## Exploring the Concept of Teacher Leadership through a Document Analysis in the Australian Context

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Abstract	Article Info
<p><i>This paper focuses on a document analysis for an Australian case study, which contributes to a larger international study on teacher leadership. The aim of this paper is to ascertain how teacher leadership is understood and conceptualised from an Australian documentary perspective spanning the national, state, regional, and local education administrative levels. A document analysis framework stipulated by the larger study identified the attributes of teacher leadership. Twenty-one documents were analysed and the attributes in relation to five considerations impacting teacher leadership are discussed. Results indicated differences of dominant attributes across each of the levels: however, accountability and advocacy are consistently represented. Accountability filters through all four levels. The system is beginning to advocate and acknowledge pathways to leadership. At the state level, teacher leadership is strengthened through professional and collaborative practices. However, this paper suggests this is not consistently evident at the regional and local levels due to a number of pertinent organisational issues.</i></p>	<p><b>Article History:</b>  <i>Received</i>  June 15, 2020    <i>Accepted</i>  September 7, 2020</p> <hr/> <p><b>Keywords:</b>  Teacher leadership,  Document analysis,  Education system.</p>

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### **Introduction**

The importance of leadership in schools is recognised as a critical factor positively impacting student learning (Harris & Jones, 2015; Hattie, 2015; Robinson, 2008). Additionally, teacher leadership is instrumental in school reform whereby teachers' roles in collaborative decision making ultimately influence the success of students (Campbell et al., 2015). Beyond school reform and improving student outcomes, Coggins and McGovern (2014) emphasized that teacher leadership is also crucial to extending the professional growth of teachers who wish to remain in the classroom. Furthermore, they stated that teacher practice is positively impacted by teacher leaders who influence their colleagues to take a lead in policy making decision.

However, the definition of what constitutes teacher leadership and how this manifest across school settings remains ambiguous. Although it is clear that many teachers serve as leaders, schools have traditionally relied on a hierarchical system where leadership responsibilities appear to be clearly demarcated and reinforce the idea of the top-down approach (Harris, 2003). This is contrary to the idea that teachers serve a pivotal role as agents of change through collaborative, informed decision making.

## **Context of the Study<sup>1</sup>**

Teacher leadership is not a new phenomenon. Past research has highlighted the legitimacy of teacher leadership worldwide and is often viewed as teachers undertaking various formal and informal leadership roles within their schools (Crowther et al., 2009; Frost, 2011; Lieberman, 2015; Wenner & Campbell, 2017). However, it is unclear how the construct of teacher leadership is conceptualised across countries. Whilst in some countries there is evidence of initiatives to develop teacher leadership for promoting school reform (Frost, 2011), Pineda-Báez et al. (2019) noted that research on the conceptualisation of teacher leadership across different countries is sparse.

Over the past decade in Australia, there has been significant investment in improving the quality of school leadership at both the government and school system level (Wyatt, 2018). Increased system expectations for schools and school leaders demand that leaders are upholding an education that is accessible and tailored to each student's needs (Robinson, 2011). Whilst this presents many challenges, it reaffirms that quality leadership counts. Therefore, this paper aims to understand how teacher leadership is defined and stated from a documentary perspective through four administrative levels (See Figure 1).

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<sup>1</sup> This report is based on research done as part of the International Study of Teacher Leadership conducted in Australia, Canada, China, Colombia, Mexico, Romania, South Africa, Spain, Tanzania, and Turkey. The multi-stage study commenced in 2018. For more information, see the study website: [www.mru.ca/istl](http://www.mru.ca/istl).

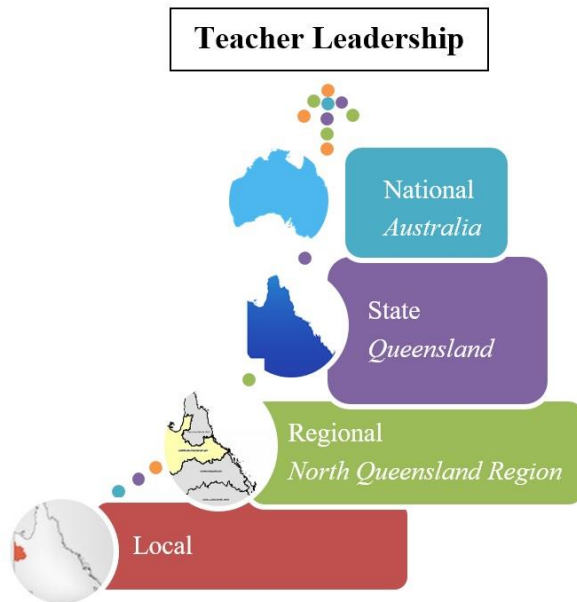


Figure 1.

#### *The Four Administrative Levels*

First considered is the national level, then Queensland as one of the states of Australia, followed by the regional level of North Queensland as one of seven educational regions in the state, and finally, one local state primary school within that region of North Queensland.

#### **Rationale**

Whilst there have been many different initiatives across school systems worldwide, leadership is constructed from various perspectives, such as the context and teacher capacity for leadership. Results from the Teaching and Learning International Survey (The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2009) found that the prevalence of instructional leadership practices

varies across countries with countries such as Brazil, Poland, and Slovenia demonstrating higher evidence than countries such as Estonia and Spain. In a cross-country study by Pineda-Báez et al. (2019), significant differences of the impact of teacher leadership were found in a comparison of three countries. Although the ultimate goal of all three countries was positive student impact, it found that empowerment of teacher leadership through collaboration was more evident in the Canadian and Australian case studies than the third case study in Colombia. Consequently, there were deliberate structures and processes established in the Canadian and Australian cases to facilitate teacher leadership, whereas the processes in Colombia were informally actioned by teachers.

Within Australia, the importance and role of teacher leadership has been at the forefront of government and teaching union agendas. The establishment of the Highly Accomplished and Lead Teacher classification (Queensland Teacher's Union [QTU], 2018b) driven by enterprise bargaining with the Queensland Government, realises remuneration among the highest professional teacher salaries in Australia. These classifications recognise lead teachers as teachers who are "recognised and respected exemplary teachers. They initiate and lead activities/projects focused on improving outcomes for students. They support colleagues to expand teaching practice" (QTU, 2018b, p. 1). However, Danielson (2006) stated that these types of classifications and formal teacher leadership roles differ from leadership that emerges spontaneously from teachers. These roles are considered complementary to administrative decision making or leadership distribution. Danielson (2006) argues that true teacher leaders are those who spontaneously collaborate with colleagues in

response to a school need. Thus, the varying definition of teacher leadership and how it is conceptualised in different contexts remains.

This paper focuses specifically on how teacher leadership is conceptualised and understood in the Australian school context at a national to a local administrative level. The study uses a document analysis and is intended as an addition to the data compiled in a larger Australian case study to address a gap in understanding of teacher leadership and ultimately will contribute to a broader understanding of teacher leadership as explored in the International Study of Teacher Leadership ([www.mru.ca/istl](http://www.mru.ca/istl)) project.

### **Conceptual Framework**

Wenner and Campbell (2017) referred to teacher leadership as an umbrella term representing innumerable roles and titles. The Queensland Department of Education (DoE, 2019b) referred to a number of teacher filled positions including instructional coach, coordinator, representative, mentor, master teacher, senior teacher, experienced senior teacher, highly accomplished teacher, and lead teacher. These titles may also differ across schools. However, existing literature has identified a lack of clarity around the definitions of teacher leadership (Campbell et al., 2015; Pangan & Lupton, 2015) even though numerous key attributes of teacher leadership and teacher leaders appear consistently across the literature. Ultimately, these attributes represent teachers leading learning in some way and this is recognised worldwide as a current area of change through professional development, school improvement, school culture, and leadership formality (Conway, 2015; Crowther, 2015; Sterrett, 2015).

Table 1 summarizes 11 emerging attributes from the literature on teacher leadership identified in a review by Webber (2018).

Further, Webber (2018) suggested a number of considerations also emerged from the literature. These included, for example, context, leadership capacity, group dynamics, evidence-based, and political beliefs. The relationship between attributes and considerations represents the framework that was subsequently used in this study for the data collection and analysis as stipulated by the research design for the international study by Webber (2018).

Table 1.

*Attributes Underlying Teacher Leadership*

Attribute	Assumptions	Authors
Accountability	Take responsibility for outcomes	Boone, 2015
	Evaluation and progress monitoring provide focus	Owens, 2015
		Webber & Scott, 2012
Advocacy	Focus on Student learning needs	Bauman, 2015
	Teacher leadership has an activist dimension	Conway, 2015
		Lambert, 2003
Cultural responsiveness	Curricula and pedagogy should include students identities have been insufficiently considered	Nieto, 2015
Inclusiveness	Teachers should be part of decision making	Bauman, 2014
	Career stages are considered	Pangan & Lupton, 2015
		Steffy et al., 2000
Openness to change	Go beyond enculturation to build capacity for transformation	Pangan & Lupton, 2015
Professionalism	Teaching is an ethical activity	Davis et al., 2015
	Teachers are the single largest influence on students' academic achievement	Lambert, 2003
		Nieto, 2015
Reflection	Reflective practice should be ongoing	Carr, 2015
Risk-taking	Safety and trust are important	Lambert, 2003
Shared vision	Alignment of goals and mission are valued	Bond, 2015
		Boone, 2015



Stability	Practices should be sustainable	Conway, 2015
	Professional learning	Conway, 2015
Teamwork	communities provide a venue for collaboration	Jackson et al., 2010

*Adapted from "A rationale and proposed design for researching teacher leadership", by C. F. Webber, 2018. Paper presented at the International Research Conference, Faculty of Education at Guangxi Normal University, Guilin, China, May 26-27, 2018.*

## Related Literature

### Why Teacher Leadership?

The list of challenges in Australian school education are numerous and extensive. Masters (2016) highlighted that the literacy and numeracy levels of Australian students are steadily declining and there is an obvious and increasing disparity in educational outcomes for students from differing socioeconomic backgrounds. Many of these students are failing to meet minimum standards of year level expectations. In response to these increasing pressures and challenges, Hattie (2015) commenting on Australian based research, noted that high-impact instructional leaders through seeking collegial agreement about which evidence-based practices have the most impact on student learning are able to maximise outcomes. However, he does not explicitly state the term teacher leadership.

Traditional models of school leadership have relied on a hierarchical system where the roles and responsibilities of the administrative leaders are clearly defined (Harris, 2003). However, educational leadership that addresses current challenges is beyond the scope of the administrative leaders alone (Danielson, 2006). Thus, there is gradual acknowledgement of the untapped potential of teacher leadership in addressing these 21st century challenges (Crowther et al., 2009).

There are numerous examples reported in the literature of teacher leadership. Margolis and Huggins (2012) and Safir (2018) affirmed that administrative leaders promoted teacher leadership as distributed leadership where teachers work alongside administrative staff for school improvement. Furthermore, Nguyen and Hunter (2018) suggested that teachers are well versed as catalysts of school reform due to the contextually specific knowledge and skills that are acquired through day-to-day teaching experiences. Such studies provide evidence that formal leaders are dependent on teachers who unofficially and often voluntarily lead school reform (Conway & Andrews, 2016; Danielson, 2006).

Further, Cosenza (2015) affirmed several positive outcomes of successful teacher leadership beyond school reform, including staff retention and increased student attainment. York-Barr and Duke (2004) identified the recognition, incentives, and opportunities for advancement that accompany teacher leadership titles as beneficial to recruiting and retaining teachers. Additionally, Dawson (2014) suggested that opportunities for teacher leadership can rekindle commitment and passion in teachers who are considered stagnant in their careers.

### **Definitions and Attributes of Teacher Leadership**

Consistent changes in educational reform have seen teachers become the driving force behind school reform (Boone, 2015). Countries including Australia, Canada, New Zealand, England, and Singapore have begun to take a proactive approach to developing teacher leaders who are collectively responsible for school improvement through recruitment and selection, increased remuneration and incentives, and professional development (Campbell et al., 2015). Furthermore, a vested political agenda has led

to the development of teacher standards and frameworks in numerous countries to ensure accountability for student outcomes (Wenner & Campbell, 2017). Several studies have recognised teachers as advocates for school improvement through collective responsibility and parallel leadership (Bauman, 2015; Conway, 2015).

Whilst many studies focus on teacher leadership as a means of improving student outcomes through collaborative efforts, Nieto (2015) argued that teacher leadership is demonstrated through teachers who are also culturally responsive to the needs of their students. He stated that the intense focus on curriculum and pedagogy has shrouded opportunities to engage students by building on the students' identities and experiences. Further, Steffy et al. (2000) suggested that teachers who are capable of collaboration and leadership and are responsive to student needs do so in a continuous cycle of professional development as they progress through various career stages. In support of this, Pangan and Lupton (2015) argued that early career teachers provide fresh and innovative approaches to pedagogical practice that can have a positive effect on school culture. Thus, teacher preparation programs and opportunities for experiences and mentorship are necessary to develop the leadership capacity of early career teachers and to alter the perception that the capacity for transformation is limited to just veteran teachers.

Teaching has a professional and ethical dimension. Teachers can have either a positive or a negative effect on their students through their actions, attitudes, and practices (Nieto, 2015). The OECD (2013) stated that "teachers are an essential resource for learning; the quality of a school system cannot exceed the quality of its teachers" (p. 96). Bradley-Levine (2018) acknowledged teachers who unite practices of pedagogy and leadership do so through their

advocacy for students. Collaborative leadership involves teachers intentionally leading and engaging in mutual decision making that is guided by moral and ethical standards, resulting in positive outcomes for students (Woods & Roberts, 2019). Davis et al. (2015) described teacher leadership demonstrated through experienced teachers mentoring beginning teachers and collaborating with others.

Hattie (2015) noted that improving student outcomes requires collaboration between all staff alongside committed reflection of whether practices are successful. Campbell et al. (2015) suggested that teachers who self-reflect and de-privatise their practice through collaboration are better able to lead the professional development of their colleagues through an intentional and explicit approach to sharing their knowledge. However, a strong sense of relational trust is needed (Bryk & Schneider, 2003) if teachers who are empowered to be leaders are more willing to take risks with new ideas (Dawson, 2014). Furthermore, the development of collaborative relationships built on trust ensures a productive working environment that is conducive to teacher leadership (Demir, 2015). Further, the principal has a central role in this building of trust, resulting in the development of leadership capacity in schools (Crowther et al., 2009; Lambert, 2003).

Sterrett (2015) asserted the demonstration of teacher leadership is through reflection, collaboration, and a shared desire to accomplish school goals. A shared vision encompasses a distributed leadership model where teachers and school leaders work collaboratively by implementing effective pedagogy, evaluating student data, and making decisions that move the school to achieving its shared goals (Boone, 2015). Additionally, through teachers leading effective professional learning communities, all stakeholders within a school

can sustain learning and school improvement practices (Conway, 2015).

A considerable quantity of literature previously defined teacher leadership as those appointed to administrative duties (Goldstein, 2004; Leithwood, 2007). Crowther (2015) argued that the perception that all teachers are leaders is misguided and detracts from the true meaning and significance of teacher leadership. Whilst strongly advocating for teacher leaders to be acknowledged, he argued that there is a marked difference between teacher leaders and expert teachers. Current research and literature validates that the teacher as a leader is an emerging construct and while some Australian studies have presented findings of evidence, successes and challenges of teacher leadership, there is limited evidence as to whether teacher leadership and associated attributes are consistently represented in documentation from a national to a local level.

## **Methodology**

### **Research Questions**

The purpose of the research as presented in this paper was to analyse key documents and discuss how the construct of teacher leadership is understood and manifested within the Australian school context. Research question 1 was used as a basis to collect data:

1. What documentary evidence emerges in exploration around teacher leadership?

And, research question 2 guided the analysis and interpretation:

2. How is the construct of teacher leadership understood and manifested in the Australian school context using a document analysis?

### **Data Collection and Instrument**

A document analysis was used as the method for collecting and analysing the evidence of teacher leadership in the available documentation. This was deemed a suitable method for the data collection due to the various definitions of teacher leadership that were either explicitly stated or implied in the documentation. The data were obtained from a range of available national, state, regional, and local sources through government, departmental, and organisational websites. In total, 21 documents were used for data collection and analysis from nine education administrative sources. Table 2 outlines the sources of data collected for the document analysis, as well as the instrument and analysis methods used to answer the proposed research questions.

Figure 2 illustrates an example of how the data from each document were collected using the Webber (2018) framework and presented in a table format. Excerpts of text suggesting evidence of teacher leadership were copied from the documents and added to the table under the relevant attributes. Evidence of teacher leadership was considered to be explicitly stated through words such as *leadership, leading others, modelling, or leadership capabilities* or implied through examples such as *building capacity of others, working collaboratively, exemplary teachers, or lifting professional practice*.

Table 2.

*Sources of Data, Instrument, and Analysis Method Used to Answer Research Questions*

Research Questions	Sources of Data	Instrument for Analysis	Methods of Analysis
A. What documentary evidence emerges in exploration around teacher leadership?	National level: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Standards documents</li> <li>National curriculum documents</li> <li>Government and organisational web materials</li> </ul>	Document analysis framework (Webber, 2018).	Content analysis used to organise the information from the documents into categories pertaining to the 11 key attributes identified in the literature
B. How is the construct of teacher leadership understood and manifested in the Australian school context using a document analysis?	State level: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Accreditation requirements</li> <li>Standards documents</li> <li>Professional publications</li> <li>Departmental policies</li> <li>Union position statements</li> <li>Teacher education curricula</li> </ul> Regional and local level: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>School policies and frameworks</li> <li>Role descriptions</li> <li>Regional initiatives and programs</li> </ul>		resulting in the analysis framework. A secondary analysis enabled interpretation of the key attributes in relation to the five considerations identified as impacting teacher leadership

Excerpts of text often indicated more than one attribute of teacher leadership and thus were included under multiple attributes. The source of the data was noted in the first column entitled 'Organisation'. The data from the documents were organised into the four administrative levels from the national perspective to the local perspective. A 'Notes' section under each of the documents collected was used to track interpretation of the data by making links to previous research to further support the analysis process.

### **Data Analysis**

Content analysis was a suitable method for analysis of the documents as it provided a comprehensive understanding of teacher leadership within the various educational levels (Allen, 2017). The identified themes provided an overall picture of how teacher leadership is defined and conceptualised in the various contexts. Through analysis, the organised content from the documents was coded into themes or categories (Duffy, 2014). These categories for analysis were predetermined in the document analysis framework (Webber, 2018). An analysis through the four levels of educational administration was conducted as well as an analysis across the attributes at each level. At the first level of analysis, the excerpts of text were analysed in respect to the attributes of teacher leadership. The explicit wording and implied meanings were considered in relation to the definitions of the attributes listed in Table 1. This process of content analysis involved categorising and deliberating the meanings of the words, phrases and sentences in the text excerpts to align to the attributes of teacher leadership as defined in the international study by Webber (2018).



Excerpts of text indicating more than one attribute of teacher leadership included under multiple attributes

Categories for analysis as drawn from the 11 attributes from the larger international study by Webber (2018)

Excerpts of text from documents added to table as evidence of teacher leadership attributes

Document sources and names included under 'Organisation' heading

Excerpts of text numbered. Notes taken to aid analysis and make links to research

Explicit or implied evidence of teacher leadership collected from the data sources

ORGANIZATION	Accountability	Advocacy	Cultural Responsiveness	Inclusiveness	Openness to Change	Professionalism
<b>AITSL</b>  <b>Document #1</b>  <b>Document #2</b>	7 Formal recognition of exemplary teachers can make an important contribution to the quality of teaching and leadership in schools.	1 Lead teacher: lead activities that focus on improving educational opportunities for all students.		1 Leadership is developed, shared and spread through the school.		2 Highly Accomplished teachers contribute to their colleagues' learning. They may also take on roles that guide, advise or lead others.
<b>Notes</b>	1 Drive to improve student outcomes through (O'Brien) (Reflection) – registration, performance, accountability, how the document is utilised across different systems 2 Evidence Base Teachers are the single largest influence on students' academic achievement – link to research by Hattie/Robinson? (Professionalism) 7 It is implied that part of being an excellent practitioner is one who leads (colleagues). There is an element of professionalism, advocacy and ultimately accountability linked to the certification process – resulting directly in improving student outcomes					
<b>QCT</b>  <b>Document #1</b>	2 Preservice teachers... under the direct supervision and guidance of experienced, registered teachers					1 The Dr John Dwyer award recognise teachers who have taken a leading role in enhancing teaching and learning in their school.

Figure 2.

*Example of Data Collection Using the Document Analysis Framework*

The analytic strategies used to identify and classify the information into the categories (Creswell, 2012) included writing reflective passages in the 'Notes' section whilst reading the documents as illustrated in Figure 2. The excerpts were analysed for consistency in the literal and implied language, intention, and interpretation of teacher leadership. Additionally, the frequency of the attributes within each level was noted and used to consider the similarities and differences throughout the levels and across the attributes (Creswell, 2012). For the secondary analysis, the excerpts of

text were then considered in relation to the five issues of teacher leadership identified in the literature including context, leadership capacity, group dynamics, evidence base, and political beliefs as outlined in Webber's framework (2018).

### Findings

An analysis of the frequency of attributes throughout the four levels of educational administration as displayed in Table 3 presented notable similarities between the four levels as well as some differences. In addition, Figure 3 provides a visual representation of the weightings of each administrative level.

Table 3.

*Frequency of Attributes in the Four Levels of Educational Administration*

Attribute	National	State	Regional	Local
Accountability	2	5	4	3
Advocacy	2	5	2	3
Cultural	0	0	0	0
Inclusiveness	1	1	3	3
Openness to Change	1	2	2	1
Professionalism	2	9	2	2
Reflection	1	4	0	1
Risk-taking	0	1	0	0
Shared Vision	2	3	0	3
Stability	2	4	3	0
Teamwork	2	9	1	3

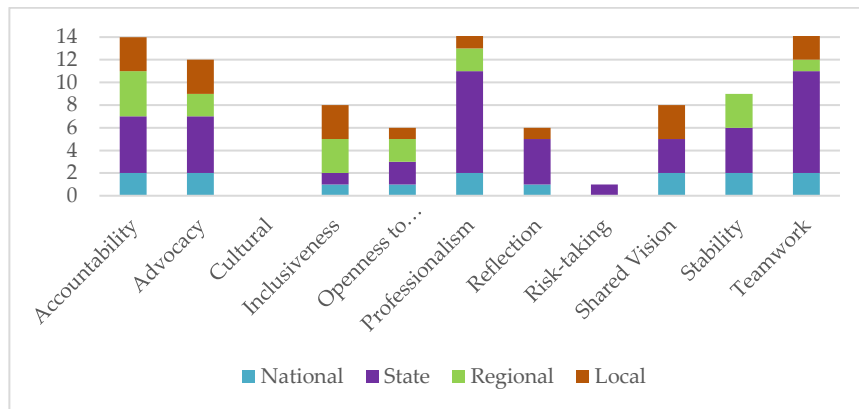


Figure 3.

*Frequency of Attributes Across the Four Levels of Educational Administration*

### Documents at the National Level

At the national level, evidence of teacher leadership was examined in the independent statutory authority, the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA, 2016) as well as the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL, 2017a), the body responsible for the development of the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers. There was an even spread of the attributes of teacher leadership with all attributes represented in the identified documents except for the *cultural* and *risk-taking* attributes. Individual excerpts of text alluded to multiple attributes of teacher leadership. In the national curriculum documentation that was considered, it was acknowledged that first “leadership is developed, shared and spread through the school . . . [and second, the principal of schools is recognised as] . . . the leader of leaders” (Hay Group, 2010, p. 8).

Therefore, it is understood that the principal is responsible for distributing leadership, indicating the attributes of *teamwork* and *inclusiveness*. However, the principal leads the process to ensure *stability* and the value of a *shared vision*. Numerous references to teacher leadership were identified in documentation when referring to the Professional Standards. *Advocacy, accountability, openness to change, and professionalism* were noted where the “standards guide professional learning, practice and engagement, facilitate the improvement of teacher quality and contribute positively to the public standing of the profession” (AITSL, 2017b; AITSL, 2018, p. 2). Furthermore, *reflection of practice* was emphasised in the exploration of how “teachers and school leaders are working across both the Teacher Standards and the Principal Standard to develop leadership skills” (AITSL, 2017c, para. 2).

### **Documents at the State Level**

At the state level, evidence of teacher leadership was examined through the Queensland Education Leadership Institute (QELi, n.d.-a) programs, together with various documentation from the Queensland Department of Education (DoE, 2019b), the teacher registration body Queensland College of Teachers (QCT, n.d.), and the Queensland Teacher’s Union (QTU, 2019a). At the state level, all attributes excluding the *cultural* attribute were represented in the documents. However, of note at this level was the consistent frequency of *professionalism* and *teamwork* as the suggested dominant attributes underlying teacher leadership. QELi highlighted these attributes in their Leadership for Teachers program that proclaims “a teacher leader’s primary responsibility is to lead learning to positively impact on student outcomes” (QELi, n.d.-b, para. 2). Furthermore, “the effectiveness of teacher leaders to lead and to

create a culture that is conducive to shared leadership is contingent upon the ability to create a culture of collaboration” (QELi, 2019, para. 1). Whilst highlighting the attributes of professionalism and teamwork, these excerpts also reaffirm *accountability* and *advocacy* of the profession.

Leadership is not just those in formal management positions. “The evolution of school leadership theory and practice supports this decentralised perspective, with teachers, mentors, and administrative staff being asked to take a more participative role in leadership responsibilities across all levels of the school environment” (QELi, 2019, para. 3) thus ensuring stability of practice and collaborative teamwork. The Department of Education and teaching registration body also recognise the role of teachers supporting pre-service and early career teachers. A Senior Teacher commits to “teaching excellence and a leadership role amongst classroom teachers by performing higher level duties” (DoE, 2018e, p. 23). Additionally, the Mentoring Beginning Teachers program requires teaching mentors who support teachers by encouraging “reflection on practice, engaging in professional and coaching conversations, observing lessons . . . [and] . . . providing feedback on practice” (DoE, 2019a, p. 1). Pre-service teachers “demonstrate their teaching capabilities under the direct supervision and guidance of experienced, registered teachers” (QCT, 2015, p. 3). Thus, these supervising teachers should be “exemplary classroom teachers with demonstrated skills” (QCT, 2015, p. 4).

Additionally, the teaching registration body draws attention to the notion of advocacy of teacher leadership and professionalism through recognition of merit. The John Dwyer Excellent Leadership in Teaching and Learning Award recognises “classroom teachers or

school administrators who have taken a leading role in enhancing teaching and learning in their school” (QCT, 2019, para. 4). Furthermore, the teaching unions welcomed the national and state implementation of a certification process for Highly Accomplished and Lead Teachers stating that it “provides a genuine choice, enabling classroom teachers to achieve a higher salary by staying in the classroom, rather than applying for promotion” (QTU, 2018a, p. 5). This recognition includes teachers at all stages in their careers.

### **Documents at One Regional Level**

At the regional level, evidence of teacher leadership was examined from two documentary sources in one education region of the state: The Rural and Remote Centre for Learning and Wellbeing known as the CLaW; and the role description of the Head of Curriculum Early Years Coach. At the regional level, most of the attributes were represented with the exception of the *cultural*, *reflection*, and *risk-taking* attributes. *Accountability* was the most commonly represented attribute of teacher leadership at the regional level. The Department of Education ensures accountability by providing funding for the appointment of regionally-based pedagogical coaches. The Head of Curriculum Early Years Coach role description states the appointed coach will work across the region to “model effective age-appropriate pedagogies and their accompanying practices and strategies in classrooms. . . [and] . . . provide coaching and advice to teachers in planning and using the evidence-based tools”. (DoE, 2018a, p. 1) In addition, the key capabilities that are demonstrated by the coach include a “capacity to lead and manage curriculum reform. . . [as well as the] . . . capacity for leading and managing change within the school environment” (DoE, 2018c, p. 1). Regional level findings also indicated the attribute

of *stability*. The CLaW promotes sustainability of teacher leadership by providing “mentoring and coaching of beginning school leaders” (DoE, 2017, p. 3) and “coaching mid-career and experienced teachers” (DoE, 2019d, p. 3). This is provided through services that facilitate “the Take the Lead program for aspiring school leaders. . . [and] . . . the Mentoring Beginning Teachers (MBT) program” (DoE, 2018b, p. 1).

### **Documents at One Local Level**

At the local level, documentation of a position as an Instructional Coach at a local state primary school in the North Queensland region was considered in relation to teacher leadership. This role is defined as a “classroom teacher with added responsibilities” (Local State School, 2018, p. 7). The local level displayed a similar pattern to the regional level affirming *accountability*, *advocacy*, *inclusiveness*, *openness to change*, *professionalism*, and *teamwork* as the common attributes underlying teacher leadership. The attributes of *accountability*, *inclusiveness*, *professionalism*, and *teamwork* were noted in an excerpt that stated “in collaboration with the leadership team. . . [the teacher delivers] . . . professional learning and coaching to teachers” (Local State School, 2018, p. 7) suggesting collaborative practices for positive student outcomes and school improvement. Additionally, it was found that *reflection* and the *shared vision* attribute occurred at the local level. This is in contrast to the regional level, which instead suggested the importance of *stability*. The Instructional Coach’s role is to “analyse student data and identify areas for improvement” (Local State School, 2018, p. 7). Furthermore, the coach provides “fundamental knowledge and advice to school leadership teams and teachers to drive improvement in child and student outcomes in the early years”

(Local State School, 2018, p. 7). This suggests the ongoing value of the teacher's reflections and contributions to the school's goals.

In summary, when considering the distribution of the attributes across all levels of educational administration, the attributes of accountability, advocacy, inclusiveness, openness to change, professionalism, and teamwork were represented. However, accountability and advocacy were most consistently represented. Reflection, a shared vision, and stability were represented throughout most of the levels. The cultural and risk-taking attributes were not consistently represented in the four levels.

### **Discussion and Implications**

This paper has revealed the documentary evidence of teacher leadership and how the construct of teacher leadership is understood and manifested in the documents of the Australian school context from national to local levels. Three areas emerged from the findings. First, accountability and advocacy for teacher leaders in the profession filters through the four levels. Second, the state level acknowledges that teacher leaders drive school improvement and student achievement through professionalism and teamwork. Finally, the regional level emphasises the need for stability and inclusiveness of teacher leaders but is not evident at the local level due to a number of pertinent organisational issues.

#### **Accountability and Advocacy of the Teaching Profession**

Whilst formal leadership may invoke the notion of hierarchy, the Australian education system has seen formal acknowledgement of teacher leadership through the development of a national certification process for teachers who lead. The Australian





Professional Standards for Teachers, which are regulated and supported by state bodies, allows teachers to be recognised and remunerated for their leadership work. The standards are explicit statements that define teacher quality and signify how high quality teaching results in improved educational student outcomes (AITSL, 2018). Thus, it is implied that an excellent teacher is one who leads their colleagues and as such promotes professionalism and advocacy of the profession whilst maintaining accountability.

At the state level, the role of a teacher as a leader for remuneration purposes is articulated across the documentation. The Department of Education (2018d, 2018e) developed a classification structure for career progression. Senior teachers and experienced senior teachers are recognised and remunerated for duties that are considered above and beyond those of a regular teacher. As an additional incentive, teachers in each state can apply for certification as a highly accomplished or lead teacher, which provides an income comparable to an administration leader and surpasses the years of service required to attain experienced teacher status. Strongly supported by the teaching union, this has provided a choice for outstanding teachers to remain in the classroom rather than seek an increased income through administrative leadership (QTU, 2018a).

Both the union and teacher registration body's documentation consistently stated that these classifications involve teachers leading others with curriculum, pedagogy, and practices such as mentoring or coaching as well as advocacy for the profession. From a regional perspective, driven by state government agenda, teacher leadership is recognised through administrative roles and strategies that focus on improving teaching quality and student outcomes. State funded centres facilitate the Mentoring Beginning Teacher program, Early

Years Coaches, and the Take the Lead program for aspiring regional school leaders to build the capacity of new and experienced staff in rural and remote areas (DoE, 2019d). At the local level, some schools are allocating expenditure for instructional coach positions that are filled by classroom teachers (Local State School, 2018). In these various roles, teacher leaders have the potential to have an impact on teaching practice as well as on student outcomes.

Across the documentation at all levels, it is implied that teachers are advocates for the profession and take on a variety of leadership roles. At a state level, it is expected that experienced teachers will guide and supervise pre-service students. Additionally, principals and school leaders are accountable to ensuring the development of teacher leaders and fulfilling departmental obligations (DoE, 2019c). Questions are raised on whether teachers should be paid for the leadership work that is considered beyond their regular duties when their role is not a promotional position or if the teacher has not achieved certification. Furthermore, in regional and remote areas, there is often a shortage of experienced teachers and predominance of early career teachers, often calling on those experienced teachers that are in the context to mentor early career teachers.

The Professional Standards have been developed for accreditation and quality assurance purposes and to facilitate teacher reflection due to its evidence-based impact on student achievement (Hattie, 2015). Whilst it is agreed that the standards provide a common and shared language for practice and are important for measuring quality of performance in teacher graduates, various authors argued (Clarke & Moore, 2013; O'Brien, 2015) that this force of standardisation, measurement, transparency, and accountability is



counterproductive to what is at the heart of teaching. The document analysis within this project did not find evidence of the attribute of cultural responsiveness. Therefore, it is argued that whilst the government advocates for the use of a standards framework to improve teacher quality, it disregards the equally important consideration of the culturally relational aspects of teaching. Other studies have found the inability of professional standards to measure teacher disposition and that the standards did not well articulate the importance of relationality and cultural responsiveness in teaching (Nieto, 2015; Taylor, 2016).

### **Professionalism and Teamwork – the State Agenda**

State policy has driven opportunities for professional development and expectations of professionalism and teamwork. Teachers who lead collaboratively and commit to improving their practice through ongoing professional development have a positive impact on student outcomes (Hattie, 2015; Skourdoumbis, 2014) and are recognised for their efforts. This is evident at the state level, through the commitment to the certification process of highly accomplished and lead teachers as well as through awards. Ultimately, these teachers are the single largest influence on student achievement.

The state government further calls attention to the value of collaboration to improve teacher practice. The Mentoring Beginning Teachers program is founded on the premise that experienced teachers will provide support for early career teachers (DoE, 2019a), however, success depends on mentees being receptive to that support. Whilst there is an assumption that the relationships between the mentor and mentee teacher are based on safety and trust, the risk-taking attribute of teacher leadership was not consistently presented

in the documents analysed. The importance of safety and trust as an attribute of teacher leadership is well researched in the literature, often citing the willingness to take risks depends on the contextual factors (Berg, 2018; Demir, 2015).

### **Inclusiveness and Stability at the Regional and Local Level**

The distinction between a formal organisational leader and teacher leader has been discussed widely in the literature. Whilst the hierarchical organisational structure of school systems is a given, there is much value in the role of a teacher as leader. From the national perspective, it is affirmed that principals are the leaders of leaders and that leadership is shared throughout a school (Hay Group, 2010). This implies that leadership is not reliant on one individual and state bodies support the notion of distributed leadership enabling teachers to share leadership responsibilities.

Whilst the attributes of inclusiveness and stability were apparent throughout most levels of educational administration, they were represented three times greater at the regional level. From a regional perspective, formal administrative roles have been created as a result of the state and national agenda for improving teaching and learning and to support principals in their role as facilitators of teacher leadership. Furthermore, regional centres aim to provide career pathways and retain aspiring school leaders. At the local level, it is implied through the establishment of job roles such as instructional coaches, that teacher leadership is valued and warranted.

Many efforts are made to develop and sustain teacher leadership. One example is the establishment of Professional Learning Communities in schools, which utilise teachers to be the

driving force behind pedagogical change. However, retention of staff often impacts on the ability for these types of practices to be sustainable. Furthermore, teachers must be willing to lead for distributed leadership to be successful (Robinson, 2008). Increasing workloads of teachers has become a contentious issue and consequently, workload was a key focus area of the most recent teaching union's Enterprise Bargaining Agreement (QTU, 2019b). It is difficult to collaborate with staff who already have full time teaching loads and timetabled sessions in the school day are not provided. Excessive workloads and time constraints inhibit teacher leadership opportunities (Wenner & Campbell, 2017).

Whilst teacher leadership is empowering, it does require a culture of trust, collaboration, and a shared vision to result in improved student outcomes. In addition, as many of these positions do not attract additional remuneration, they are often viewed by colleagues as promotional, and therefore have resulted in some resistance to collaboration with staff. Similar challenges were reported by Williams (2013) and Struyve et al. (2014) who noted resistance from teachers to work with teacher leaders. The micro-politics of the school's culture often diminishes the acceptability of those who are capable to lead (Dawson, 2014).

Consequently, the principal's role is paramount to developing a positive culture of distributed leadership that encompasses teachers as leaders. The quality of teaching and learning in schools is influenced by the processes and resources that are implemented by school leaders (Wenner & Campbell, 2017). Whilst much of the research supports the notion and impact of distributed leadership, the professional standards for principals imply that all efforts for distributed leadership and collaboration are diminished by validation

that the principal ultimately holds the power of decision making (Cunningham, 2014). However, the teacher standards state that “effective leadership is distributed and collaborative with teams led by the principal working together to accomplish the vision and aims of the school” (AITSL, 2014, p. 6). Consequently, the wording and implied intention of leadership and teacher leadership continues to be open to interpretation.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

This research study found that within the documents, accountability and advocacy were the attributes consistently attributed to teacher leadership. The implementation of national standards is being used as an instrument to advocate teacher leadership, which filters through the levels and provides both recognition and a process for remunerated certification of teacher leaders. However, political agenda and the limitations of professional standards accurately reflecting the culturally relational aspects of teaching are noted. The system is beginning to advocate and acknowledge pathways to leadership for teachers and the practicality of distributed leadership at the regional and local level that are in contrast to a conventional hierarchical system. However, this study noted that whilst these attributes were evident in documentation at the local level, this was not consistently evident in practice.

### **Limitations and Future Research**

This paper reports on a small-scale study. Therefore, it is recommended these findings be considered as one contribution to conceptualising teacher leadership and suggests that similar studies may be replicated in other regions or systems. Also noted is that staff

resistance to teacher leader promotional positions has had a significant impact in practice. Thus, further research could consider how administrative leaders ensure the development and sustainability of teacher leadership by addressing organisational barriers.

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