

The Perspective of Principals of all Teachers being Leaders

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Abstract

Building on the research about assessing teachers' leader identity, we were curious to understand how K-12 school principals perceive teachers as leaders. We used a survey research design to gather quantitative and qualitative data from K-12 school principals. We could not find any extant surveys aligned with our research focus; thus, we designed and validated a survey for our research. We contacted 1042 K-12 principals from the south-central region of the US; 70 responded by completing our survey. Analysis indicated a potential misalignment in principal leadership styles between the ideal attributes of leadership and contextual or practical applications of leadership. Additional analysis revealed considerable overlap between the principals' perceptions of leadership and the roles of teachers; however, those leadership roles aligned with teachers as school-level leaders outside the classroom rather than in their role of teaching students. Findings also revealed an alignment of principals' perceptions of teachers as leaders with principals' efforts to develop teachers as leaders. Overall, our research suggests that principals support teachers' development as leaders. We close with a discussion of the results and implications for research and practice.

Keywords: teacher leaders, classroom leaders, principal perspectives, school leadership, leadership identity

1. Introduction

We are interested in filling a gap in the literature in understanding how K-12 principals perceive teachers as leaders, particularly in their role of teaching students. Building on our work on assessing teachers' perceptions of themselves as leaders (Nadelson et al., 2020), we were curious about how K-12 school principals perceive teachers as leaders.

The effectiveness of many professionals may be attributed to their leadership. Engagement in leadership may be an expectation recognized by the title of the position (e.g., director, principal, president). Leadership is frequently essential to be effective in positions that are not typically considered leadership roles but require leadership skills (e.g., teacher, nurse, police officer). Thus, recognizing teachers in their role in teaching students as leaders by their principal is likely critical to teacher effectiveness and student success.

In our search of the literature, we could not find any studies of principals' perceptions of teachers as leaders in the role of teaching students. Thus, our research addresses the gap in the literature and increases understanding of how principals perceive teachers as leaders.

2. Review of Literature

2.1 *Why Leader Identity of all Teachers is Important*

We embrace the evidence of Harbin (2021) who reports when teachers identify as leaders, they are more likely to take more responsibility for student learning, express higher levels of teacher self-efficacy, experience less job-related stress, and are more likely emboldened to take risks to enhance student success. Teachers who lack a leader identity are more likely to hold students (and their families) responsible for learning, hold a lower teacher self-efficacy, experience more job-related stress, and take less risks to enhance student learning. Thus, teachers holding a leader identity in the context of teaching are more likely to express higher levels of professional success, satisfaction, and persistence in the field and are likely to be more effective teachers (Booher, 2020).

We are not arguing that teacher leadership outside the classroom should not be considered when supporting the leader identity of teachers (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). We are arguing the leadership of teaching inside the classroom needs to be formally recognized to foster the leader identity of teachers in all of their professional endeavors (Nadelson et al., 2020). Further, as we contend, by empowering teachers we can enhance their effectiveness and sense of responsibility for their students' learning.

2.2 Teacher as Leader

Teachers commonly engage in leadership activities within (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2010) and outside (Wahlstrom et al., 2011; Wenner & Campbell, 2018) their teaching students. York-Barr and Duke (2004) define teacher leadership as "The process by which teachers, individually or collectively, influence their colleagues, principals, and other members of the school community to improve teaching and learning practices with the aim of increased student learning and achievement" (pp. 287-288). York-Barr and Duke recognize the broad influence that teachers may have as leaders and consider the range of potential contexts for teacher leadership. Nevertheless, York-Barr and Duke (2004) do not explicitly define teacher leadership in the context of teachers teaching students but rather as assuming responsibility for school-associated endeavors that most commonly lead adults outside the classroom. As York-Barr and Duke (2004) share, "In some cases, teachers designated as leaders served full time in formal leadership positions. In other cases, teacher leaders served as full-time classroom teachers but assumed additional leadership responsibilities" (p 257). York-Barr and Duke (2004) do recognize the importance of teachers as leaders of instructional practice but of other educators and not in the role of teaching students, a position shared by Wenner and Campbell (2017). Thus, York-Barr and Duke do not explicitly recognize teachers directly interacting with their students as leadership for teachers (Hamzah et al., 2016; Kamaruzaman et al., 2020).

In recognition of the importance of leadership to teacher effectiveness and student achievement, a consortium was formed to develop model standards of teacher leadership (Teacher Leadership Exploratory Consortium, 2011). The Consortium's standards model involves examining teacher leadership along seven domains. Within each domain are the functions a teacher engages in as a leader, reflecting teacher leadership's complexity and multifaceted nature. Also included in the Consortium's document is a call for transforming school environments to enhance opportunities for teachers to feel empowered as leaders and function as change agents to increase school effectiveness and student learning. The Consortium's standards document concludes with a series of questions for consideration about fostering and supporting teacher leadership development.

We maintain the questions cannot be answered effectively before understanding teacher leadership, particularly in their role of leading their students in learning. Thus, there is a warrant for researching teachers as leaders in the classroom from multiple perspectives. We are particularly interested in K-12 school principals' perceptions of teachers as leaders of their students' learning.

2.3 Principals Fostering Leader Identity of Teachers

Principals play a critical role in supporting teachers' perceptions of themselves as leaders (Cheng & Szeto, 2016; Harbin, 2021; Mangin, 2007). For teachers (and others) to perceive themselves as leaders, they must develop and maintain a leader identity (Carver, 2016; Hogg, 2006; Sinha & Hanuscin, 2017). However, forming and holding a leader identity is a complex interplay between individuals claiming to be leaders and the expectations and identification of others, such as principals, of teachers as leaders (Hogg, 2006). Thus, if principals recognize teachers as leaders, teachers may be more likely to embrace a perspective of themselves as leaders (Sinha & Hanuscin, 2017). If teachers are recognized as leaders in all their professional activities, including in their role in teaching students, they are more likely positioned to claim to be a leader (Angelle & Schmid, 2007; DeRue et al., 2009).

When examining and documenting the leader identity of teachers as leaders, we argue that there is a need to determine the extent to which principals perceive teachers as leaders and grant teachers a leader identity in their role in teaching students. Of interest to us is the extent to which principals recognize teachers as leaders in their role in teaching students. In other words, there seems to be a lack of published research documenting how principals perceive teachers teaching their students as a leadership activity. Our research attends to this critical gap in the literature.

2.4 Teacher as Classroom Leader

Bush et al. (2016) discuss the concept of the master teacher in a school environment as an alternative for teachers becoming leaders outside the classroom. Bush et al. maintain that master teachers can be perceived as leaders for what they do in their role of teaching students. The Bush et al. perspective differs from the widely held idea that teacher leadership involves having responsibilities outside the classroom (Hamzah et al., 2016; Kamaruzaman et al., 2020).

Similarly, Warren's (2016) historical detail about the separation of teachers and administrators highlights the notion of recognizing teachers as leaders within the classroom in alignment with their primary responsibility of teaching. Waris (2011) reinforces this claim, "teacher's leadership is limited to academic activity rather than managerial activity... [the] teacher is the key figure and transfers knowledge as well as the changes to the following generations in the positive sense" (p. 92). Offering an additional perception of teachers as leaders, Lumpkin et al. (2014) argue when teachers take a leadership perspective of their work as learning leaders for their students, the students experience more significant learning gains. In alignment with recognizing teaching as a leadership role, we were interested in principals' perspectives to determine their perceptions of teachers as leaders in their role of teaching students.

2.5 Leadership Styles of School Leaders

We determined the need to assess principals' leadership styles as we speculate that their leadership style is likely associated with their perceptions of teachers as leaders. There are many styles of leadership (Demirtas & Karaca, 2020) that are defined using an array of leadership-related attributes (Northouse, 2021). We argue the two leadership attributes most salient to defining the leadership style of school leaders are the level of desire for controlling situations and decision making and their willingness to engage in or support collaboration (see Table 1). Applying our position to school leaders, we would consider a leader with low engagement in situation control and low engagement in collaboration to likely hold a laissez-faire leadership style. In contrast, we would consider a leader with high levels of engagement in control and engages in high levels of collaboration to lead with a transformational leadership style. We recognize that other leader attributes may be salient to school environments, such as being visionary, creative, and flexible (Nadelson & Loyless, 2021). However, in school leadership, the additional attributes are likely to be less overt and detectable at lower levels than principals' engagement in control and collaboration.

Table 1. Leadership Style and Levels of Leader Engagement Control and Collaboration

Style Name	Leader Engagement in Control	Leader Engagement in Collaboration
Autocrat	High	Low
Transformational	High	High
Bureaucrat	Medium	Low
Familial	Medium	High
Laissez-Faire	Low	Low
Servant	Low	High

2.6 Zones of Leadership Style

While levels of engagement in control and collaboration may be used to define different leadership styles, we recognize that assessing these variables is likely more qualitative and general than quantitative and specific (Duyar et al., 2013). Thus, we embrace the position that the levels of engagement in control and collaboration are associated with a range (in our case, zones) rather than a specific value (See Figure 1). When examining data to determine the leadership style of school leaders or school leaders' perceptions of the leadership styles of themselves and others, it is essential to consider their perspectives more generally. Thus, data analysis involves generalized data categorization to represent relative levels of engagement in control and engagement in collaboration.

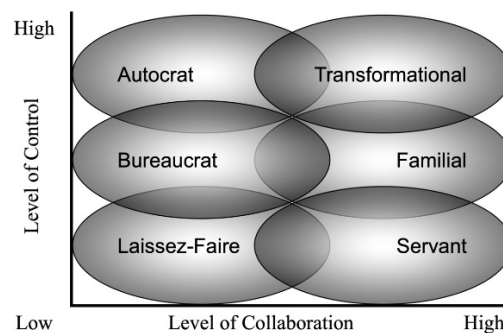


Figure 1. Zones of Leadership Styles Based on Engagement in Control and Collaboration

2.7 Principal Teacher Relationship

Principals are fundamental to the culture, vision, priorities, success, and climate of the schools they lead (Hallinger, 2005; Hallinger & Murphy, 1985; Wahlstrom & Louis, 2008). Principals' leadership style can influence the levels to which teachers engage or disengage in their efforts toward improving and enhancing their teaching practice (Supovitz et al., 2010; Wahlstrom & Louis, 2008). In particular, some principals' traits or actions lead to enhanced teacher commitment and effort toward advancing student learning (Price, 2012). For example, the perceived trustworthiness of principals can influence teacher empowerment and engagement (Rinehart et al., 1998). Sebastian and Allensworth (2012) maintain principal creation of safe and inclusive environments is fundamental to their effectiveness and creating a positive learning environment the teachers support. Further, Shaw and Newton (2014) posit teacher retention and satisfaction increase when principals lead with a servant leadership style. Thus, multiple teacher outcomes are influenced by principal actions, leadership, and goals.

In addition to motivating teacher commitment and engagement in student success, principals have also been found to promote teacher development as leaders when they engage with teachers in distributed leadership (Sebastian et al., 2016). The Teacher Leadership Exploratory Consortium (2011) claims that teacher leadership cannot be effective without principal support. Further, when principals and teachers work on leading together, there is more likely to be increased student success (Lambert, 2002; Sebastian et al., 2017). Given the potential of principals to influence teacher perceptions and engagement in leadership activities and leader identity formation, there is justification for examining principals' perceptions of themselves as leaders and their perceptions of and support for teachers as leaders.

3. Method

3.1 Research Questions

The overarching research question for our investigation was, "What are principals' perceptions regarding teachers as leaders?" To frame answering our overarching research question, we developed the following guiding research questions:

- What is the alignment between principals' definitions of leadership and their self-reported approach to leadership?
- What leadership roles do principals perceive for teachers, and how are the roles aligned with how principals define leadership?
- What do principals perceive as typical leadership roles of teachers within the school?
- What are principals' perceptions of teachers as leaders, and what actions do principals take to foster teachers' leadership development?
- What is the relationship between principals' personal and professional characteristics and their perceptions of teachers as leaders?

3.2 Participants

The participants in our research were 70 principals working in a region in the south-central United States out of 1042 principals to whom we sent an email invitation to participate in our research. Our participants were, on average, 49.87 years old ($SD = 8.37$), had been in K-12 education for an average of 24.57 years ($SD = 8.14$), and had been a principal for an average of 9.35 years ($SD = 8.23$). Twenty-three of the principals worked in elementary schools, eleven in middle/junior high schools, twenty in high schools, and sixteen in some other type of school (e.g., grades k-8, grades 6-12). The majority identified as female (52%). Twenty-seven indicated they had a master's degree, fourteen had a post-master's certificate, twenty-one had an education specialist degree, and eight responded they held a doctorate degree.

3.3 Measure

The exploratory nature of our research limited the likelihood of locating tools for our data collection. Thus, we were not surprised that in our search of the literature, we could not find any extant surveys designed to assess principals' perceptions of teachers as leaders in the primary role of teaching students. We thus determined that there was a need to develop the survey. We began our survey development process by discussing the extant research on teachers as leaders and the attributes and activities of teachers leading in the context of teaching students. For example, we considered situations such as teachers serving as role models for their students and teachers inspiring their students to learn.

We generated a series of potential free and selected-response survey items based on our list of leadership attributes and activities gathered from the literature. We then developed the survey items from a principal's perspective and their

possible consideration of teachers as leaders. In addition, we aligned our guiding research questions to our items to increase the likelihood of gathering the data necessary to allow us to document our questions empirically.

Once we generated a bank of items aligned with our research focus, we reviewed the items to ensure they were single-barrel. Recognizing the time that principals might devote to completing the survey, we culled our survey items to limit the length so that the participants could complete the survey in approximately five to seven minutes,

Our final survey included twelve selected-response items, a multivariable rank-order item, three free-response prompts, and multiple demographic items. Our selected-response items included stems such as "Teaching is leadership" and "I encourage my teachers to develop as leaders," which were responded to using a 5-point Likert scale. The free-response items included prompts such as, "What are the common leadership roles of your teachers?" and "How do you lead in your school?" The participant had no limits in space for their replies. Our rank-order item included ten roles or attributes of teachers as leaders with instructions to rank order them in terms of importance.

To validate our survey, we shared it with several scholars who had expert knowledge of the work of K-12 principals, teachers, and the leadership structure of schools. We asked the scholars if they thought the items were aligned with school administrators perceiving teachers as leaders. Based on their feedback, we made minor changes to our survey to increase clarity and alignment. The feedback also indicated items met the expectations of content and construct validity. The reliability analysis of our data revealed a Cronbach's alpha of .73, indicating an acceptable level of internal consistency.

3.4 Data Collection

We developed an email invitation to invite participants to complete our online survey. The email included a brief explanation of our study and a link to our survey. We secured the email addresses of 1042 K-12 principals working in the south-central region of the United States from a site that is publicly accessible. We distributed the email invitation and collected data for three weeks. We had 70 principals complete all the selected response items of the survey, and 66 of those completed the free-response items.

3.5 Analysis

To analyze the participants' responses to our survey prompt "How do you lead in your school?", we generated a set of codes for the perceived level of leader engagement in control and leader engagement in collaboration (see Table 2). We initially applied the codes together to assure alignment across a comprehensive list of codes and collaborated to code a small subset of the data. We discussed and resolved the individual perspective differences and the rater bias we identified through our initial coding analysis. We then proceeded by independently coding a subset of the data to establish interrater reliability. We examined our independent codes of the subset and found that we were more than 80% consistent; therefore, we progressed with independently coding the remaining data.

Table 2. Codes for Principals' Leadership Actions by Leadership Control, Leadership Collaboration

Leadership Action	Codes
Low-Level Collaboration	Task/mission-oriented, independent work, delegate responsibilities regardless of personal abilities of organizational members
Middle-Level Collaboration	Delegate responsibilities with perceived personal abilities of organizational members to achieve task/mission
High-Level Collaboration	People/relationship-oriented, community-focused, teamwork, distribution of responsibilities based on known personal abilities/strengths/interests of organizational members
Low-Level Control	Reluctant to accept responsibility; maintain status quo, use the ideas of others, low expectations of self and others to make a difference
Middle-Level Control	Strong adherence to organizational structures, willing to implement small changes, build on others' ideas, moderate expectations of self and others to make a difference
High-Level Control	Goal setting, willing to accept responsibility, need to be the driving force in decision-making, develop own ideas, willing to challenge the status quo, and have high expectations of self and others to make a difference

When we analyzed the responses, we observed that the leaders' conveyed levels of focus on control had three reasonably distinguishable regions: low, medium, and high levels of control. We also found we could categorize the participants' conveyed desire for collaboration into three different discernable groups: low, medium, and high levels of collaboration (See Table 2). We noted that some responses described positions of authority without defining leadership attributes, and several described one aspect of control or collaboration without describing the other aspect of leadership. Out of the seventy participants, sixty-six responded with one or more aspects of leadership, while four replied only with their job position within the organization.

In a separate coding process, we analyzed the participants' responses to the survey prompt, "How do you define leadership?" We independently examined the participants' responses and coded the data as one of the six leadership zones (see Figure 1) most representative of the response. We tabulated the frequencies of the coded words to determine the number of respondents who shared responses representative of each leadership zone.

3.6 Common Leadership Roles for Teachers

We determined the principals' expectations for teachers acting as leaders based on the participants who responded to our prompt, "What are the common leadership roles of your teachers?" Using a combination of a priori and emergent coding, we developed a list of eleven distinct roles of teachers when acting as leaders (See Table 3). We then collectively coded a sample subset of the data to assure consistency and resolve any potential conflicts or missed codes. Once we determined our codes were comprehensive and representative of the data, we coded a subset of the data independently to establish interrater reliability. We examined our codes and found that we exceeded 80% consistency; therefore, we progressed with independent coding and triangulated the remaining data.

Table 2. Construct and Codes of Location of Leadership, Form of Leadership, and Associated Roles of Teachers

Form and Location of Leadership	Codes	Roles
Formal Leader, Outside the classroom	Official school/district positions (instructional facilitator, department chair, leadership team), athletic coaches, mentors, club/organizational moderators/advisors/sponsors	Instructional Coach, Leadership Team, Athletic Coach, Club Advisor, PLC Leader
Informal Leader, Outside the classroom	Community-based involvement, lead committees, senior/master (unpaid) teacher	Mentor, Sponsor student-teacher, Team Leader (unspecified projects), Community Collaborator
Leader, Inside the Classroom	Role models to students, master teachers	Mentor, Role Model, Content Expert, Instructional Expert, Advocate (emergent), Disciplinarian (emergent)

4. Results

4.1 Alignment between Expectations and Practice

Table 3. Coding of Principals' Definitions of Leadership by Leadership Style, Frequency, and Representative Responses

Leadership Style	N	Representative Response
Bureaucrat	21	Providing guidance, choice, materials, resources, and learning necessary for teachers and students to work at their best.
Autocrat	21	I am working on our school culture, building a teamwork mentality, and our keyword for this coming year will be accountability.
Servant	10	I believe a good leader allows others to lead and have opportunities to grow.
Familial	6	Implementation of a team approach by convincing individuals to partake in the actions necessary to achieve a common goal.
Transformational	6	The action of guiding others and collaborating with them to produce the best outcome.
Laissez-Faire	2	I prefer to give freedom to staff members to show their skills and talents in their classroom.

Our first guiding research question was, "What is the alignment between principals' definitions of leadership and their self-reported approach to leadership?" To answer this question, we examined the coded responses to the participants' definitions of leadership and the coded data to the participant's responses to the prompt, "How do you lead in your school?" We found that the overall frequencies of the participants' definitions of leadership (see Table 4) and their descriptions of their approach to leadership (see Table 5) tended to have similar frequencies. For example, we coded twenty-one of the participants' definitions of leadership as autocratic and twenty of their responses to how they lead as autocratic.

Table 4. Coding of Principals' Self-reported Leadership Style, Frequency, and Representative Responses

Leadership Style	N	Representative Response
Autocrat	20	I am working on our school culture, building a teamwork mentality, and our keyword for this coming year will be accountability.
Servant	18	I believe a good leader allows others to lead and have opportunities to grow.
Bureaucrat	13	Providing guidance, choice, materials, resources, and learning necessary for teachers and students to work at their best.
Transformational	7	The action of guiding others and working with them to produce the best outcome.
Familial	6	Implementation of a team approach by convincing individuals to partake in the actions necessary to achieve a common goal.
Laissez-Faire	3	I prefer to give freedom to staff members to show their skills and talents in their classroom.

Upon further review, we found that, while the overall frequency of the responses was similar, the individual responses tend to be misaligned (see Figure 2). The comparison of our classification of the individual participant's definitions of leadership and our classification of their self-reported approach to leadership revealed relatively low consistency in responses. We found sixty-two of the seventy respondents defined leadership in ways that differed notably from how they described their approach to leadership. Of the eight participants who provided definitions of leadership that aligned with their descriptions of their approach to leadership, seven conveyed attributes of servant leaders, and one expressed characteristics of a transformational leader. Interpreted, our results indicate that the principals describe leadership using different attributes based on the context in which they are considering leadership.

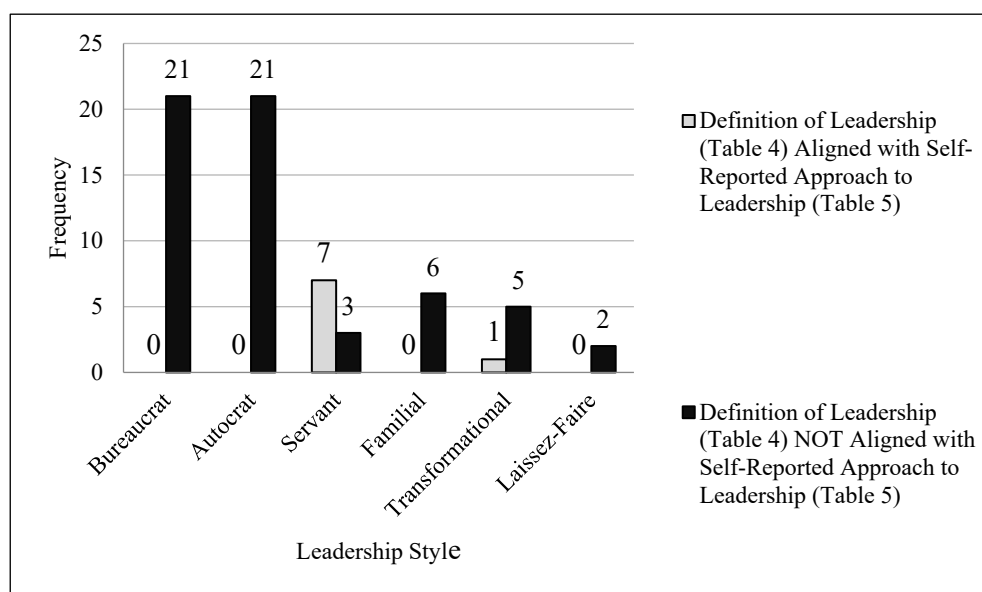


Figure 2. Comparison of Alignment of Leadership Definitions with Self-reported Approach to Leadership

4.2 Leadership Role Alignment

Our second guiding research question was, "What leadership roles do principals perceive for teachers, and how are the roles aligned with how principals define leadership?" We approached answering this guiding question in two ways. First, we examined the principals' rank order of leadership roles in terms of importance for teacher effectiveness (see Figure 3).

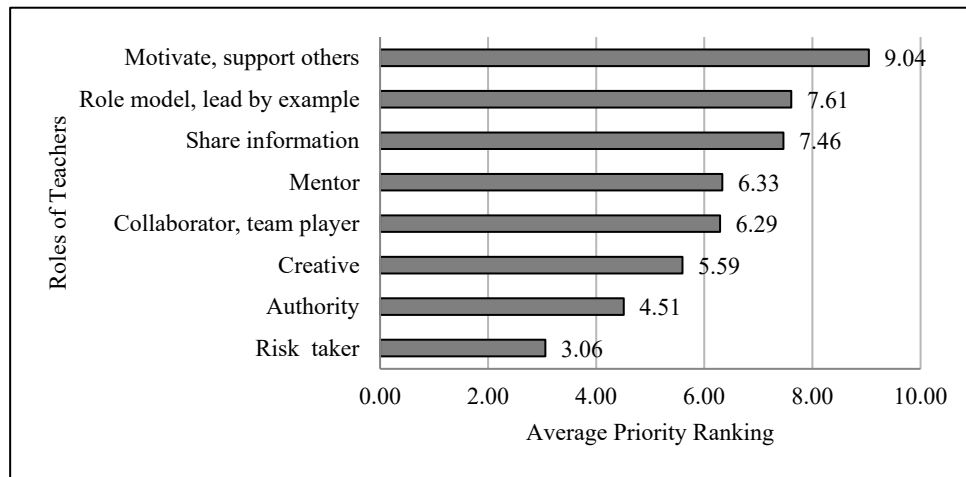


Figure 3. Roles that Principals Perceive are Critical for Effective Teachers

Next, we examined the participant's responses to the prompt, "Please provide your definition of leadership," which we coded using the same leadership roles as those we associated with the leadership of teaching. For example, we used the role codes of both collaborator and authority from the following participant's definition, "Guiding a group to accomplish goals." Then we tabulated and rank-ordered the frequency in which the roles were conveyed by the participants (see Figure 4).

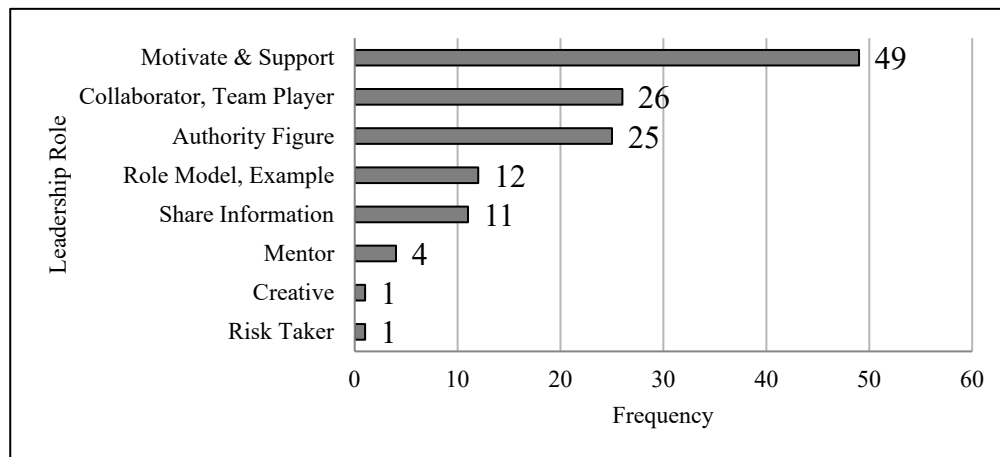


Figure 4. Rank Order of Roles Principals Conveyed When Defining Leadership

We followed the examination of the coded words by comparing the participants' rank-order frequencies for the roles of highly effective teachers to the frequency of the roles that participants conveyed in their definitions of leadership (see Figure 5). Overall, we found a high level of alignment between the roles the principals perceived as priorities for effective teaching and the frequency of the occurrence of the leadership roles in the participants' definitions of leadership. The two notable exceptions were collaboration and authority, which were conveyed at higher levels in the participants' definitions of leadership than in the essential roles of teachers. Interpreting our results, we found

considerable overlap between the leadership roles principals consider when defining leadership and the roles they recognize as critical to teacher effectiveness.

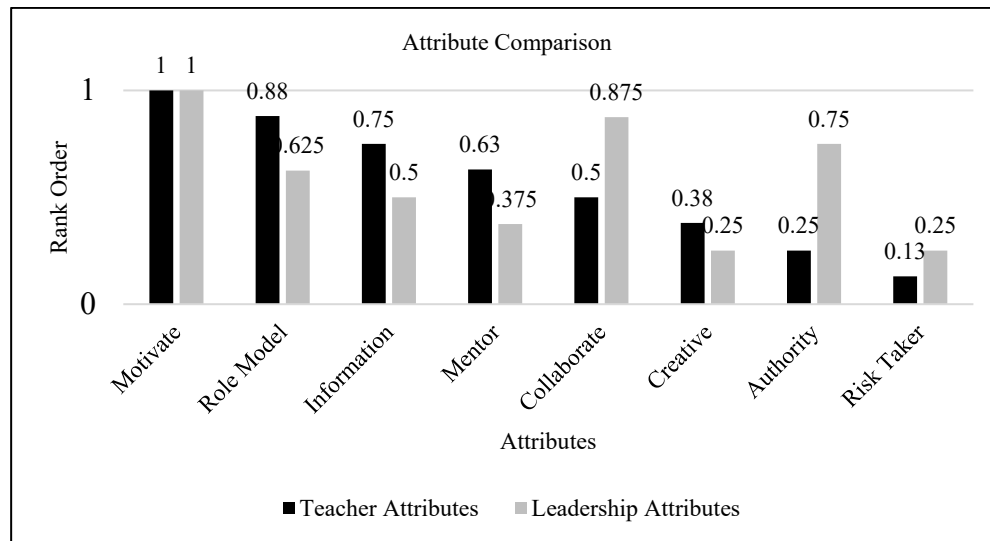


Figure 5. The Rank Order of Highly Effective Teacher Roles in Comparison to the Frequencies of Communicating the Roles When Defining Leadership

4.3 Teacher Leadership Roles

Our third guiding research question was, "What do principals perceive to be the common leadership roles of teachers within the school?" To answer this question, we examined the coded results of the analysis of the participant's responses to, "What are the common leadership roles of your teachers?" Of the sixty-three participants who provided analyzable responses, fourteen respondents identified roles inside the classroom; of these, six listed roles that were exclusively in the classroom. The remaining eight participants considered teacher leadership inside the classroom to be part of larger expectations for teachers, including leadership outside the classroom (see Table 6). Four of the eight participants identified teacher leadership roles as occurring inside the classroom and outside the classroom in both formal and informal roles. One participant's response reflected perceptions of teachers engaging in leadership inside the class but only in informal roles outside the classroom. Of the forty-nine respondents who responded with teachers assuming leadership roles outside the classroom, six shared responses reflective of informal roles, twenty-three focused on formal roles, and twenty provided answers reflective of a combination of formal and informal roles (see Table 6). Interpreting our findings, most participating principals tended to perceive teacher leadership outside the classroom in informal and formal leadership roles.

Table 5. Frequency of Principals' Perception of Teacher Leadership by the Location and Structure of the Leadership

Location and Structure	Frequency
Outside Formal	23
Outside Formal, Outside Informal	20
Outside Informal	6
Outside Formal, Inside Classroom	3
Outside Formal, Outside Informal, Inside Classroom	4
Outside Informal, Inside Classroom	1
Inside Classroom	6

We continued to answer our question by examining our data analysis for evidence of the principals' perceptions of the roles that teachers fulfill when engaging in leadership. Our analysis focused on teachers engaging in school-level initiatives or structures such as professional learning community (PLC) leaders and as part of the school leadership team (see Table 7). While still notable, there was less frequent focus on teachers as mentors and team leaders.

Responses reflective of teacher leadership inside the classroom focused on teachers as content and instruction experts. Interpreted, the leadership roles identified and conveyed by the participants were aligned with engagement in established school processes and initiatives that require teacher involvement, such as the PLCs, and to a lesser frequency, focused on leadership roles of leading students in learning in the classroom.

Table 6. Frequency of Location, Form of Leadership, and Role

Outside (Formal)	N = 50	Outside (Informal)	N = 31	Inside Classroom	N = 14
PLC Leader	41	Mentor	16	Content Expert	7
Leadership Team	29	Team Leader	13	Instructional Expert	5
Instructional Coach	16	Community Collaborator	10	Role Model	4
Club Advisor	16	Sponsor Student Teacher	2	Advocate (emergent)	4
Athletic Coach	5			Mentor	2
				Disciplinarian (emergent)	1

4.4 Fostering Teacher Leadership

Our fourth guiding research question was, "What are principals' perceptions of teachers as leaders, and what actions do principals take to foster teachers' leadership development?" To answer this question, we examined the correlations among our three composite variables of taking action to prepare teachers as leaders, perceptions of teachers as leaders, and supporting teacher development as leaders. We found all composite variables to be significantly correlated ($p < .01$) (see Table 8). Our results suggest that, as the participating principals' support for teachers developing as leaders increased, there was also an increase in their perceptions of teachers as leaders, which contributed to their propensity to take action to prepare teachers as leaders. Interpreting our findings, we found that perceptions of teachers as leaders increase, there is likely also to be an increase in the support for teachers' leadership development and in their engagement in developing teachers as leaders.

Table 7. Correlations among Composite Variables Associated with Principals' Support and Perceptions of Teachers as Leaders

	(M, SD)	Taking action to prepare teachers to be leaders	Perceptions of teachers as leaders	Supportive of teachers developing as leaders
Taking action to prepare teachers to be leaders	(3.63, .50)	1	.37**	.37**
Perceptions of teachers as leaders	(4.01, .47)		1	.54**
Supportive of teachers developing as leaders	(4.03, .49)			1

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

We continued our analysis by examining the responses to our selected responses items associated with principals' actions for developing teachers as leaders (see Table 9). We found that the participants disagreed with leadership requiring formal preparation and agreed that they share readings about leadership and teach their teachers to be leaders.

Table 8. Participants' Responses to Preparing Teachers to be Leaders

Item Stem	Mean	SD	Median
Leadership in schools requires formal preparation in leadership. (-)	2.71	1.18	2
I share readings about leadership with my teachers.	3.66	.80	4
I teach my teachers how to be leaders.	3.96	.62	4

Next, we examined the participants' perceptions of teachers as leaders (see Table 10). We found that the participants tended to strongly disagree with the statement that teachers who give more referrals are better leaders. Participants also

disagreed with school administrators being the only leaders in the school. The participants tended to agree that teaching is considered a leadership activity in their schools, that teachers are expected to be leaders when teaching, and that teaching is leadership.

Table 9. Participants Responses to Teachers are Leaders

Item Stem	Mean	SD	Median
Teachers with more student disciplinary referrals are better leaders. (-)	1.63	.80	1
School administration is commonly the only formal leadership in schools. (-)	2.33	1.16	2
In my school, the teachers consider teaching as leadership.	3.42	.86	4
I expect my teachers to be leaders when they are teaching.	4.27	.61	4
Teaching is leadership.	4.3	.60	4

We concluded answering the question by examining the responses to our items related to principals' support for teachers developing as leaders (see Table 11). We found that the participants tended to agree that they encourage teachers to develop as leaders, that their professional learning communities emphasize teachers as leaders, that participants encourage teachers to take leadership roles, and that participants expect teachers to be leaders outside the classroom. Overall, the results suggest that the principals support teachers' development as leaders.

Table 10. Participants Responses to Support for Teachers as Leaders

Item Stem	Mean	SD	Median
I encourage my teachers to develop as leaders.	4.31	.83	4
Our professional learning community emphasizes classroom teaching as leadership.	3.89	.75	4
I encourage my teachers to take leadership roles in professional organizations.	3.83	.78	4
I expect my teachers to be leaders outside of the classroom.	4.09	.70	4

4.5 Leadership and Personal and Professional Variables

Our fifth guiding research question was, "What is the relationship between principals' personal and professional characteristics and their perceptions of teachers as leaders?" We found a significant positive correlation between our participants' age and their perceptions of teachers as leaders ($r = .31, p = .01$). Similarly, we found a significant positive correlation between the participant's age and their being supportive of teachers developing as leaders ($r = .34, p < .01$). Interpreted, our findings suggest that age is a potential predictor of principals' perceptions and support for teachers as leaders.

We failed to detect any relationships between our composite variables and the following demographic factors: years of experience as a principal, years engaged as a professional in education, level of school in which they worked, ethnicity of participants, each participant's highest academic degree, and the number of teachers working in their schools.

5. Discussion and Limitations

The goal of our research was to determine the K-12 school principals' perceptions of teachers as leaders. Through our survey research, we gained insight into the participants' thoughts about leadership, their leadership style, and the leadership of teachers. Our findings have multiple implications for teacher preparation and support.

5.1 Alignment between Expectations and Practice

We found notable differences in the participants' definitions of leadership and their self-described approach to leadership. We speculate that principals hold ideals for effective leadership but cannot implement them fully due to systematic constraints. As Northouse (2021) shares, outside factors can limit leaders' ability to achieve their goals and require them to adjust their styles to maintain effectiveness in their positions. There is a need for more research on the potential misalignment of self-described leadership styles and actual practices enacted when engaging in leadership. Another possible explanation for the misalignment may be the principals holding multiple views of the ideals of effective leadership while using a range of styles in practice. In answering our questions, the participants may have only focused on one aspect of their leadership and did not reveal the full complexity of their perceptions and practices. In future research, we recommend investigators use interviews to gain a more profound knowledge of the principals'

perceptions and practices. Regardless, one implication of our findings is the potential for principals to share their perceptions of leadership using a different lens than the leadership of their practice, which could be confusing for those they lead. A second implication is the potential for principals to hold different leadership expectations for teachers than they model in their role as an administrator.

5.2 Leadership Role Alignment

In our analysis, we found a high level of continuity in the principals' priorities for leadership and those for effective teachers. Our results indicate that the principals perceived the fundamental skills of effective teachers are aligned with the skills participants use to describe leadership. Further, our results suggest principals have expectations for teachers to engage in the activities of leaders, which may lead principals to recognize teachers as leaders in the classroom. It may also be possible that there is simply an overlap of skill terms between teaching and leadership, with the principals holding different definitions for the terms within the two contexts. Thus, our findings need more confirmation to determine if principals perceive the attributes of teachers due to perceptions of teachers as leaders or if principals perceive those attributes simply due to overlap in position skills. Our findings suggest there is a potential for principals to perceive teachers in leadership roles; however, principals may need to be more explicit about the principals' expectation that teachers will function as leaders in the classroom. There is also likely a need for principal preparation programs to focus on teachers as leaders to help principals develop a mindset that all teachers lead, particularly in their primary teaching role.

5.3 Teacher Leadership Roles

In our analysis of principals' perceptions of teacher leadership roles, we found the principals tended to focus on roles outside the classroom and on leading other adults, such as other teachers. We speculate that, while K-12 school principals may recognize teachers as leaders in the classroom, principals may consider the role of leading students to be inferior to leading other adults. The perception of teachers as leaders outside the classroom is consistent with the perspective of the Teacher Leadership Exploratory Consortium (2011), which tends to focus on teachers as leaders of other teachers. More research is needed to determine when, where, and how principals perceive teachers as leaders. Further, future research might explore what may be necessary to change principals' perceptions to consistently perceive teachers as leaders when teaching. One implication of our finding is the potential for principals to compartmentalize their perceptions of teachers as leaders. Our evidence suggests principals are less likely to consider teachers acting as leaders when in teaching roles than when teachers are engaged in other roles outside of teaching. By not recognizing teachers as leaders in the classroom, principals may be limiting teachers' professional effectiveness and the potential for teachers to personally elevate their self-perceptions as leaders in all of their roles.

5.4 Fostering Teacher Leadership Development

Our analysis revealed that the participants' actions to prepare teachers as leaders correlated with their perceptions of teachers as leaders and their support for teachers being leaders. Further, we found that the participants agreed to engage in actions that we perceived would foster teacher development as leaders. We posit that, while principals may be supportive of teachers developing as leaders, their perceptions of leadership may be in roles outside the classroom rather than when teaching students. Future research should focus on principals' goals for teachers when supporting teacher-leader development. Further, there is a need for more details about how the principals support teachers' development as leaders. One implication of our findings is that principals tend to perceive teachers as leaders and support their development as leaders, which may readily transfer to teachers leading in all their roles, including as teachers of students.

5.5 Leadership and Personal and Professional Variables

We found that, as principal age increased, so did their self-reported engagement in helping teachers develop as leaders. We posit that the principals may have gained wisdom over time to develop a deeper understanding of leadership and the power of leading others. The gained insight likely influences their understanding of the importance of teachers being perceived as leaders inside and outside the classroom. Additional research is needed to explore the relationship between the age of principals and their taking action to support teacher development as leaders. One implication of our finding is to consider the potential influence of the personal growth of principals on their support and engagement in fostering the leadership of teachers.

5.6 Limitations and Delimitations

There are multiple limitations to our research. The first limitation was the potential for a sampling bias. Only those principals who were interested in our research participated in our study; therefore, principals with different perspectives who were not interested in our research may have decided not to participate. Future research should

involve more effort to collect data from a larger sample of principals with diverse demographics and perspectives.

The second limitation of our research is the potential that our participants answered our survey with confirmation bias, selecting responses they perceived to be socially desirable. Given our research involved an anonymous survey, we could not follow up with the participants to find out why they answered as they did and if the answers truly reflected their perceptions of teachers as leaders. Future research could provide additional confirmation of the limitation through semi-structured interviews of principals.

The third limitation of our research is the potential for the practice of principals not to be aligned with the answers they provided in our survey. It is possible that principals may hold an ideal of leadership as their image for effective leadership that may be misaligned with their practice. Future research is needed using observations and interviews of others collaborating with the leaders to triangulate the data and compare ideals with organizational practices.

A delimitation of our research was the potential sampling bias of our participants. We recruited principals for our study whom all worked in the same region of the United States. It may be possible that principals working in other locations could provide different responses. We encourage others to replicate our research and explore principals in other locations perceptions of teachers as leaders.

6. Conclusion

The goal of our research was to explore K-12 school principals' perceptions of teachers as leaders, particularly in their role in teaching students. We found a mixture of the participants' support for the notion that all teachers are leaders inside and outside the classroom, suggesting that there may be differing views of teachers as leaders of learning. Our research laid a foundation for a new line of research examining the perceptions by non-teachers of teachers as leaders in their primary role of teaching students. We encourage other researchers to build upon our work and expand the empirical basis for considering teachers as leaders, particularly in their primary role of teaching students.

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