

## **A Study on Developing Teacher Leadership and Engendering an Emerging Teacher-led Culture**

Tan Liang See, Letchmi Devi Ponnusamy, Hung Wei Loong David and Tan Chiu Kian Keith

### **KEY IMPLICATIONS**

1. While teacher leaders appreciated the autonomy and opportunity to learn to lead and lead to learn, they held a less comprehensive understanding of teacher leadership as compared to the officials.
2. Professional learning and development situating teacher leaders to inquire and reflect on their own practice in a practitioner community can increase sophistication in teachers' participation in curricular and pedagogical decision-making. This process was associated with changed practice and led to readiness to mentor colleagues among teacher leaders.
3. The five leverages identified in this study interact within the iterative process of professional learning and support fluid, relative and situated networks of learning that go beyond teacher leaders who were involved in the professional learning programme.

### **BACKGROUND**

Teacher leadership has been recognised as an important lever for self-improvement both at the teacher and system level. This study focused on nurturing and supporting teacher leadership in pedagogical practice among Art and Music teachers. Building such leadership requires teachers to be equipped with the pedagogical knowledge, skills and dispositions involved in the teaching of Art and Music which in turn enables

students to meet the desired outcomes. Teacher leaders are provided the opportunities to influence their colleagues, principals, and other members of the school community to improve teaching and learning practices with the aim of enhancing student learning and experiences.

### **FOCUS OF STUDY**

This study investigated the nurturing of teacher leadership in deepening teacher learning and fostering a teacher-led culture through a teacher leadership professional development programme. In the context of this teacher leadership professional development programme, the study aims to understand teachers' ground up perspectives of teacher leadership, the quality and effectiveness of teacher learning and the extent to which teacher leadership influenced and fostered a teacher-led culture as the desired outcome.

### **KEY FINDINGS**

1. Our analysis shows that officials hold a more complex view on teacher leadership as compared to that of teacher leaders' ground up views. The teacher leaders perceived their participation, learning and influence as opportunities for continuous professional improvement. They are learning for self, learning with others and learning for others.
2. The teacher leader professional development programme formalises the process in a three-pronged approach: (a)

inquiring pedagogical practice; (b) building a culture for teacher learning; and (c) creating a culture for critical feedback and learning. The three embedded elements increased scrutiny of their practice, facilitated the act of making pedagogical decisions, and cultivated a self-growth mentality. In that authentic setting, there was intentional reflective practice which promotes agentic behavior in learning and leading in the subject.

3. Providing opportunities for professional sharing is a necessary but insufficient condition to promote teacher leadership. The exploration, questioning and reinterpretation process required for the teacher leaders who plan and lead the workshop differentiate them from teachers who simply attend and share at the workshop.
4. In delineating the pathways for development of teacher leadership, teacher leaders who showed changed practice had higher levels of efficacy and the willingness to mentor others. Whereas among the teachers, changed practice was associated with higher level of efficacy and agentic behaviour, but they did not see their role as a mentor.
5. Five leverages emerged that appeared to enable teacher leaders to function, formally and informally, and that also acted as catalysts of learning for self, with others and for others: (a) provision of affordances to appropriate pedagogical practice; (b) provision of contextualised/ situated learning; (c) provision of dialogic space; (d) legitimising the role of arts education through teacher learning and leadership; and (e) forging intra-school and inter-school networks.

## SIGNIFICANCE OF FINDINGS

Providing opportunities for teachers to exercise informal leadership beyond the boundary of school, paired with job-embedded collaboration, moves teachers toward leadership over time as they accumulate professional experience and increase self-efficacy.

Situating professional learning in a practitioner community that requires teachers to inquire and reflect their pedagogical practice brings about learning in making better pedagogical decisions which further develops teacher expertise and increase professionalism.

The critical attributes of professional learning, namely pedagogical inquiry and reflective practice, can be embedded and anchored in practitioner learning communities both within and beyond the school to promote teacher leadership that is not tied to an official designation.

## PARTICIPANTS

This study involved 6 officials, 100 primary school Art and Music teacher leaders and 400 teachers who attend the workshops conducted by the Art and Music teacher leaders.

## RESEARCH DESIGN

This is an exploratory mixed methods study. The research team interviewed the key officials, observed the workshop conducted by the officials and administered a survey to all teacher leaders involved. In addition, 9 teacher leaders' lessons were documented and a survey was administered at the workshop conducted by teacher leaders.

## About the authors

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This brief was based on the project AFR 01/14 TLS: A Study on Developing Teacher Leadership and Engendering an Emerging Teacher-led Culture.

## How to cite this publication

Tan, L.S., Ponnusamy, L.D., Hung, D., & Tan, C.K. (2017). *A Study on Developing Teacher Leadership and Engendering an Emerging Teacher-led Culture*. (NIE Research Brief Series No. 17-002). Singapore: National Institute of Education.

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