7-24-2017

What Complicates or Enables Teachers' Enactment of Leadership

Jill Bradley-Levine 8881892

Ball State University, Muncie, IN, jsbradleylev@bsu.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr

Part of the Educational Leadership Commons, Elementary and Middle and Secondary Education Administration Commons, and the Other Teacher Education and Professional Development Commons

What Complicates or Enables Teachers' Enactment of Leadership

Abstract

This article presents findings from a case study that describes the ways that four teachers pursuing their master's degree in teacher leadership engaged in leadership activities in their schools. In order to explore this purpose, this study examines two research questions: (1) How do teachers enact leadership in their schools and (2) What complicates or enables teachers' leadership activity? Findings indicate that the norms of the teaching profession including equality and privacy affect teachers' enactment of leadership in their schools. Teacher leaders limit their work based on their knowledge of these norms, their past experiences engaging in leadership, and the culture present in their schools.

What Complicates or Enables Teachers' Enactment of Leadership

Jill Bradley-Levine
Ball State University, Muncie, Indiana, USA

This article presents findings from a case study that describes the ways that four teachers pursuing their master's degree in teacher leadership engaged in leadership activities in their schools. In order to explore this purpose, this study examines two research questions: (1) How do teachers enact leadership in their schools and (2) What complicates or enables teachers' leadership activity? Findings indicate that the norms of the teaching profession including equality and privacy affect teachers' enactment of leadership in their schools. Teacher leaders limit their work based on their knowledge of these norms, their past experiences engaging in leadership, and the culture present in their schools. Keywords: Teacher Leadership, Professional Norms, Qualitative Inquiry

This study examined the ways that four teachers attempted to engage in leadership activities within their schools as they learned about leadership practices through an educational leadership graduate program. In order to facilitate understanding, I first examine the context of teacher leadership and teacher professional norms in the United States. Next, I share details about the study design, graduate program, participants, methods of data collection, and analysis procedures. Then I describe the findings as shared by the participants. Finally, I discuss the implications of the findings on teacher leader practice.

Background

Traditionally, teachers in the United States have instructed students while administrators managed teachers' work. According to Danielson (2006), "in many states and school districts, the work of teaching is regarded as following procedures or instructional plans designed by others and under the close direction of a supervisor" (p. 13). Such conditions created a situation where teachers with a desire to "extend their influence" beyond the classroom had few options, and often the choices available required teachers to leave the classroom to become administrators, counselors, or other middle managers (Danielson, 2006, p. 15). These options did not satisfy teachers who wanted to utilize their expertise and commitment to positively influence their colleagues' work with the goal of improving teaching and learning.

Early teacher leadership was embedded in formal roles with distinct responsibilities. Hatch, White, and Faigenbaum (2005) discussed three waves of teacher leadership in the U.S., starting in the 1970s. Teachers were first invited to become department heads, who functioned as middle-managers. Their responsibilities included compelling teachers within their departments to be cooperative team-players (Little, 2003). These roles were soon expanded to include expert positions such as curriculum or staff developer (Little, 2003). Principals often controlled the work of such teacher leaders, utilizing them to implement new programs and curriculum. The third wave saw a significant shift in focus to colleague support roles such as mentor. Such roles offered opportunities for more teachers to become leaders.

By the start of the 21st century, definitions of teacher leadership in the U.S. had moved beyond formal roles. For instance, Katzenmeyer and Moller (2001) characterized teacher leaders as those who "lead within and beyond the classroom, identify with and contribute to a

community of teacher learners and leaders, and influence others toward improved educational practice" (p. 5). Similarly, York-Barr and Duke (2004) defined teacher leadership as "the process by which teachers, individually or collectively, influence their colleagues, principals, and other members of school communities to improve teaching and learning practices with the aim of increased student learning and achievement" (pp. 287-288). These descriptions emphasize that teacher leaders have the potential to influence their colleagues outside of formal leadership roles. But they fail to provide a description of what such teacher leaders actually do.

Danielson (2006) provides a more complete definition of teacher leadership as a "set of skills demonstrated by teachers who continue to teach students but also have an influence that extends beyond their own classrooms to others within their school and elsewhere" (p. 12). She describes the work of teacher leaders as establishing trust to cultivate positive relationships with an end to collaborating with colleagues to identify and address problems of teaching and learning. Further, teacher leaders are sometimes responsible for "managing a process of change" among their colleagues (p. 12). However, they also may inspire and support their colleagues simply to do what they currently do, but more effectively (Danielson, 2006).

Literature Review

Early reviews of research reported few positive outcomes for teaching and learning when teachers tried to lead their colleagues. For instance, although Rowan (1990) summarized that teacher leaders in formal roles such as department head, master teacher, or committee chair found satisfaction from their position and were committed to their work, these teacher leaders did not broadly change teaching and learning within their schools. Likewise, Smylie (1994) explained in his literature review that teacher leaders were unsuccessful in altering the nature of teachers' work within their classrooms. The question, then, is why teacher leadership initiatives have had so little influence on teachers' work.

Professional norms for U.S. teachers

Some of the research on teacher leadership suggests that the norms of the teaching profession in the U.S. may limit the work of teacher leaders, whether they are appointed to a formal position or conduct their work through influence relationships (Duke, 1994). Lortie (1975/2002) studied the culture of teaching in the United States in the early 1970s. Although he collected the data shared in *Schoolteacher* over 30 years ago, he released a second edition of his text in 2002. In that edition's Preface, he acknowledged that "the major structures in public education are much the same today as when *Schoolteacher* was written in 1975" (p. vii). Lortie identifies two cultural norms that impact the work of U.S. teachers: a norm of egalitarianism and a norm of privacy (Lortie, 1975/2002).

Egalitarianism

The norm of egalitarianism limits teachers' leadership work in various ways. Lortie (1975/2002) found that although U.S. teachers are comfortable asking for help or advice, they insist that such assistance should be offered only when requested. Thus, the norm of egalitarianism implies that teachers should focus on doing their own work, and not interfere with other teachers' work unless they are asked specifically for assistance. Therefore, although teacher leaders often seek collaborative learning opportunities through positive relationships with their colleagues, their work is viewed by these colleagues as creating inequitable status distinctions between them and other teachers (LeBlanc & Shelton, 1997; Lieberman & Friedrich, 2010; Little, 1995; Smylie & Denny, 1990). A few scholars have suggested that

teachers ought to lead only when the work revolves around instruction, and that they should not be involved in districtwide or schoolwide decision making (Smylie & Denny, 1990). However, Lortie (1975/2002) also relates the norm of egalitarianism to a teaching structure that "does not emphasize the acquisition of extrinsic rewards" (p. 102). In the U.S., teachers are suspicious of colleagues "who seek money, prestige, or power" (p. 102). This means that even when teachers focus their leadership work on instruction, they are still likely to be viewed with distrust by fellow teachers.

Additionally, Lortie (1975/2002) found that while most teachers believe it is acceptable for individual teachers to seek external rewards when they are working in solidarity with a teachers' union, they do not accept such behavior when individual teachers seek their own rewards independent of collective action. Nevertheless, teacher leaders have often been allocated tasks that "emphasized individual job enhancement over collective improvement" (Lieberman & Friedrich, 2010; Stoelinga & Mangin, 2010, p. 3). These leadership roles distinguish and separate teacher leaders from their colleagues, and as a result, teachers are more likely to resist this sort of leadership enacted by their colleagues (Lieberman & Friedrich, 2010). Moreover, reward distribution structures for teachers in the U.S. also deemphasize the individual pursuit of external rewards, which may be characterized by additional leadership responsibilities (Lortie, 1975/2002). For instance, teachers have typically earned pay raises automatically every year, which are determined through union negotiations. Further, teachers often earn additional raises when they pursue higher education through master's programs or additional certifications. In other words, teachers' "income goes up primarily as one acquires seniority and takes courses" (Lortie, 1975/2002, p. 102). Therefore, if teachers are compensated financially in any way for additional leadership work, their colleagues are more likely to resist their efforts because such work does not follow these traditional reward distribution structures.

Privacy

The norm of privacy has also hindered teachers' leadership work. Lortie (1975/2002) found that a "sink-or-swim" attitude characterizes the socialization of U.S. teachers into the teaching profession (p. 160). For instance, although mentoring for novice teachers is accepted, experienced teachers expect to be left alone to do their work unless they ask for help, as described above (Little, 1988; Lortie, 1975/2002). Indeed, Lortie (1975/2002) noted that the norm of privacy shelters teachers from "unsolicited interventions by others" including colleagues (p. 195). In addition, because the "rewards of teachers are earned in isolation," they often respect each other's privacy and avoid "intruding on classroom boundaries" (Lortie, 1975/2002, p. 192). In other words, teachers mutually uphold an expectation that they will not interfere with each other's work as it relates to teaching and learning within their individual classrooms.

However, Lortie (1975/2002) observed that U.S. teachers are typically interested in their colleague's work despite that they "do not share a powerful technical culture" (p. 192). As described above, teachers are comfortable seeking help from each other. Additionally, they expect their colleagues to take equal responsibility for tasks that must be done outside of their classrooms (Lortie, 1975/2002). In fact, schools with a culture of shared responsibility respond most positively to teachers' leadership work. For instance, Little (1988) suggests that "the prospects for school-based teacher leadership rest on displacing the privacy norm with another that might be expressed this way: 'It's part of your job to ensure that all the teaching here is good teaching" (p. 94). But this suggests a shift away from taking collective responsibility for schoolwide tasks toward taking mutual responsibility for teaching and learning, something that Lortie (1975/2002) found teachers to resist in favor of "the individual's right to choose between association and privacy" (p. 195).

Undeniably, establishing a more collaborative community among teachers provides teachers who lead with a space in which to work more successfully. Teachers engaging in leadership, in particular, facilitate the process of developing collaborative communities when they seek "to establish more collegial relationships, affirm other teachers' expertise, and accomplish positive outcomes for their students" through their leadership work (Lieberman & Friedrich, 2010, p. 31; Lieberman, Saxl, & Miles, 1988). These behaviors result not only in greater transparency, but also in a more egalitarian leadership structure across the school (Lieberman & Friedrich, 2010). Nevertheless, Lortie (1975/2002) maintained in his 2002 preface that although "a sense of professional community exists, mutual isolation during most of the day is [still] the rule at many schools" (p. xi).

In summary, the norms of egalitarianism and privacy protect U.S. teachers from the external influence of colleagues so that they may work independently and so that they have greater control over their work (Lortie, 1975/2002). Lortie (1975/2002) encapsulates the professional culture of teachers in the U.S. in this quote:

> Responding to collegial requests for help and meeting schoolwide obligations are expected. The individual teacher is not permitted to "put on airs," but should share in the egalitarian spirit which marks these expectations. Egalitarianism rules out imposing one's view on others; one should respond to requests for help but not expect special privileges for doing so. (pp. 194-195)

These expectations inevitably lead to greater privacy among teachers where they work mostly in isolation and where any teacher who takes initiative is viewed with distrust or confusion.

Author Context

I engage in this work with a critical perspective; I believe that teachers need to find ways to have control over their work in a time when education policy dictates and defines so many elements of that work. Teacher leadership provides teachers with opportunities to influence what happens in classrooms and across schools. But it is important to study the ways that such work may be undermined by internal (i.e., from within the profession) and external (i.e., from policy makers, administrators, etc.) forces. This study allowed me to examine the internal forces that affected four teachers' enactment of leadership work in their school settings. Their perceptions are important because although there are only four of them, I believe they represent many teachers' experiences and help us understand the ways that teachers are making sense of leadership as a collective and individual practice.

Study Design

I gathered data for this study using critical qualitative methodology, as described by Carspecken (1996). According to Carspecken, critical theorists agree that examining "the nature of social structure, power, culture, and human agency" through qualitative research is important (p. 3). However, they have disagreed on how best to carry out critical research. Therefore, Carspecken (1996) details a process by which to conduct critical qualitative research that allows researchers to examine the truth claims that participants share with them during data collection. He describes four types of claims associated with participant data: objective, subjective, identity, and normative. Through specific analysis procedures, explained below, critical researchers explore the landscape of possible claims made by each participant in order to better understand more backgrounded meaning(s).

Using the critical qualitative approach, I focused on examining participants' perspectives through two research questions guiding this study: (1) how do teachers enact leadership in their schools; and (2) what complicates or enables teachers' leadership activity? The findings presented here draw on my doctoral dissertation (Bradley-Levine, 2008), portions of which also have appeared in other forms in other publications. In addition, this study was reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board of the university where I worked at the time.

Participants

Although all 17 teachers in the master's degree program were invited to participate in the study, only four agreed to participate. The other teachers declined to participate, perhaps because they were too busy or were disinterested in the study or because they had not engaged in leadership and could not contribute to a discussion about leadership enactment. I describe the four participants next.

Audrey, a secondary social studies teacher with seven years of teaching experience at the time of the study, wanted to earn her principal's license and felt the incentives offered by the district to participate in the program were attractive. She had extensive teacher leadership experience when she started the program, having served as a department chair for two years, a Critical Friends facilitator, a co-chair of the Climate Committee, and a member of the School Improvement Team. Allison, a secondary mathematics teacher with five years of experience at the time of the study, wanted to be a teacher leader, but not an administrator. She had teacher leadership experience prior to starting the program including being a member of her school's state test Data Analysis Committee, coaching cheerleading, sponsoring student council, and choreographing for the show choir. Pauline, an elementary special education teacher with six years of teaching experience at the time of the study, wanted to earn her master's degree and the program met her passion for life-long learning. Her teacher leadership experience included chairing the Family and Community Involvement Committee and serving on the School-wide Planning Committee. Phil, an elementary teacher with 10 years of teaching experience at the time of the study, wanted to earn a principal's license although this only became a goal during the study. He had experience as a teacher leader, having been a Parent-Teacher Organization (PTO) liaison, Positive Behavior Support facilitator, and a committee member of the state Student Achievement Institute and the School Improvement Committee.

In-Depth Interviewing

I conducted interviews to allow the four participants to explore their development as teacher leaders. Interviews allow the researcher the flexibility to "continuously revise her understanding of core cultural categories employed by her subjects of study" and then to reformulate interview questions before, after, or during the interview (Carspecken, 1996, p. 75). Interviews also probe the "layered subjectivity" of participants, allowing them to discover and revise their initial thoughts and emotions through each stage of the interview process (Carspecken, 1996, p. 75). Interviewing is particularly important for critical research because as "dialogical data" it allows participants to become empowered through exploratory conversation (Carspecken, 1996, p. 154). These conversations help us discover "who we are, becoming more certain of our potentialities and capacities" (Carspecken, 1996, p. 169). Thus interviews offer participants the opportunity to "claim the existence and validity of entire worlds within which an identity is defined and located" (Carspecken, 1996, p. 169).

I interviewed the participants three times over six months. Interviews were semi-structured, lasting between 30 and 60 minutes, and I conducted them in locations convenient

for participants including their homes, classrooms, coffee shops and bookstores. I developed interview protocols after conducting observations of the participants in two of their graduate classes. This allowed me to probe ideas brought up during class discussions such as the ways their leadership work had changed since they started the master's degree program and how they were able to influence their colleagues to modify their practice through such leadership work. Finally, I audio-taped and transcribed each interview, and then sent the transcripts to participants for member checking.

Data Analysis

After applying low-inference codes to objective features in the data, I conducted preliminary reconstructive analyses (PRA) on commonly occurring actions and statements (Carspecken, 1996). PRA involves developing meaning fields for expressions or actions connected to low-inference codes (Carspecken, 1996). Meaning fields represented all of the possible meanings that the expression or action had for the participant. Moreover, my shared experience as a former teacher and graduate student allowed me to be a "virtual participant" and improved the accuracy of meaning fields I created (Carspecken, 1996, p. 98). Table 1 provides an example of a meaning field.

Table 1. Meaning Field Example

Audrey	I think I'm well liked. I think some people think that I'm an overachiever, probably accurately. I think that the three teachers in my building who are just do nothings—and everybody knows that they are on the margins, everybody knows that they are definitely mediocre—they don't like me. They probably think that I am pushy, maybe a know-it-all. Those are those three people. No one cares about what they think because if we based all of our decisions on what those people thought then we wouldn't do anything. I ignore them. I listen to what they say and I reply diplomatically. In fact, just last week I had to reply to this one badgering email in a very diplomatic way and I did. Problem solved. Whatever. It doesn't get to me. Those three people don't get under my skin.
Meaning field	"I want my colleagues to like me." "I work hard and people notice." "A few (mediocre) teachers don't like me because I work hard." "Most of my colleagues value hard-working people." "I don't want my work to be any more difficult than it already is." "I don't want to become isolated from my peers." "I don't care what mediocre teachers think about me." "We need our colleagues' cooperation in order to do our work." "I am able to negotiate potential negative interactions." "I am skilled at dealing with difficult, resistant teachers." "I don't let these things get to me."

After constructing meaning fields, I conducted pragmatic horizon analysis (PHA). PHA identifies the possible claims and back-grounded meanings of an action or expression. I searched for four types of claims including objective, subjective, normative, and identity. It is important to note that low-inference codes are only designed to identify objective claims. However, PHA allows the researcher to delve more deeply into the possible meanings of the data, and to explore a wider variety of claims including those that are feeling-based or subjective claims, those that are judgmental or normative claims, and those that are personal or identity claims. Table 2 provides an example of PHA.

Table 2. Pragmatic Horizon Analysis Example

	Highly Foregrounded	*Foregrounded*	*Backgrounded*	*Highly Backgrounded*
Objective	I do my job. I am social. My work is sometimes difficult.	I can't do my job alone. I am social and want to be part of a group. My colleagues can help make my work easier.	I need my colleagues to help me do my job. I care what people think about me.	My colleagues might be able to do my job better than me. My colleagues might not accept me.
Subjective	I feel social.	I feel uncomfortable that my colleagues might not like me.	I feel conflicted about what I think I should do and the fact that I want to be cooperative.	I feel irritated that my colleagues aren't supportive of my work.
Normative	Cooperation is good. Hard work is good. Being diplomatic with resistant teachers is good.	Everyone in a peer relationship should contribute positively. People's work should be respected.	Teachers should work together. Teachers should be supportive of each other.	Some teachers should have more to contribute than others. Some teachers' opinions or feelings should be more important than others. Some people should be silenced.
Identity	I am an open-minded person. I am a fair person. I am a diplomatic person. I am an independent person.	I am a generous person (for putting up with mediocre teachers).	I am a realistic person.	I am a weak person because I will not confront mediocre teachers head-on.

With PHA complete, I was able to develop more high-inference codes; these represented the full range of possible claims made by participants. I re-coded the data using these high-inference codes. Finally, I compared the data within each new code to determine how ideas overlapped or related to each other. Through this process, I began to see that the participants' leadership work was limited by the norms of the teaching profession, as described above.

Validity Checks

I conducted validity checks throughout the data collection and analysis process including prolonged engagement, peer debriefing, member checks, negative case analysis, and consistency checks (Carspecken, 1996). Peer de-briefers included professors teaching the courses I observed, doctoral students outside the program who took one course within the program, and other teachers in the district who were pursuing their master's degree in a different program. De-briefers checked observation notes for bias and the inference level of codes. Other graduate students familiar with qualitative methods peer debriefed the interviews by reading transcripts in search of leading questions or comments. They also debriefed the PRA and PHA analyses. Additionally, I asked the participants to review various analysis documents, and encouraged them to challenge interpretations or add their own. I utilized negative case analysis when one incident was inconsistent with a code or theme. Finally, I conducted consistency checks by comparing what participants said during interviews over time.

Findings

Participants reported enacting teacher leadership in various ways within their schools. Their master's degree program pushed them to be reflective about the ways they enacted leadership, as well as how effective their enactment was among their colleagues, two ideas that emerged during the interviews. The findings presented here include a description of two themes relevant to the research questions for this study. The first shares participants' descriptions of their colleagues' perceptions of them as teacher leaders. The second examines participants' thoughts about the potential conflict between teacher leadership as supportive or evaluative in nature.

How Enactment Is Affected by Others' Perceptions of Teacher Leaders

The participants enacted leadership in a variety of ways including through formally assigned tasks, as well as through developing influential relationships with their colleagues. However, as they explored the ways they enacted leadership, they realized that their enactment was shaped by their colleagues' perceptions of them. Phil and Audrey both identified themselves as teacher leaders through the formal work they did in their schools. However, they were frustrated by their perceived futility of this work, which was either not supported by administrators or rejected by colleagues. As such, both sought authority through formal roles, something they believed they could acquire by eventually becoming school principals. Conversely, Allison did not consider herself a teacher leader although she accepted that her peers considered her a leader because they asked her for advice. Her colleagues' perceptions of her informed the way that she defined and enacted teacher leadership in her school setting.

Phil deduced that his colleagues must consider him a teacher leader because they often asked him for assistance. For example, one colleague who had not taught a novel in the past asked Phil to help him plan a unit to teach a novel. Nevertheless, even though his colleagues utilized Phil's expertise, Phil was frustrated by what he considered the principal's lack of support for his teacher leadership efforts:

> [Although my principal] will tell you that I'm a leader, I don't feel like I'm a leader because I don't feel like I'm ever given the opportunity to make a decision. I don't feel empowered. There was a time that I did…I put this block schedule together…we went to another teacher's house and laid [out] all these things and discussed how we were going to approach [the principal] with it and

she said yes. After one year she said no. She said we weren't going to do it again. She thought that there were problems with it.

Phil judged that his influence, hard work, and initiative were not appreciated or supported by the principal, and he began to question whether he could influence change in his school as a teacher leader. He assumed that without the authority of the position of school principal, he was powerless to affect the status quo at his school. Therefore, Phil determined to become a principal so that he would have more power to transform his school.

Audrey also identified herself as a teacher leader because of the extra work she had taken on at her school. Her colleagues recognized her as the leader of committees, book studies, and a Critical Friends professional collaboration group. She was always volunteering to lead another initiative so that her colleagues could not help but notice her leadership work. In addition, like Phil, Audrey viewed herself as respected by fellow teachers since they came to her for help:

> I am perceived definitely as a teacher leader. That is for sure. That is a given. People come to me. I'm not always the one that stands up and presents things at faculty meetings and runs activities but oftentimes I get a lot of follow-up emails or questions [such as] "Can you point me to this resource? Can you point me to that resource?" I tend to have pretty good follow-through so I think people appreciate that. That is why they keep asking me.

Audrey noted that her colleagues sought her advice because she showed commitment and responded to their needs, something she thought they valued. However, Audrey reflected that some teachers did not appreciate her leadership skills, and even interfered with her work. She tolerated these colleagues, but showed concern that they might negatively influence other teachers' perceptions of her:

> Some people think that I'm an overachiever, probably accurately. I think that the three teachers in my building who are just "do nothings"—and everybody knows that they are on the margins; everybody knows that they are definitely mediocre—they don't like me. They probably think that I am pushy, maybe a know-it-all…No one cares about what they think because if we based all of our decisions on what those people thought then we wouldn't do anything. I ignore them. I listen to what they say and I reply diplomatically. In fact, just last week I had to reply to this one badgering email in a very diplomatic way and I did. Problem solved. Whatever. It doesn't get to me. Those three people don't get under my skin.

Audrey sought recognition for her work so the fact that some of her colleagues did not appreciate or support this work upset her. Although she claimed indifference to their opinion, she did seem to care what her peers thought about her work. Consequently, she had grown disenfranchised with the idea of teacher leadership and planned to become a school principal.

Allison chose not to volunteer for teacher leader positions. She identified herself as a teacher leader because her colleagues approached her for advice in working with special groups of students. Because Allison was a naturally unassuming person, teachers did not feel threatened asking her for guidance. Rather, they had identified her as an expert on specific groups of students she had worked with in the past. Allison never promoted herself as an expert:

A lot of my colleagues come to me because they know that my first two years of teaching were strictly junior high and they know that my experience at [my former school] was with at-risk students. That helps them too. They come to me a lot for things with lower achieving students and discipline issues, and students not being interested in something. [They ask me,] "How do you get them interested?"

Allison approached her role as a teacher leader with humility, and thus found she was able to support her colleagues without coming off as arrogant. Thus, Allison found that her colleagues perceived her as a teacher leader without her having to assert her expertise in a way that made her (or them) feel uncomfortable.

Teacher Leadership as Supportive Versus Evaluative

Participants struggled to determine the appropriate balance between responding to direct requests for support from colleagues and offering unsolicited advice. They tended to doubt their influence over their colleagues for various reasons. Phil, Audrey, and Pauline wished to avoid conflict, and did not want their advice to be perceived as evaluative or judgmental by their peers. Audrey and Pauline in particular were concerned that their contemporaries considered them too inexperienced to provide leadership, or that their peers found them too arrogant to want to listen to their suggestions. As a result, these three participants worked to establish rapport with their colleagues in order to improve their credibility and influence. In addition, Phil and Audrey sought the principalship in order to secure the authority they thought necessary to influence teaching practice in their buildings. However, Pauline and Allison retained their faith that authority is not necessary for teachers to have influence in their schools. They focused their attention on developing positive relationships with their colleagues in order to grow mutual trust and respect.

Phil found it easy to enact supportive teacher leadership. For example, he shared curricular resources and instructional advice with colleagues when they asked. However, he was reluctant to exert influence that might be interpreted as evaluative by his colleagues. He described an incident when he did not offer advice to a teacher even though he thought she had handled a disciplinary situation ineffectively:

If [the student] is telling the truth, [my colleague] was wrong. Is my role as a teacher to tell her she is wrong? That is a good question because maybe it is, maybe it's not. I wasn't there. Maybe there was more to it. Maybe there wasn't. If I open up this conflict with this teacher—it will be a conflict because I'm questioning her judgment, [then] in the long run is it going to be worth it? Is this teacher going to change?

Phil stopped himself from coaching his colleague in order to avoid a conflict. He imagined that offering such advice would appear more condemnatory than supportive, and therefore, be rejected by the teacher. In addition, Phil did not wish to disrupt his relationship with his peers, and had worked to build rapport with them by complimenting their work. However, Phil also questioned his authority to intervene, noting that it may be inappropriate for teachers to critique each other's practice. As such, it is no surprise that Phil aspired to the principalship, the only position he regarded as having the authority necessary to influence change within his school.

Audrey also experienced difficulty determining how to enact teacher leadership outside of a formal role such as committee chair or leader of a school-wide improvement initiative. When she held such positions, she exerted authority and held her peers accountable. However,

minus a formal role, she dreaded creating conflict with her colleagues. She particularly avoided interfering in her colleagues' work until they solicited her help, "When I notice [a colleague in trouble or struggling]—not when they come to me, that is different [because] then I just try to help them, [but] if I notice it, then I am not real straightforward about it."

Audrey feared that she would be perceived as arrogant by her colleagues if she offered advice outside of her formal leadership roles. She judged that her lack of experience decreased the influence she had among her colleagues. Nonetheless, she recognized a need to become more confident when she observed a colleague requiring help. For example, she had noticed one of the teachers on her team becoming anxious about the behavior of two students. Audrey planned how she would build rapport with the teacher by sharing her concern for the teacher's wellbeing. She realized that the way she framed her offer of help was essential if she wanted the offer to be well-received and did not want the teacher to be insulted.

Like Phil and Audrey, Pauline was comfortable offering support to her colleagues. For example, she often invited teachers to place the students they were having trouble reaching in her small (pull-out) group for a given class period, something that provided relief to struggling teachers. However, Pauline lacked confidence when it came to offering unsolicited advice. For instance, despite her concern that her peers had negative perceptions of special needs students, she was reticent to challenge them directly because they had ignored her in the past. Even so, her sense of responsibility to her students motivated her to find ways to exert influence as a teacher; figuring out how to challenge her colleagues' beliefs about students effectively was one reason she had joined the master's degree program. She reported that her leadership training was helping her learn how to confront her colleagues in a positive and influential way: "[The courses] gave me the words but I still fight to say them because I still wonder, 'What are they going to think when I say this?' You still have to work with those people." Pauline acknowledged that she had utilized a "cocky" approach to giving advice in the past. Thus, she was working to rebuild broken relationships with her colleagues by offering suggestions in a more constructive way and by praising them for their success in working with special needs students. She had begun to notice that improving her relationships with her colleagues had changed their perceptions of her. They were taking her advice and asking for her opinion more often, reinforcing her belief that teacher leaders had the ability to affect change through positive relationships.

In contrast to the other participants, Allison felt confident supporting and challenging her colleagues. Her experience as part of a teacher-led professional learning community (PLC) at her school shaped her perspective of teacher leadership as a democratic and empowering activity: "I'm not one of the few leaders. There are lots of leaders. I am able to learn from them and …still kind of influence others as well." She recognized that the PLC structure used at her school established trust among teachers, creating a safe space for owning weaknesses and acknowledging strengths. In addition, she privileged influence relationships over formal roles in the enactment of teacher leadership: "It's the teacher leaders that want to do something, the people who I perceive as a teacher leader whether they think they are or not. I feel those are the teachers who would initiate something." Allison linked teacher leadership to each member of a learning community being able to initiate change by following their passions. As such, Allison noted that teachers would become leaders in areas that most interested them or where they were experts so that all teachers have opportunities to lead. Allison's view of teacher leadership enactment was the only one that allowed for supportive and challenging behaviors to coexist.

Discussion

The findings presented here demonstrate how the concept of teacher leadership interacts with the professional norms for teachers in the U.S. When the participants took the initiative to do leadership, they often felt frustrated because either administrators or their colleagues ignored, rejected, or resisted their efforts to lead. On the other hand, when they merely responded to requests for advice or help, their efforts were rewarded with acceptance and respect. For example, Audrey, Phil and Allison described how their colleagues and sometimes administrators asked them for assistance. Because they identified this as acknowledgement of their expertise, they considered evidence that their colleagues consider them leaders. However, such requests are accepted within the U.S. teaching cultural norm of egalitarianism, and are not necessarily associated with any particular recognition of leadership (Lortie, 1975/2002). Therefore, the participants' identification of themselves as leaders based on this behavior may be misguided. However, if teacher leadership is, in fact, the act of influencing one's colleagues to change their practice (Danielson, 2006), then perhaps it matters less whether teacher leaders offered their advice without being asked, or offered their advice after being asked by their colleagues. The important point may be that they are engaging in an influence relationship with a colleague.

Nevertheless, the fact that Allison was perceived as unassuming by her colleagues, while Audrey was seen as overbearing may have been impacted by Allison's refusal to seek leadership positions compared to Audrey. The pursuit of positions of leadership is certainly in conflict with the norm of egalitarianism because taking such positions shows an interest in extrinsic rewards (Lortie, 1975/2002). An important question to ask is whether it should be acceptable for teachers to reject the leadership work of some teachers simply because they do not like the way the teacher engages in the work. For instance, because Audrey took initiative and got things done, she was viewed by some of her colleagues as arrogant while Allison's inclination to wait until she was asked to lead caused her colleagues to consider her modest. It is unsurprising that Audrey felt frustrated by her experiences when enacting leadership. She expected to be rewarded for being resourceful, but instead she was criticized. This indicates a need for change within the professional norms of teaching in the U.S. so that when teachers take on extra work, they are met with a sense of appreciation rather than suspicion (Lortie, 1975/2002).

The conflict that the participants experienced between providing support or evaluating practice demonstrated the professional norm of privacy. They were aware of an expectation that they should not interfere with their colleagues' work. However, the expectation was amplified when their interference was viewed as evaluative rather than supportive. Lortie (1975/2002) did not distinguish between support and evaluation, finding that any interference in classroom practice ran contrary to the norm of privacy. In that case, the conflict experienced by the participants was wasted energy because the problem was not located in how they worked with colleagues or the nature of their assistance, but in the interference itself. Nevertheless, they each continued to work to build positive and trusting relationships with their colleagues in an attempt to influence those colleagues' work.

Finally, it is obvious that all four participants understood the norms of the teaching profession in the U.S. The amount of time and energy they spent considering whether to act or not act, and the approach to take provides evidence that they knew that egalitarianism and privacy dictate the work of teachers. This has not changed much since Lortie's (1975/2002) initial study of the teaching culture in the U.S. However, Allison's experience of her professional learning community, and the confidence it gave her to interfere in her colleagues' work when she felt it was most important offers some hope for teachers engaging in leadership in their schools. When structures change, they can transform culture, even when the culture has

existed for many years. At such point, teacher leadership is much more promising as an approach that teachers can use individually or collectively to impact change in their schools, districts, states, and the U.S.

Conclusion

The findings of this study suggest the importance of transforming the cultural norms for teachers in the U.S. Such transformation may be possible through processes and practices that replace the culture of privacy with a culture of transparency. This could occur through the expansion of communities of learning within schools. These communities provide opportunities for all teachers to engage in leadership based on their individual areas of expertise. Lieberman, Saxl, and Miles (1988) recommended several processes important to developing learning communities within schools: establishing trusting relationships, understanding and diagnosing school cultural issues, controlling the change process, allocating and using resources, managing the work required for the change process, and fostering skills and confidence in others. When applied, these processes have created spaces where more teachers across a school engage in meaningful leadership work.

The primary limitation of this study is that there were only four participants, and that their experiences could differ from many other teachers' experiences. In truth, there were differences among these four teachers that distinguished them in their perceptions of teacher leadership and how they enacted leadership. Future research should be conducted in different school settings, and with teachers who have experiences that differ from the four teachers who participated in this study. Their experiences may not be universal, and to more deeply understand the ways that professional norms affect teachers' enactment of leadership, further research should be pursued.

References

Bradley-Levine, J. S. (2008). *The role of leadership preparation in teacher leaders' formation of critical consciousness and enactment of critical teacher leadership* (Doctoral dissertation) Indiana University, Bloomington, IN. Retrieved from http://hdl.handle.net/2022/8426

Carspecken, P. F. (1996). *Critical ethnography in educational research: A theoretical and practical guide*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Danielson, C. (2006). *Teacher leadership that strengthens professional practice*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Duke, D. L. (1994). Drift, detachment, and the need for teacher leadership. In D. R. Walling (Ed.)*, Teachers as leaders: Perspectives on the professional development of teachers* (pp. 255-273). Bloomington, IN: Phi Delta Kappa Educational Foundation.

Hatch, T., White, M. E., & Faigenbaum, D. (2005). Expertise, credibility, and influence: How teachers can influence policy, advance research, and improve performance. *Teachers College Record*, *107*(5), 1004-1035.

Katzenmeyer, M., & Moller, G. (2001). *Awakening the sleeping giant: Helping teachers develop as leaders* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

LeBlanc, P. R., & Shelton, M. M. (1997). Teacher leadership: The needs of teachers. *Action in Teacher Education*, *19*(3), 32-48.

Lieberman, A., & Friedrich, L. (2010). *How teachers become leaders.* New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Lieberman, A., Saxl, E. R., & Miles, M. B. (1988). Teacher leadership: Ideology and practice. In A. Lieberman (Ed.), *Building a professional culture in schools* (pp. 148-166). New

York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Little, J. W. (1988). Assessing the prospects for teacher leadership. In A. Lieberman (Ed.), *Building a professional culture in schools* (pp. 78-106). New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Little, J. W. (1995). Contested ground: The basis of teacher leadership in two re-structuring high schools. *The Elementary School Journal*, *96*(1), 47-63.

Little, J. W. (2003). Constructions of teacher leadership in three periods of policy and reform activism. *School Leadership & Management*, *23*(4), 401-419.

Lortie, D. C. (1975/2002). *Schoolteacher: A sociological study*. Chicago, USA: University of Chicago Press.

Rowan, B. (1990). Commitments and control: Alternative strategies for the organizational design of schools. *Review of Research in Education*, *16*, 353-389.

Smylie, M. A. (1994). Redesigning teachers' work: Connections to the classroom. *Review of Research in Education*, *20*, 129-177.

Smylie, M. A., & Denny, J. W. (1990). Teacher leadership: Tensions and ambiguities in organizational perspective. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, *26*(3), 235-259.

Stoelinga, S., & Mangin, M. (2010). *Examining effective teacher leadership: A case study approach.* New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

York-Barr, J., & Duke, K. (2004). What do we know about teacher leadership? Findings from two decades of scholarship. *Review of Educational Research*, *74*(3), 255-316.

Author Note

Jill Bradley-Levine is an assistant professor in the Educational Studies Department at Ball State University. Her research interests are teacher leadership, professional learning, and innovative instruction. Correspondence regarding this article can be addressed directly to: jsbradleylev@bsu.edu.

Article Citation