

ISTL Symposium

Exploring a cross-cultural perspective of teacher leadership among researchers: A phenomenographic study

Janet M. Okoko

University of Saskatchewan, Canada

&

Catherine H. Arden

University of Southern Queensland, Australia

Objectives or purpose

This presentation is based on a study that explores the culturally diverse understandings, experiences and perspectives of teacher leadership among the membership of an International Study of Teacher Leadership (ISTL) research team comprised of 20 academics working in universities in Australia, Canada, Latin America, South Africa, Tanzania, the United Kingdom, China and Europe. The impetus for this study emerged as a result of discussions at a conference in which ISTL team members expressed interest in exploring perspectives of teacher leadership among the team to inform their ongoing collaborative ISTL research.

Perspective(s) or theoretical framework

Leadership is theorised as a culturally mediated endeavour (Rogoff, 2003), with notions of what constitutes effective educational leadership and teacher leadership seen to be context-specific and subject to cultural bias (AHRC 2018; Hallinger & Walker, 2011; Okoko, 2018; van Emmerick, Euema & Wendt, 2008). Literature on educational leadership and teacher leadership suggests that both teachers' and researchers' understandings of these concepts are widely varied (Webber, 2018). Moreover, much of the published teacher leadership literature has been found to offer interpretations, conceptual frameworks, and recommendations reliant on a knowledge base in which Western notions of leadership are embedded as if they were culturally transferable (Hallinger & Walker, 2011; Webber, 2018). This study offers insights to inform understandings of teacher leadership among researchers, policy-makers and the broader education community, with a particular emphasis on interrogating Western notions of teacher leadership.

Methods, techniques or modes of inquiry

Phenomenography, a qualitative research approach focused on capturing the differences and variations in how people experience a particular phenomenon (Larrson & Holmstrom, 2007; Marton & Booth, 1997), was used to explore the ways that the participants related with the phenomenon of interest, "teacher leadership". Mind mapping and semi-structured online interviews (Arden, 2016; Buzan & Buzan, 2003) were used to gather data from the 20 members of the ISTL research team.

Data Sources/evidence

Participants' experiences of teacher leadership were accessed through their reflections in their mind maps and verbal expressions during the interview. A phenomenographic data analysis procedure was followed to elicit conceptions and experiences reflected in the data, identifying and highlighting the critical variations therein.

Results and conclusions/points of view

The findings were synthesized into a phenomenographic outcome space to reveal the range of qualitatively different ways that teacher leadership was experienced by participants from different geographical contexts and cultural and linguistic backgrounds, each of which is situated in its respective leadership domain. For example, the phenomenon of teacher leadership is variously experienced as being: a personal choice; a political act; a service; an exotic idea/platform for change; a pedagogical endeavour; a social-pedagogical mission; a journey; and an act of being a champion. Examples of leadership domains include: the academy; the teaching profession; the school; the school community; the formal education system; the curriculum; and the geopolitical and socio-historical contexts.

Educational importance of this study for theory, practice, and/or policy

The study contributes to fuller, richer, more culturally inclusive, and thus potentially more sophisticated understandings of teacher leadership. The findings can contribute to research and practice by providing an "experiential framework" (Pham, Bruce & Stoodley, 2002) for engaging with cross-cultural understandings of teacher leadership. It provides educators, educational leaders and educational researchers, insights for embedding more culturally inclusive and diverse conceptions of teacher leadership in their work.

Connection to the conference theme and networks

The presentation falls under the "role of policy makers, researchers and practitioners in promoting educational change" theme and the Educational Leadership Network.

References

- Arden, C. (2016). An inquiry into learning in rural community informatics: Understanding, facilitating and accounting for learning in the GraniteNet project [Doctoral Dissertation] Available from
- Australian Human Rights Commission. (2018). Leading for change: A blueprint for cultural diversity and inclusive leadership revisited. Author. ISBN 978-1-921449-89-5. Retrieved from <https://www.humanrights.gov.au/our-work/race-discrimination/publications/leading-change-blueprint-cultural-diversity-and-inclusiv-0>
- Buzan, T., & Buzan, B. (2003). *The MindMap book*. London: BBC Books.
- Hallinger, P., & Walker, A. (2011). School leadership in Asia Pacific: Identifying challenges and formulating a research agenda, *School Leadership & Management*, 31(4), 299-303, DOI: 10.1080/13632434.2011.606988

- Larsson, J., & Holmström, I. (2007) Phenomenographic or phenomenological analysis: does it matter? Examples from a study on anaesthesiologists' work, *International Journal of Qualitative Studies on Health and Well-being*, 2 (1) 55-64, DOI:10.1080/17482620601068105
- Marton, F., & Booth, S. (1997). *Learning and awareness*. New York: Routledge.
- Okoko, J.M. (2018). Framing school leadership preparation and development for Kenya: Context matters. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 1–18
doi: 10.1177/1741143218792913
- Pham, B., Bruce, C., & Stoodley, I. (2002). Understanding and influencing a learning community: Researchers' ways of seeing the significance and value of research projects. *Building learning communities through education: Refereed papers from the 2nd International Lifelong Learning Conference June 2002.*, (pp. 16-19). Yeppoon, Queensland. Retrieved from <http://researchgate.net>
- Rogoff, B. (2003). *The cultural nature of human development*. New York: Oxford University Press
- Van Emmerick, H., Euema, M., & Wendt, H. (2008). Leadership behaviors around the world: The relative importance of gender versus cultural background. *International Journal of Cross Cultural Management* 8(3): 297 –315
- Webber, C. (2018). A proposed design for researching teacher leadership: Discussion starter. 1st International Conference on Culture and Symbiosis Education hosted by Faculty of Education, Guangxi Normal University, Guilin, China, 26-27 May