WHAT ARE THEY DOING ASIDE FROM TEACHING? TEACHER LEADERSHIP IN AN ELEMENTARY PUBLIC SCHOOL

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ABSTRACT

There were school reform efforts of the Philippine government, particularly the DepEd. The intention of this study was to explore how teacher-leaders (TLs) can support and strengthen current reform efforts. This thesis has provided a sharper, more focused picture of teacher leadership in practice in schools facing challenging circumstances, specifically in the Philippine public school context. Aside from teaching, TLs have other responsibilities, like working on an effective classroom management; not in informal leadership positions; beyond classroom duties; capable of leadership work; respected and looked up to by students and colleagues; without leadership positions; and responsibilities of informal TLs. This study collected several challenges according to teachers' narratives: relational issues; personal circumstances; time; realities of the school; and the Department of Education. The management insights of teachers about teacher-leaders (TLs) or teacher leaderships: Teacher leadership was a meaningful concept in Philippine public schools; many teachers are engaged in important leadership work, whether formal or informal the concept of teacher leadership has not been formally introduced in Philippine public schools; the TLs were highly effective teachers; the TLs showed that they were capable of doing any assigned tasks successfully; the TLs had notable attributes; teacher leadership exists in a restricted form in a centralized and structured hierarchical system; the leadership of the principal has a strong influence on teacher leadership; ideal conditions for TLs; school culture supports teacher leadership; teacher leadership is nurtured by the support of family and the LGU; and the practice of teacher leadership is challenged by specific factors.

Keywords: Teacher-leaders, practices, views, realities, challenges, insights

1. INTRODUCTION

The mandated structural shift from the present 10-year basic education cycle to a K-12 basic education program is unlikely to bring about real improvement without proper attention to other important aspects such as the crucial role of the teacher in supporting the reform towards achieving positive student performance outcomes. The Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013 only indicated teacher education and training as the participation of teachers and school leaders in the implementation of the reform. However, more than ever internationally, teachers and teaching are seen to 'matter' (Muijs & Reynolds, 2011; Day, et al., 2007) contrary to the "positioning of teachers in the past 30 years in print and in minds as the problem in education" (Gunter, 2003). School improvement literature actually report high degrees of teacher involvement and collaboration as main levers of change (Harris and Muijs, 2005).

The important contribution of teachers to school improvement has been established by research. Furthermore, the emergence of teachers who taught well and demonstrated leadership capabilities at the same time has led to the concept of teacher leadership as a critical factor in sustaining changes in schools. This idea has developed rather progressively in places such as the USA and Australia. In the Philippines, school leadership continues to be largely centered on the principal and concerns have been raised related to this as current practices on posting principals to schools and political factors have created situations where a principal is assigned to a school for a short time, even less than a year in many cases. The fast turn-over of principals in schools has resulted in the failure to fully implement great and promising endeavors (Luistro, 2010).

Hence, it does not make sense to leave school improvement in the hands of the principals alone no matter how great a leader they may be. Even if the principals were made to stay longer, no one leader has all the time, energy, and expertise to lead reform (Spillane, 2006) and even the most promising initiatives are likely to fail when left in the hands of only one person. Given this context, it is of interest and of value to determine whether teacher leadership exists in Philippine public schools as it does in other educational systems and if it does, to understand its nature and explore its contributions to school improvement efforts.

Although literature supports the highly beneficial effects of teacher leadership upon schools and students specifically in USA, Canada and Australia (Harris and Muijs, 2003), there appears to be no published research on the nature and impact of teacher leadership within the Philippine public education context. Even if there are many stories about teachers who seem to be making a difference for their schools, little attention has been given to teacher leadership in the Philippine setting. One reason could be the extremely highly-centralized top-down approach characteristic of the Philippine public education system.

Katzenmeyer and Moller (1996) highlighted egalitarian norms in teaching and quite acutely perhaps in the Philippines, the culture in the schools and the broader school system may not be ready to acknowledge differences in status among teachers based on knowledge, skills, or initiatives. These distinctions may blur lines between those in formal leadership positions and the teaching force and create differences among the teachers where subservience to authority and solidarity among those in the same status and rank are more the norm.

The focus of the study is the elementary teachers of a public school in Toril District, Davao City. Teaching for several years in the same school, the researcher has observed that teachers in the school, aside from teaching, has been doing a lot of administrative, instructional and personal tasks that borders on leadership functions. In so doing, they oftentimes, conduct tasks that are similar, and often, equate with what school heads are doing. The researcher has identified these teachers and collected data from them. The study is an exploration of teacher leadership.

This research on teacher leadership in the public school was also prompted by personal encounters with public school teachers who seemed to be actively and passionately engaged in school affairs beyond their respective classrooms. These teachers may not have been instructed or trained to take on more than the day-to-day responsibilities of teaching a class of students but were nonetheless able to seek and find challenge and growth within and beyond their classes. Notably, they appeared to be making a difference in the improvement of their schools.

Teacher leadership is one approach to the distribution of influence in schools and its emergence is more likely when distributed leadership is present in the surrounding context of practice (York-Barr and Duke, 2004). This review of literature focuses on a discussion of the concept of teacher leadership and its important aspects. The important role of context in the development and practice of teacher leadership is also considered.

Definition of teacher leadership

Frost and Durrant (2003) articulated that "whether the impetus for change springs from national reforms or from the perception of a single teacher that something could be better, improvements in teaching and learning ultimately depend on the action taken by teachers". Teachers have the agency to lead change and to guide organizational development and improvement (Harris, 2003) and success is more likely when there are opportunities for teachers to lead development and change (Harris, 2008).

Recent research on school development and change has pointed to dramatically different roles for teachers, including increased leadership roles. Crowther, et al (2002) noted that today, teacher leadership appears to be inseparable from successful school reform. Teacher leadership has been regarded as crucial to a school's capacity to improve itself (York-Barr & Duke, 2004) primarily because of its inherent potential to help counter the limitations of the hierarchical model of school organization (Frost & Durrant, 2003) and its emphasis on collective action, empowerment and shared agency.

The advocacy for teacher leadership is premised on the belief that as teachers are closest to the classroom, they can implement changes that make a difference to learning and learners (Harris & Muijs, 2005; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Teachers are on the front lines and know the classroom issues, the culture of the school, and the kind of support they need to do their jobs (NCCTQ, 2007). When teachers take on responsibilities that used to be reserved for those in the administrative hierarchy, their decisions are likely to be based on their experience and expertise and on what are actually needed to support teaching and learning for students and teachers. It is unfortunate that many initiatives to support, acknowledge, reward or better use teachers' abilities have maintained traditional views of most teachers' roles as implementers of curriculum decisions and procedures decided elsewhere in the bureaucracy (Darling-Hammond, Bullmaster & Cobb 1995). These have limited the teachers' freedom to exercise leadership for change from within and have impeded the advancement of teacher leadership.

In the teaching profession, teachers influence their students each day, lesson by lesson and TLs are able to transfer these skills into work with colleagues. Formal positions are not necessary to influence others. Although the extent of teacher leadership influence in a school depends in large measure on the group ethos, collegial and professional norms, and customs of a school or district (Hart, 1995), motivating colleagues toward improved practice relies greatly on the personal influence of a competent teacher who has positive relationships with other adults in the school (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 1996). Conversely, teachers allow themselves to be influenced by colleagues who exhibit behaviors they advocate (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2011) even if these colleagues are not assigned formal roles.

Smylie, et al (2011) proposed three related models of distributed leadership that have important implications for teacher leadership: (1) leadership as the performance of key tasks and functions rather than as the work of people in formal leadership roles, (2) leadership as an organization-wide resource of power and influence, and (3) leadership practice as constituted in the interaction of school leaders, followers and situations.

The first model indicates that teachers can and do perform important leadership tasks within and outside formal positions of authority. The second implies that teacher leadership may make both independent and, with other sources

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of leadership, additive or multiplicative contributions to student achievement and school improvement. Distributed leadership implies thinking about leadership in a new way, one that goes beyond the Superman and Wonder Woman view of leadership (Spillane, 2006) and takes us from a person "solo" to a person "plus" perspective on leadership (Harris, 2008). This perspective is in contrast to a leader-follower relationship which connotes a power imbalance and a command and control approach to leadership.

The third model discussed by Smylie, et al (2011) emphasizes that teacher leadership is a social process that exists in schools and teachers can exert influence by simply being part of the "webs" of relationships that define school organizations. Spillane's emphasis on the interactions among leaders, followers, and their situation over the additive or multiplicative contributions of individual leaders to student achievement and school improvement indicates that even followers who are regarded as passive actors in the traditional leader-follower relationship contribute to leadership practice through interaction with the leaders and aspects of the situation.

Characteristics of Teacher Leaders and their leadership work

Teacher leaders are both teachers and leaders. They are "strong teachers" or educators with highly developed and effective teaching practices and with the ability to assume leadership among their colleagues (Miller, 2005). In general, those who were regarded as TLs were perceived as excellent teachers with many years of significant teaching experience and were respected by their peers. In terms of differentiating between formal TLs and informal ones, Gronn (2002) reported no difference in their characteristics suggesting that people's leadership prototypes did not discriminate between formal and informal roles.

Being teachers, it was assumed that TLs knew the academic content, were creative, used many instructional techniques, understood the curriculum, and inspired students (Hart, 1995). They were first and foremost, competent in the classroom and evidently more knowledgeable about teaching the subject matter than other teachers, a reputation that gained them the respect and confidence of their peers. They were also able to draw critically from additional resources and expertise if required and could seek external assistance when needed (Day & Harris, 2002).

Crowther (1997) pointed out that the failure of most educational administration theorists to recognize the full leadership dimensions of the work of some classroom teachers may be partly attributable to the insistence on the part of the outstanding teachers themselves that their main interest is to teach rather than to lead. The TLs whom Crowther, et al (2002) studied and whose work was the basis for their Teachers as Leaders Framework regarded themselves as ordinary citizens bound by the usual limitations and imperfections yet they were doing what appeared to their colleagues, principals, and communities to be extraordinary feats.

Miller (2005) highlighted the key roles played by teachers who were prepared to become leaders of their colleagues as well as teachers of their classes. These teachers were re-constructing learning and teaching at the same time or in other words, re-culturing the school. Miller explained that these teachers were succeeding to change the conditions of their work by shifting (1) from individualism to professional community, (2) from teaching at the center to learning at the center, (3) from technical work to inquiry, (4) from control to accountability, (5) from managed work to leadership, and (6) from classroom to whole school focus. In the process of describing what these teachers did, Miller brought to the fore important characteristics of teachers who re-culture teaching and learning, notably, the following: willingness to leave behind the comforts of individualism and isolation and embrace new norms of collegiality; openness to focus on how students learn and adjusting their teaching accordingly rather than focusing exclusively on how they teach; disposition toward continuous learning and improvement; sense of accountability for student learning more than accountability for control; sense of responsibility for areas traditionally reserved for administrators; and concern for the whole school rather than just the classroom, and how to develop and support the culture of the whole school.

Through their contributions in (re)shaping the school culture, teachers engaged in leadership. Conversely, as teachers engaged in leadership, they contributed to (re)shaping the school culture. As leaders, teachers use their capacity to direct their own practice and do not need to rely on external experts for answers. It is their reputation for continuously improving their practice on their own initiative and the results they produce that slowly gain them the attention and recognition of their peers. By serving as mentors, peer coaches, staff development trainers, curriculum specialists or simply willing listeners (Katzenmeyer and Moller, 1996), TLs extend to their peers the fruits of their efforts to improve their own practice and in the process help colleagues become better teachers. Working with peers is a delicate undertaking, though, as it requires TLs to maintain collegial relationships with fellow teachers while keeping a positive and non-threatening relationship with school leaders.

Teacher leadership challenges

To maximize the potential of teacher leadership, Katzenmeyer and Moller (2011) suggested that it is necessary to guarantee teacher quality in every classroom, ensure principal effectiveness, and engage teachers in meaningful leadership responsibilities. Pursuing these goals will require an examination of the leadership structure of the school

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and school system, a shift from the old norms of teaching in isolation that made teachers focus on just "my teaching" and "my students", and teachers recognizing that a broader role of teacher leadership is available to those who wish to assume the responsibilities.

Transformation on both the level of the school and school system as well as on the level of the teacher is necessary. Although teacher leadership 'has always existed', it may have remained dormant in many places because schools and school systems have not been organized or transformed to treat teachers as leaders within and beyond their classrooms, including the larger policy environment. The organizational contexts of schools could exert substantial influence, often negative, on the performance and outcomes of teacher leadership roles (Smylie, et al, 2011). Without the needed transformation of the vertical hierarchy in schools into more horizontal networks and collective decision-making, teachers will continue to be overloaded with tasks coming from a command and control leadership style and operate in a guarded environment that does not encourage creativity.

This will render a participatory ambiance unlikely. Transformation on the school level is imperative and will require the principal to be knowledgeable about what teacher leadership entails, be comfortable with other sources of leadership in order to unleash and strengthen the leadership capacity of teachers, and provide the TLs with active rather than just passive support.

Equally important is transformation from within the teachers themselves. They must have the initiative to take advantage of opportunities for professional growth and personal development that will increase their qualifications and credibility for leadership. Confidence in their abilities to be leaders (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 1996), transcending the skepticism that may come along with the initial stages of shared governance (Allen & Glickman, 2005) and the ability to work with other adults are important given the tensions that exist between the cultures of teaching and creating new hierarchical roles for teachers (Hart, 1995; Barth, 2001b). The teacher who steps in and distinguishes himself or herself from the others by assuming leadership violates a basic taboo of the egalitarian norms of teaching cultures which do not encourage teachers to be singled out from the group and draw attention to themselves in an environment that values treating all teachers equally. These teachers can end up paying a clear price in the form of rejection, isolation, and resistance from their former peers. There are many reasons behind the resistance experienced by TLs from colleagues, including some named by Barth (2011), for example, inertia in terms of the traditional roles of principals and teachers, aversion to risk entailed by following another especially someone who has not been officially appointed, the TL's personal and interpersonal skills, and plain active resistance to teacher leadership.

Also, although the assumption is that all teachers can lead (Barth, 2001b) and the implicit goal is for all teachers to develop into TLs, Timperley (2009) has reminded us of the reality that TLs with high acceptability among their colleagues were not necessarily those with expertise, and, conversely, the micro-politics within a school can reduce the acceptability of those with expertise.

Time has also been named as a constraint to the practice of teacher leadership. Typically, those to whom leadership is being distributed have their plates full. It is helpful that emerging formal roles for teacher leaders such as those of full time mentor for new teachers enable TLs to leave the classroom to take on leadership roles. Katzenmeyer and Moller (2011) explained that formal TL roles can enable TLs to be valuable contributors to school improvement as long as they are not pulled into quasi-administrative responsibilities that take them away from the focus on teaching and their authentic relationships with fellow teachers. The framework developed by York-Barr and Duke (2004) grounded in and extending the findings from a review of two decades of literature consisting of 140 studies on teacher leadership is pertinent to this research. Their framework linked teacher leadership to student learning and suggested a theory of action for teacher leadership that has seven major components. The first three focused on the teacher leaders (TLs) (their characteristics, type of leadership work they engaged in and the conditions that support their work) and represented the foundations upon which teacher leadership is possible. The next three (means of leadership influence, targets of leadership influence, and intermediary outcomes of teacher leadership) suggested the path by which teachers affect student learning. The seventh component, student learning, completed their theory of action. In addition to the components of the framework of York-Barr and Duke (2004), it is also relevant to explore the role of context in the link between teacher leadership and student learning. Day, et al (2011) claimed that while there is a core set of practices that almost all successful leaders use, it is important for these practices to be enacted in ways that are sensitively appropriate to the contexts leaders find themselves in, if these are to have their desired effect. Consistent with this claim, the best education systems in the world have, for instance, produced approaches to ensure that the school can compensate for the disadvantages resulting from the student's home environment resulting in a low correlation between outcomes and the home background of the individual student (McKinsey, 2007). Thus, the conceptual framework for this research adapts the framework of York-Barr and Duke (2004) by identifying country-specific context as a factor in the nature and practice of teacher leadership.

2. METHODS

The phenomenology study was deemed appropriate for this investigation on teacher leadership because as defined by Yin (2014), the phenomenology study is "an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon (the "case") in depth and within its real-world context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context may not be clearly evident".

This research involved a set of phenomenology studies with some features in common, particularly what Bassey (2012) calls picture-taking phenomenology studies which are predominantly descriptive accounts of educational events, projects, programs or systems aimed at illuminating theory. While the basic phenomenology study involves in-depth research into a single phenomenon or a small set of phenomena (Thomas, 2009), the intent of this exploration was to cast the net widely, to get a broad picture of teacher leadership in the Philippine public school setting through a study of a particular public elementary school. The research expectation was to understand teacher leadership in the Philippine setting and the evidence from a single and simple phenomenon should be more compelling and increase the robustness of the study.

All the elementary teachers of the identified school were invited to participate in the research and twenty (20) agreed to be interviewed. The head teacher was requested by the researcher to identify twenty (20) teachers in the school whom they perceived as teacher leaders. Teacher Leaders were defined as teachers who had been given roles and responsibilities beyond their classroom functions or who had the opportunity to lead and to take responsibility for areas of change that were of most importance to the school. The instruction specified that these TLs may or may not have formal leadership positions. Teacher-leaders were coded as TL1 to TL20 for purposes of protection and identity safeguard.

For this study, purposive sampling was used to identify the school and the participants from that school. In purposive sampling, the researcher intentionally selects individuals and sites to learn or understand the central phenomenon. It was not expected that the schools or individuals chosen were themselves representative of the population but rather that they possessed the necessary information about the population (Fraenkel and Wallen, 2007). Theory or concept sampling was applied in particular, which meant sampling individuals or sites because they can help the researcher generate or discover a theory or specific concepts within the theory (Creswell, 2008).

This research involved both face-to-face individual interviews and collective interviews. An individual or one-on-one interview is a data-collection process in which the researcher asks questions to and records answers from only one participant in the study at a time while a focus-group interview is the process of collecting data through interviews with a group of people, typically four to six (Creswell, 2008). While research interviews had generally been one-on-one initially, the use of focus-group interviews increased in the 1950s. This type of interview was originally developed for market research but has grown in popularity in educational research (Coleman, 2012). The interaction among the interviewees in group interviews could bring forth more spontaneous expressive and emotional views than in individual, often more cognitive interviews (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009) and therefore suitable for this exploratory study in a new domain. In focus-group interviews, the intention is to get at what people really think about an issue in a social context where the participants can hear the views of others and consider their own views accordingly (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2007). It is normal for participants to spontaneously offer additional comments beyond what they originally had to say once they hear the other responses.

Each interview was transcribed without reference to any non-verbal communication soon after it was conducted. Although time consuming, I opted to transcribe the interviews myself and to do verbatim transcription in order to secure the many details relevant to this research. Transcription is the process of recording material into text, a necessary precursor to commencing the analysis of interview data (King & Horrocks, 2010). Consistent with the nature of a qualitative design, it was not possible to pinpoint exactly when the analysis of data began in this research. As early as during the interviews themselves, tentative theories started forming in my mind as insights emerged serendipitously on occasions. Throughout the research, data collection and analysis were considerably intertwined processes. The analysis of data was a continuous, iterative and reflexive process rather than a sequential and linear progression. The recognizable stage following the collection of data involved thematic analysis which is basically a search for patterns within data where emerging themes become the categories for analysis. While there are no hard-and-fast rules on what should be identified as a theme, the following definition of a 'theme' served as guide: "Themes are recurrent and distinctive features of participants' accounts, characterizing particular perceptions and/or experiences, which the researcher sees as relevant to the research question" (King and Horrocks, 2010).

Thematic analysis is an inductive process where categories are 'induced' from the data rather than decided prior to coding (Ezzy, 2002). The analysis of the interview data involved a coding process which Scott and Morrison (2005) described as an early phase of a researcher's reinterpretation of the research participants' interpretations, an activity

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consistent with the double hermeneutic of educational research. In analyzing the data, I opted for the use of highlighters and other pre-computer era tools over specialized software packages like NVivo primarily because most of the interview data was in Filipino and it would not have been worth the time to translate the massive amount of interviews into English first. Being a native speaker, conducting the analysis of data from the interview transcriptions did not cause any problems. The analysis of data culminated in linking the findings to the research questions and to the adapted York-Barr and Duke (2004) framework on teacher leadership. This involved interpretation which Patton (2002) described as "attaching significance to what was found, making sense of findings, offering explanations, drawing conclusions, extrapolating lessons, making inferences, considering meanings and otherwise imposing order on an unruly but surely patterned world".

3. RESULTS

Teachers' experiences aside from performing the task of teaching

Aside from teaching, TLs have other responsibilities, like working on an effective classroom management; not in informal leadership positions; beyond classroom duties; capable of leadership work; respected and looked up to by students and colleagues; without leadership positions; and responsibilities of informal TLs.

Coping with the challenges or demands of teacher leadership

The researcher cites Daniel L. Duke's metaphor of crabbing: Crab fishermen do not need to place a lid on their buckets because if a crab tries to escape, the others grab it and pull it back down into the bucket. Duke, in the 1994 book Teachers as Leaders: Perspectives on the Professional Development of Teachers, likens crabbing to the discord that many teachers are faced with in their own schools. In such a culture, or even milder varieties, the authors say teachers may be reluctant to "advance" and violate egalitarian norms.

Other challenges include overly relationships with peers, where teacher leaders exercise authority instead of working collaboratively. The appointment of a teacher leader by an administrator without teacher input, uncertainty about teacher leader versus principal domains of leadership, and inadequate communication and feedback among teacher leaders, principal, and staff can all contribute to conflict. Traditional top-down leadership structures, the authors suggest, may also stand in the way of developing teacher leaders and a structure to support them.

Such challenges can impede school improvement because they detract from allowing qualified teachers to act as facilitators in reform efforts. The crux of the necessity for teacher leadership is that such teachers help in the administration of school reform. Elements of school structure and culture that stand in the way of teachers being able to facilitate improvement may prove detrimental to the sustainability of improvement efforts.

This study collected several challenges according to teachers' narratives: relational issues; personal circumstances; time; realities of the school; and the Department of Education.

Challenge 1. Relational issues. Misgivings about being associated with the principal or other formal leaders that ranged from discomfort to fear prevented some teachers from going beyond the confines of their classrooms and accepting additional responsibilities.

Challenge 2. Personal circumstances. It was said that what prevented certain teachers from engaging in leadership work was their situation which included personal or family problems or their beliefs in terms of priorities in life.

Challenge 3. Time. The TLs with formal leadership positions were assigned less classes to teach but the informal TLs had full teaching loads. While the evidence in this study clearly showed how the TLs were actually able to make time for the additional responsibilities they had.

Challenge 4. Challenging realities of the schools. Many realities faced by the schools hindered the practice of teacher leadership. Class size was a serious concern in most public schools. The TLs also named lack of financial and material resources as a serious impediment to the practice of teacher leadership. The context of the majority of students enrolled in the public schools prevented teacher leaders from trying out new things in the classroom. In many classes, there were a number of over-age students, those who stopped schooling in previous years. In general, the TLs felt they couldn't go on with the lessons smoothly and were always torn between attending to the performing students or those who were lagging behind for various reasons.

Challenge 5. The Department of Education (Deped). The DepEd was perceived as a hindrance to teacher leadership for two reasons: policies that did not encourage teacher leadership and the inability to provide adequate resources to schools. According to TL8, many rules were very stifling. She perceived a dissonance between the directives of DepEd officials and what was actually relevant to the schools and vowed.

Management insights about teacher leadership

The management insights of teachers about teacher-leaders (TLs) or teacher leaderships: Teacher leadership was a meaningful concept in Philippine public schools; many teachers are engaged in important leadership work, whether

formal or informal even if the concept of teacher leadership has not been formally introduced in Philippine public schools; the TLs were highly effective teachers focused on student success and effective teacher mentors who demonstrated concern for fellow teachers; as leaders, the TLs showed that they were capable of doing any assigned tasks successfully without any need for detailed instructions or supervision; the TLs had notable attributes; informal teacher leadership exists in a restricted form in a centralized and structured hierarchical system; the leadership of the principal has a strong influence on teacher leadership; ideal conditions for TLs; a school culture marked by collegial, collaborative, and trusting relationships supports teacher leadership; teacher leadership is nurtured by the support of family and the Local Government Unit; and the practice of teacher leadership is challenged by specific factors.

4. RESULTS

Consistent with the claim of York-Barr and Duke (2004) the TLs were both teachers and leaders. For York-Barr and Duke (2004), background as a teacher seemed to account for what enabled teachers to influence the practice of their colleagues. Based on the research data, the TLs from the elementary schools had an average of 16 years of teaching experience. Compared to the teaching experience of the TLs from the high schools, the average for the TLs from the elementary schools was closer to the typical 18 years cited by Wilson (2011).

Just as evidence has not supported the idea that teachers necessarily became more effective over the course of their careers (Day, et al., 2007), it cannot be assumed that TLs would be the more senior and experienced teachers in the schools. Clemson-Ingram and Fessler (2012) thought that if teachers in certain career stages required supports that were sensitive to the peculiar characteristics of each stage, then teacher leadership could be initiated at several points in the career cycle.

Middle leaders continually face role ambiguity and role conflict with difficult choices to be made and difficult people to be confronted (Fleming, 2014). Smylie and Denny (1990) found that TLs were very careful not to separate or alienate themselves from their fellow teachers but were also sensitive about their relationships with their school heads. This tension is presumably more intense in the case of formal TLs than informal TLs given the positional role and authority granted to them.

This study has unearthed evidence of teacher leadership that preceded a formal introduction of the concept in the Philippine setting. The bayanihan spirit which lies deep in every Filipino motivates individuals to help out one's neighbour as a community and to do tasks together; this spirit could be why teacher leadership was found to be present in the schools in this study even if the concept had not been formally introduced in the schools.

The TLs were learning-oriented who found time to constantly seek and apply new knowledge in their subject areas. In learning more, these TLs were able to help both colleagues and students to also learn more. When attention is focused on stimulating learning, students become more engaged, their learning improves and the opportunity for significant improvements in student achievement increases (Reason & Reason, 2011).

Numerous references were made to the school community using 'family' as a metaphor and relatedly, to the leaders as 'father' or 'mother' and to colleagues as 'siblings' implying that members of the school community related with each other in ways similar to the interactions within a family. In the Philippines, the family is a social institution that has remained at the core of the social structure, a most important unit of society and it is widely known that the Philippines is one country where family ties are very strong.

The way the TLs acted out their leadership locally was affected by pakikisama with both colleagues and the principals. Pakikisama, a Filipino trait and value which is strongly present in everyday interactions in Philippine society served as a natural pull for teachers to follow the lead of TLs. On the other hand, it could also inhibit TLs from doing leadership work. Even well-intentioned mentoring or coaching or sharing of initiatives can be interpreted as the TL having more power and responsibility in the relationship and the seeming hierarchy can get in the way of pakikisama especially with those teachers who would rather be left alone to continue with their old practices.

While the support of the LGU for the improvement of schools was recognized to be helpful, and although such acts may have actually been motivated by the LGU's sense of responsibility for the needs of the constituents, it must be acknowledged that these politicians are also concerned about their image as being able to provide the needs of the people to increase their chances of getting re-elected in public office.

5. DISCUSSION

What sets this study apart from other similar studies is its focus on teacher leadership in the Philippine setting and education system. The findings from this study, therefore, call for specific actions to be taken on the levels of both policy and practice in the Philippines.

Recognizing teacher leadership in the education reform agenda This study has demonstrated that TLs have the potential to contribute positively to the improvement of education in the public schools. Therefore, school

improvement efforts such as the nationwide implementation of the K-12 Reform will benefit from including a specific role for teacher leadership in the reform agenda. The authorities at the different levels of the DepEd need to recognize the value of teacher leadership as an alternative form of school leadership that can support rather than compete with the leadership of the principal. The authorities must be willing to change or modify aspects of the system that prevent TLs from engaging in leadership work in schools. This includes a shift from a highly bureaucratic and single-person conception of school leadership (the heroic head) to a more distributed practice and the development of the conditions for supporting TLs. In contrast to mere restructuring, high priority should be given to re-culturing or the process of developing collaborative work cultures or professional learning communities in the school (Fullan, 2000).

Recognition of teacher leadership in the education reform agenda of the country implies the acknowledgement of this form of leadership in the basic unit of the education sector, the schools. It would be helpful if individual schools developed a shared vision of what teacher leadership is and the form it can best take in specific schools. Once teacher leadership attains better acceptance and grounding in the schools, the DepEd can proceed to define the parameters for informal teacher leadership work vis-à-vis the roles of formal teacher leaders. However, in defining teacher leadership in a more formal sense, the DepEd must be careful not to formalize informal teacher leadership work to become similar to the formal teacher leadership roles because of the inherent characteristics and benefits of the two forms of teacher leadership. Both forms are important and they have their specific contributions to make to school improvement.

The introduction of the K-12 Reform in the Philippines actually presents an opportune moment to promote teacher leadership to support the structural changes but consideration will have to be given to professional development programs that can strengthen the leadership capacities of TLs as well as provide principals with the skills they need to develop other leaders and work effectively with them.

In the Philippine public school system where the school heads have little freedom to select staff, the need to develop people, specifically other leaders, and work effectively with them is very important. Educational leadership programs must thus go beyond the usual preparations for formal leadership positions and preferably include educating formal school leaders and informal TLs together. The development of many leaders or of a deep and strong leadership team within the school is particularly important in order to ensure the sustainability of school improvement efforts in Philippine public schools where principals come and go, sometimes very quickly.

Teachers must be prepared to take on the additional responsibilities associated with teacher leadership and support one another in the leadership work. Harris (2005) pointed out that it was much more difficult to build leadership capacity among teachers than to tell them what to do. Moreover, leadership work is demanding and in Philippine public schools, the additional pay is not perceived to be commensurate to the responsibilities involved. In the case of informal TLs, there is no additional compensation for the leadership work they do on top of full teaching responsibilities. Hence, what is important is to highlight the benefits of teacher leadership in terms of job satisfaction, sense of moral purpose, increase in motivation and morale among teachers and the transformation of the workplace into a better place.

The active involvement of a critical mass of teachers in various aspects of the leadership of the school can allow teacher leadership to function and flourish. It goes without saying that the principal must also realize the benefits of teacher leadership and not be threatened by the TLs or their work. The conditions in the schools must be able to attract teachers who are qualified and enthusiastic to do leadership work. This means provisions for the professional and personal development of TLs as well as an incentive or reward system for them even if the findings from this research revealed that self-fulfillment and altruistic purposes (moral purpose) had been the TLs' motivation for doing leadership work. Given the limited resources of DepEd and the current participation of LGUs in school improvement processes, the possibility of an incentive or reward system for TLs complementary to a formal recognition of teacher leadership in the schools can be sought from the LGUs.

Time is an important component of the teacher leadership equation. Encouraging teachers to undertake leadership work implies that time needs to be set aside for teachers' leadership work including professional development and collaborative work with colleagues. In Philippine public schools, teachers with formal leadership positions have reduced teaching loads but informal TLs engage in leadership work on top of full teaching responsibilities. Bubb and Earley (2010) suggested that schools explore creative ways to find time for staff development during the course of the normal school day or working week and to evaluate whether existing time is being utilized well.

Professional development programs that can build the leadership capacity and capability of TLs and develop school heads to become leaders of leaders and leaders of learning are urgently called for. By the very nature of teacher leadership, opportunities for reflection on practice should be included.

Odell (1997) described three examples of university programs in the USA for preparing teachers for teacher leadership where habits of inquiry are fostered in different ways through collaborative action research, portfolio development, research report writing, journal writing and delivering papers at professional conferences.

The goal for the emphasis on inquiry was for TLs to become reflective and to inquire in order to produce change in the social context and curriculum in schools. While this sounds ideal, however, expectations must be tempered. Opportunities for reflection on practice in the form of the activities cited by Odell will be difficult to realize without additional staffing and other resources.

Teacher leader development is a complex undertaking that will require efforts aimed at improving the TLs' knowledge and skills needed to perform the new work roles. Development programs for TLs will need to cover aspects specific to their leadership role such as leading groups and facilitating group sessions, collaborative work, mentoring and teaching adults, adapting to continuous change, and research, specifically action research.

Teacher leadership development be approached as an issue of organizational change and not merely as a task of enhancing individual opportunity and capacity.

The development programs for both school heads and teachers can now include sessions on teacher leadership, specifically in the Philippine context, so that the school heads become mindful of this type of leadership that can complement their leadership and the teachers are encouraged by the possible benefits from stepping up to leadership opportunities.

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