

**EMERGENT TEACHER LEADERSHIP WITHIN THE LOCAL CONTEXT: A SURVEY IN THE UMLAZI DISTRICT,  
KWAZULU-NATAL**

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*(Paper in progress)*

**Abstract**

While research into teacher leadership is well established in many countries, with a range of global trends, it is a relatively new area of research in South Africa. This paper reports on survey research into teachers' perceptions and experiences of teacher leadership. Quantitative data in the form of self-administered questionnaires were gathered from 396 teachers in a random sample of nineteen schools in the Umlazi District, KwaZulu-Natal. Of the 396 teachers, 189 were primary school teachers while 207 were high school teachers. The data were first analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences and then analysed according to Grant's (forthcoming, 2008) model of zones and roles of teacher leaders.

This paper describes the key findings from this research. In brief these findings reveal that the majority of teachers generally perceived leadership as a shared, collective endeavour. Teacher leadership was identified in relation to teachers' own teaching within their classrooms as well as in relation to teachers working with other teachers in curricular and extra-curricular activities. To a lesser degree teacher leadership was evident in school-wide decision-making processes. Responses also revealed that while half of the teachers in the study recognised the existence of a collaborative culture in schools, the context of leadership was such that many of the 'important' school-wide decision-making remained in the hands of the School Management Team (SMT). This paper argues that this constitutes emergent teacher leadership where there is clear support for teacher leadership; where taking initiative is encouraged and where distributed leadership is emerging. However, in order for teacher leadership to become successful, further development of teacher as leaders is necessary together with further distribution of power within schools.

**Keywords:** teacher leadership, distributed leadership, shared leadership, delegation, volunteering, collaboration, teamwork

**Introduction**

South Africa is a society that has witnessed significant transformation. The establishment of a democracy in South Africa has necessitated the democratization of the education system (Carrim, 2001). Since 1994, education has been a notable beneficiary of reconstruction, restoration, renewal and redress of the past. It has moved from being an authoritarian, undemocratic and racially segregated

society to one which is more open and inclusive. The now single national Department of Education promotes a shift from centralized control to collaborative decision-making of the schooling system of in South Africa. This is evident in current educational policies such as the South African School Act (Republic of South Africa, 1996), the Integrated Quality Management System (IQMS) (Department of Education, 1998) and the National Education Policy Act (Department of Education, 1996). Although new education policies call for new ways of leading and managing schools, Grant (2006) argues that South African schools have not yet embraced the notion of teacher leadership as envisaged in the Norms and Standards for Educators (Republic of South Africa, 2000). The Norms and Standards for Educators (2000) requires teachers to take on seven roles, amongst them that of a leader, manager and administrator which were previously deemed to be roles for formally appointed people. In this paper we work from the premise that leaders can work at many different levels within an organisation. For many current reformers, the key ingredient in improving schools in the new millennium is through the development of effective and distributed leadership and, in particular, teacher leadership (Gronn, 2000; Harris, 2004; Harris & Muijs, 2005; Hopkins, 2001; Leithwood, Jantzi, & Steinback, 1999). Building on the emerging body of qualitative research into teacher leadership in South Africa (see for example Grant, 2006; Rajagopaul, 2007; Singh, 2007 and Grant, forthcoming), this paper reports on a quantitative study which explored teachers' perceptions and experiences of teacher leadership in their schools, identified the teacher leader roles and asked questions to reveal the leadership context and culture in schools.

## **Leadership does not isolate or discriminate**

### *Leadership and Management*

Davidoff and Lazarus (1999) argue that leadership and management are closely associated functions which cannot be attended to independently. Kouzes and Posner (1997) believe that management is crucial, but it really only achieves merit if mixed with generous amounts of leadership. In our study and for the purpose of this paper, 'leadership' was understood as the process which works towards movement and change in an organisation while 'management' was understood as the process which works towards the stability, preservation and maintenance of the organisation (Astin and Astin, 2000). Furthermore, we work from the premise that both leadership and management are necessary for schools to function effectively and both processes often need to be filled by the same person, as envisaged in the Norms and Standards for Educators (Republic of South Africa, 2000). In a similar vein, Coleman (2003) suggests that leadership and management functions are likely to overlap and to be carried out within the same role. Morrison (1998), too, views leadership and management as one and suggests that the role of a leader includes the role of a manager and that they interlock each other.

### *Distributed leadership*

Customarily, leadership has been premised on a singular view of leadership and upon individual thrust (Muijs & Harris, 2003). Coleman (2003) suggests that the amalgamation of authoritarianism, centralization and a masculine leadership style promotes the idea that leadership is vested in the principal. However, Woods (2005) suggests that the customary role of the school principal has changed

under the culture of the democratic order. In the past, South Africa schools were organised bureaucratically around a hierarchical structure with the principal at the apex. In contrast, the culture of the democratic order displayed in South Africa requires school principals to exercise leadership that fully promotes the participation of all stakeholders (Swanepoel and Booyse, 2006). The Task Team Report on Education Management (Department of Education, 1996, p. 26) advocates that the internal management of a school be accompanied by an internal 'devolution' of power within the school to replace inherited autocratic leadership and management strategies. Decentralising management and decision-making allows leadership to become distributed throughout an organisation (Rutherford, 2006). Coleman (2005) believes that leadership can and should be shared throughout an organization. Elaborating further, Lumby (2003) argues that the allocation of tasks can simultaneously reflect management delegation, a division of responsibilities between individuals and also the sharing of mutual responsibility that creates the distribution of leadership. This distribution of leadership incorporates the view that varieties of leadership expertise are distributed across the many, not the few. This distributed form of leadership can be described more appropriately as 'fluid and emergent, rather than a fixed phenomenon' (Gronn, 2000, p. 324) where, according to Spillane, Halverson and Diamond (2001), leadership practice is stretched over leaders, followers and the situations.

### *Teacher leadership*

Teacher leadership has come to prominence in educational literature primarily within the last decade (Little, 2000). In contrast, teacher leadership in the South African context is a relatively new area of research interest. Teacher leadership is solely concerned with the idea that all organisational members can lead and that leadership is a form of agency that can be distributed or shared (Goleman, 2000). The current view of teacher leadership integrates the notions of teaching and leading. What is noticeable about teacher leadership is that it is not a positional concept. A number of initiatives have grown substantially, both international and locally, reflecting both 'formal' and 'informal' leadership activities (see for example Gehrke, 1991). Blasé & Anderson (1995) argue that shared leadership is morally just in a democratic country where individual rights are accorded high priority. However, Muijs & Harris (2003) suggest that many schools, in practice, remain largely unchanged and retain the view that leadership is equated with status, authority and position. Coleman (2003) states that from a traditional leadership perspective positions are ordered hierarchically in terms of status and may be thought of as locations on an organisational chart. Teacher leadership, Singh (2007) argues, offers a fundamental departure from the traditional understanding of school leadership associated with positions and she equates teacher leadership with agency where leadership is not about role or function. Moreover, Grant defines teacher leadership as: " leadership beyond headship or formal position, teachers become aware of and taking up informal leadership roles both in the classroom and beyond" (2006, p. 516). She describes how teachers can lead within four zones; the classroom, working with other teachers in curricular and extra-curricular activities, leading in school-wide issues and in whole school development and finally by leading beyond the school into the community.

The traditional emphasis on bureaucracy is being challenged by a normative preference for collegiality in many parts of the world, including South Africa. In the United States context, Miller (1998) suggests that the erosion of traditional leadership opens up the possibility of all organization members becoming

leaders in a collegial environment. Collegiality can be defined as a collaborative process that entails the devolution of power to teachers and other stakeholders in order for them to become an integral part of the school's shared vision (Bush, 2003). While traditional leaders cling onto power as an entitlement of their positions, collegial leaders share their power base in order to flatten hierarchies (Kouzes & Posner, 1997, p. xvi). For Bush (2003), the ideas and practice of collegiality are similar to the ideas and practice of the concepts such as democracy, participation, empowerment and collaboration. Bush (2003) further argues that these terms have different emphases but all emphasise teacher and stakeholder involvement in school management and leadership. Singh, (2007) in her South African case study research, found that whilst the rhetoric of collegiality and collaboration was used, the degree of participation, inclusivity and shared decision-making among all stakeholders was controlled by the SMT and collegiality was merely contrived. The study on which this paper is based aimed to add to the initial qualitative studies on teacher leadership by offering breadth to the field through a survey research approach.

## **Research design and methodology**

### *Research Aim*

The research aimed to investigate teachers' perceptions and experiences of teacher leadership in Umlazi schools in the province of KwaZulu-Natal. Broadly it explored how teachers understood teacher leadership in schools and it did this through a survey which employed quantitative methods. The quantitative data were obtained by means of a self administered, closed questionnaire.

### *Population and sample*

The research was conducted in the Umlazi District and involved a randomly selected sample of 25 schools (17 primary and eight secondary schools). Using the advice of Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000), the study over sampled to ensure that the desired number of respondents would finally participate. The participants were 366 post level one teachers from these 25 schools (189 primary school teachers and 207 secondary school teachers). The questionnaire was pilot tested with a group of teachers in a primary school from a neighbouring district and the insights from the pilot test were included in the revised version of the questionnaire.

### *Analysis of data*

Data analysis was done in two stages. The first stage of analysis was done using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) for Windows (Einspruch, 1998) Descriptive statistics were initially utilised to analyse the data gathered from the questionnaires. Frequencies and percentages were calculated for the various responses in order to determine teachers' perceptions about leadership in schools, the extent to which teacher leadership was happening in schools, the roles of teachers as well as their perceptions of the leadership context and culture in their schools. The second stage used Grant's (forthcoming) model of zones and roles of teacher leadership to analyse the data further.

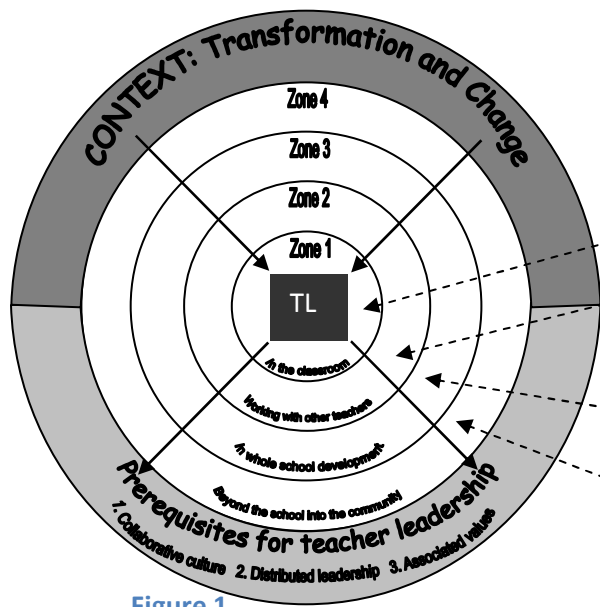


Figure 1

## TEACHER LEADERSHIP

**First level of analysis:**  
**Four Zones**

**Second level of analysis:**  
**Six Roles**

First level of analysis: Four Zones	Second level of analysis: Six Roles
<b>One</b> In the classroom	<b>One:</b> Continuing to teach and improve one's own teaching
<b>Two</b> Working with other teachers and learners outside the classroom in curricular and extra-curricular activities	<b>Two:</b> Providing curriculum development knowledge <b>Three:</b> Leading in-service education and assisting other teachers
<b>Three</b> Outside the classroom in whole school development	<b>Four:</b> Participating in performance evaluation of teachers <b>Five:</b> Organising and leading peer reviews of school practice
<b>Four</b> Between neighbouring schools in the community	<b>Six:</b> Participating in school level decision-making <b>Two:</b> Providing curriculum development knowledge <b>Three:</b> Leading in-service education and assisting other teachers

Figure 1: Zones and Roles model of teacher leadership (Grant, forthcoming)

## Presentation of findings

### The participants

The majority of the teachers in the study (83%) were between the ages of 30 and 50 years. Of the group, 74% were female and 26% male. Of the 396 teachers, 64.7% had a qualification higher than the expected REQV 13 and only 5.1% participants did not meet the minimum requirements. The sample was therefore predominantly well qualified. The respondents were generally a group of experienced teachers with 71% having more than ten years of teaching experience.

### Teachers' perceptions about leadership in schools

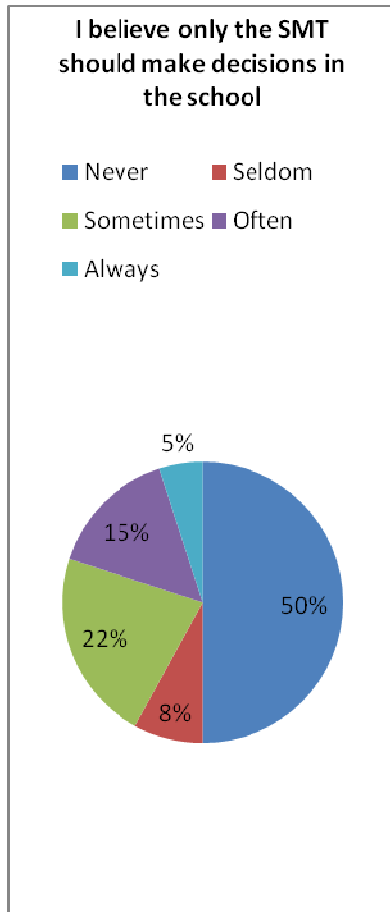


Figure 2

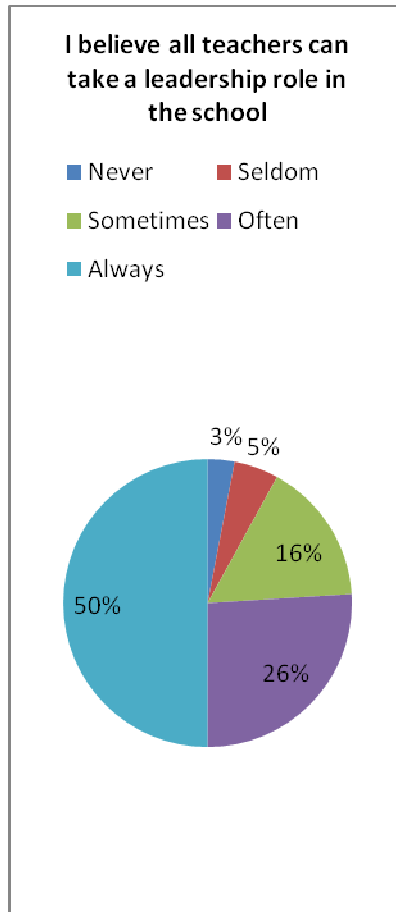


Figure 3

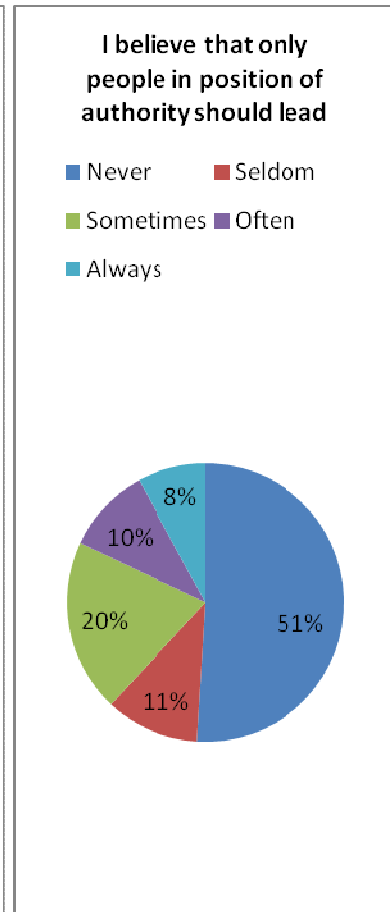


Figure 4

Figure 2 above indicates that 50% of the teachers did not believe that only the School Management Team should make decisions in the school. Figure 3 above shows that 50% of the respondents supported the notion of teacher leadership. With regard to perceptions of leadership in schools, figure 4 indicates a slight (1%) difference from the previous figures (Figure 2 and 3). Figure 4 indicates that (51%) of the respondents did not believe that only people in positions of authority should lead. In other words, the outcomes of figures 2, 3 and 4 reflect that the majority of teachers in the study endorsed the notion of shared leadership and teacher leadership and their views echoed the views of both international (Gronn, 2000; Muijs & Harris, 2003; Harris, 2004; Gunter, 2005) and local researchers (Grant, 2006; Rajagopaul, 2007; Singh, 2007; Khumalo, 2008).

### Teacher leader roles

Leadership and management are interdependent processes which need to be practiced together. Davidoff and Lazarus (1997, p. 32) argue that “it is important to note that leadership and management are closely associated functions which cannot be attended to separately”. We work from the premise

then that all teachers should be leaders in their classrooms which means that they need to involve themselves in management processes as well. In this section we looked at responses to the question 'What do teacher leaders do in schools?' and present data according to the four different zones of teacher leadership according to our analytical model (Refer back to Figure One).

*Zone One: Applying teacher leadership in the classroom.*

The majority of teachers in the study (90%) *always* or *often* worked at improving their own teaching in the zone of the classroom (Role One). This provided strong evidence to confirm the view that teachers in this study believed they worked as leaders in their classrooms improving their practice.

*Zone Two: Teacher leadership outside the classroom working with other teachers in curricular and extra-curricular activities.*

Of the teachers in the study, 49% *often* or *always* worked with other teachers in performance evaluation (Role Four), while 45% *often* or *always* led in planning extra-mural activities in schools. In addition 41% of the respondents had sometimes worked with other teachers giving in-service to colleagues (Role Three). Of the total number of teachers, 40% *often* or *always* led outside the classroom by providing curriculum knowledge to colleagues (Role Two). Furthermore, 35.4% of the respondents *often* or *always* assisted in the selection of the textbooks and instructional materials for the grade or learning area. Within Zone 2, 34% of the participants were of the opinion that they worked with other teachers in setting teachers' duty roster. With regard to the above statements the prevailing perception was that teachers in the study took up leadership roles working with other teachers in Zone 2.

*Zone Three: Applying teacher leadership in the whole school development*

There was evidence of teacher leadership in Zone Three. The data revealed that 43% of the participants were involved in organizing and leading reviews of the school year plan (Role Five). Furthermore, 43% of the participants participated in decision-making (Role Six). In addition, 40% of the participants led in whole school development through designing staff development programmes and 49% of the participants set standards for pupil behaviour in their schools.

*Zone Four: Teacher leadership between neighbouring schools in the committee*

Thus far, data has indicated that there was take-up of teacher leadership in Zones One, Two and Three in the schools in the study. However, it emerged from the questionnaires that there was little evidence to suggest that teacher leadership occurred in Zone Four; i.e. teacher leadership across schools and into the community.

**Teacher leadership and school committees**

Although one cannot necessarily equate teacher involvement on committees with leadership, we argue that building leadership and management capacity is essentially about participation of people in teams.

For the purpose of our research, obtaining information about teachers' involvement in committees shed light on their roles as teacher leaders. We looked at teacher leadership particularly in Zones Two and Three and fitted the committees into each of the two zones as indicated in the table below:

Zones	School Committees	Percentage involvement
<b>Zone Two:</b>  Curriculum    Extra-curriculum	<b>Teacher leadership and the curriculum as evidenced by:</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Participation in the subject committee</li> <li>2. Participation in the time-table committee</li> <li>3. Participation in the awards committee</li> <li>4. Participation in the library committee</li> </ol> <b>Teacher leadership and the extra-mural activities as evidenced by:</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Participation in the sports committee</li> <li>2. Participation in the cultural committee</li> <li>3. Participation in the catering committee</li> <li>4. Participation in the bereavement/condolence committee</li> </ol>	57% 23% 21% 13%  57% 41% 36% 30%
<b>Zone Three:</b>  While school issues	<b>Teacher leadership and the school management as evidenced by:</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Participating in the school fundraising</li> <li>2. Participating in the School Development Team</li> <li>3. Participating in the safety and security of the school</li> <li>4. Participating in the School Governing Body</li> <li>5. Participating in the maintenance of the school</li> </ol>	34% 30% 21% 18% 16%

Figure 5: Table of committees within Zones Two and Three

From the above table it can be concluded that the main involvement of teachers on committees was in relation to subject specific committees (57%) and sports committees (57%) within Zone Two. It appears that teacher leadership in Zone Two was, in the main, subject specific or extra-curricular. When reflecting on teacher involvement on committees within Zone Three, there was a dramatic drop in the percentage of teacher involvement as can be seen from Figure 5. Teacher involvement was the highest in relation to the fundraising committee (34%) and the School Development Team (30%). In summary then, teacher leadership was far more prominent in Zone Two than in Zone Three and we can conclude that teacher involvement in decision-making in Zone Three was predominantly in the hands of the SMT. SMTs appeared to exclude teachers from many of the important decision-making processes in Zone 3. We now move on to explore this view further in the next section.

### Teacher leadership: delegated or emergent?

In order to determine to what extent teacher leadership was happening in schools and what roles teachers fulfilled, this section aimed to explore how teachers got onto the committees discussed in the



previous section. Were they elected onto the committees, did they volunteer or was this delegated by the SMT?

A useful characterisation of distributed leadership is offered by Gunter (2005). She suggests that distributed leadership is currently, in research, being characterised variously as authorised, dispersed and democratic (ibid, 51). Firstly, *authorised* distributed leadership is where work is distributed from the principal to others within a hierarchical system of relations. This type of leadership can also be termed 'delegated leadership'. Secondly, *dispersed* distributed leadership refers to a process where much of the workings of an organisation take place without the formal working of a hierarchy. It is a more autonomous, bottom-up and emergent and is accepted because of the knowledge, skills and personal attributes of organisational members who, either individually or in autonomous work groups, develop the work (Gunter, 2005). In the context of this study *volunteering* to work on a committee fits well within Gunter's *dispersed distributed leadership*. Finally, *democratic* distributed leadership is similar to dispersed distributed leadership in that both have an emergent character where initiative circulates widely (Woods, 2004) but is different in that it does not assume political neutrality, but instead engages critically with organisational values and goals (Woods, 2004, 7). Democratic distributed leaders transform not only individual understandings of self and others, but that they "lay the groundwork for challenging social inequities and inequalities" (Shields, 2006, 77).

Respondents were asked how they got involved onto the committees. Of the sample, 57% were members of the subject committee. Among those who were involved in the subject committee, there was a significant difference between the proportion of the respondents that were elected, delegated and volunteered onto the subject committee. The majority of the participants (62%) were *elected* onto the subject committee. In the case of the sports committee, 57% participants were involved on the sports committee. Of this group, 54% were *elected* onto the sports committee. Of the teachers involved on the catering committee, 50% volunteered their services and 37% were elected.

Data in this section pointed to two forms of distributed leadership; *dispersed distributed leadership* - elected leadership (43%), voluntary leadership (36%), and *authorised distributed leadership* - delegated leadership (21%). Delegating responsibilities to the staff put many of the decision-making issues in the hands of the staff and so opened up the possibilities of distributed leadership. As, mentioned earlier, volunteering for us pointed to a more emergent form of teacher leadership which was closer to its true meaning.

### **The school culture necessary for teacher leadership**

In the subsequent section, participants responded to the question: 'what are teachers' perceptions of the leadership context and culture in their schools?' In this study, 55% of the teachers believed that their schools were places where adequate opportunities were created for staff members to develop professionally. 58% of the participants believed that their schools were places where teachers were able to try out new ideas. Another 55% of the respondents believed that their schools were places where the SMT listened to teachers' opinions. Of the 396 respondents, 64% believed that their schools were places

where teachers worked together while 53% believed that their schools were places where people trusted each other. Furthermore, 44% of the participants believed that their schools were places where the SMT allowed teachers to make their own decisions. In other words, the data suggested that the culture in most of the schools supported teacher leadership.

However, of the 396 participants, 63% believed that their schools were places where the SMT believed that it was its role to lead while 53% believed that their schools were places where only the SMT took the important decisions. Interestingly, 36% of the participants believed that their schools were places where only the SMT took initiative. It was clear then from the data that some SMTs were deemed to be barriers to teacher leadership.

This study further found that 34% of the teachers took initiative without being delegated duties. This is inline with what Grant (2006) views as the development of appropriate attitudes and values in the take up of teacher leadership. For her teacher leadership is about “courage, risk taking, perseverance, trust and enthusiasm within the culture of transparency and mutual learning’ (Grant, 2006, p. 529). In addition, Khumalo (2008) argues that showing confidence to play a role enables envisioning of the practice of leadership. Thus the ability to act, creates the opportunity to act and the desire to act (Blase' & Blase', 2001). It is their opinion that the reward of a trusting environment is immeasurable, yet the price of a lack of trust is enormous. Of the respondents, 53% viewed their schools as places where people trusted each other. This suggests a more distributed leadership context and an openness of the boundaries of leadership (Woods *et al.*, 2004, p. 442). Because distributed leadership has a social and an individual component (Woods, Bennett, Harvey, & Christine, 2004), it follows that relevant skills are critical within a mutual trusting and supportive culture (Louis, 2007). From data in this study, it emerged that only 10% of the sample viewed their schools as low trust settings, where people never trusted each other.

The evidence from the study revealed that half of the teachers viewed their schools as places of trust where teachers were allowed to work together and try out new ideas. It follows that when people in any context participate in shaping the life and direction of that situation, their capacity is enhanced (Lessing & Marike, 2007). However, one third of the respondents viewed their SMTs as a barrier to teacher leadership. Because of an SMT view that it was their role alone to lead, Hoyle and Wallace (2005) argue that headteachers are placed in a uniquely high-risk position where as a ‘top leader’ they have a responsibility for the practice of all their team colleagues. In addition, strong hierarchically-ordered, external accountability makes it risky for leaders to share leadership and management. The leaders are in danger of being blamed for failure by school inspectors. This might be the reason why, in some of the schools in this study, SMTs felt that it was their sole responsibility to lead.

## **Conclusion**

This paper has argued that the majorities of teachers in the study not only understood and supported the concept of teacher leadership but were also actively leading in the zone of the classroom as well as outside the classroom in curricular and extra-curricular activities. The paper argued that the majority of

teachers were not only leading formally but also informally in the schools. It seemed from the data that there was a mix of delegated distributed leadership as well as dispersed leadership across the 25 schools in the study. The leadership culture and context in the schools was such that about half of the teachers believed that a collaborative culture existed in their schools. The evidence from the study revealed that the SMTs, for the most part, encouraged teachers to try out new ideas and to make collaborative decisions. However, in some schools, SMTs were considered a barrier to teacher leadership.

The findings in the study point to what Harris and Muijs (2005) term emergent teacher leadership which is found in schools where distributed leadership is emerging but requires development. There is a move towards devolved leadership and processes of consultation in these schools which, for the most part, are supported by members of the school management teams. However, as Harris and Muijs explain, “while there is clear management support for teacher leadership, and taking initiative is encouraged, involvement in decision-making tends to be limited to middle management” (2005, p.109). These findings contrast with the qualitative case study research (Singh, 2007) and with those of a recent survey of 1055 teachers (Grant, Gardner, Kajee, Moodley and Somaroo, 2008) which pointed to teacher leadership which was restricted rather than emergent. The challenge for us now is to compare the different studies in an attempt to understand further how and why teacher leadership differed across the different contexts. Furthermore, there is an urgent need for more nuanced and multi-layered research into teacher leadership in South African schools in an attempt to investigate how teacher leadership is enacted in schools and what factors enhance or hinder this ‘enactment’.

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