

Article

## Teachers as Curriculum Leaders: What Does This Mean to School Principals?

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**Abstract:** School leadership and accountability are usually the responsibilities of principals. Principals are expected to lead and manage in matters such as instructions, finance, staff development and community engagement. This solo leadership model is challenge by increasing pressure for high student achievement. The advent of teacher leadership presents teachers as valuable contributors in curriculum matters. Principals' understanding of teachers as curriculum leaders (TCL) is important if teachers are to provide the much-needed assistance. The current research adopted a multiple-site case study design to explore principals' understanding of the concept of TCL in schools. Eight participants were purposefully selected; open-ended, semi structured interview guides were piloted prior to data collection. Observation of school meetings provided additional data. The data were thematically analysed and anchored on Grant's model of teacher leadership. The findings reveal that, to school principals, TCL means teachers performing the roles of curriculum leaders and managers, decision makers, designers of learning programmes and materials, facilitators, assessors, lifelong learners, models, and pastoral caregivers. The findings further express the frustration of principals on the exclusion of teachers from curriculum decision making at the macro and meso levels. The findings are relevant in the advocacy of distributed leadership as they provide practical reasons for principals to create opportunities for teachers to lead in curriculum matters.

**Keywords:** School principals; teacher leadership; distributed leadership; curriculum leadership; Grant's model

### Introduction

The essence of effective curriculum leadership cannot be overemphasised. Harris et al. (2020), explain curriculum leadership as a systematic process of decision making that may result in changes in the content material, pedagogy acquisition and evaluation of skills. This process, which embodies instructional leadership, pedagogic leadership, and teacher leadership (TL), takes place at any level from macro, meso and micro levels. Research on the concept of TL continues to intensify internationally because of its positive effects on school climate (Zombwe, 2008), teacher professional development (De Vries et al., 2014) and student achievement (Moorhouse & Beaumont, 2020). Literature on TL covers components including understanding TL identity (Liu et al., 2021), the need for cross cultural exploration of TL (Webber, 2021) and the lived experiences of secondary school principals in practicing TL (Asegu & Gedifew, 2022). Many countries have legislated TL practice. In the United States of America (USA), the Georgian Department of Education created the TL Advisory Council (Hart, 2021). Besides, the Republic of Macedonia established formal structural conditions for full teacher participation through a horizontal and decentralised governance system in managing and running schools (Petrovska & Sivevska, 2014). Similarly, in South Africa, the national Task Team on Education Management Development (Department of Education, 2009) advocated for the notion of TL for

the new educational system post 1994. Furthermore, Rule 3 of the Norms and Standards for Educators in South Africa by the Department of Education (Department of Education, 2000) challenges teachers to take up leadership roles in schools.

However, the enactment of TL which encompasses the role of TCL is fraught with difficulties (Blose & Khuzwayo, 2023; Naidoo, 2019). School principals' support is pivotal for the successful practice of any form of TL (Hart, 2021; Tian et al., 2016). Nevertheless, Hart (2021) states that "little, if any, inquiry into principals' baseline knowledge of TL has been done." Yet much of teachers' work at school revolves around the curriculum. Therefore, within the concept of TL, it is interesting to pose the question "What does teachers as curriculum leaders mean to school principals?" This is the question this study seeks to answer. It is difficult for anyone to encourage what they do not fully understand. Hence the study objective is to explore school principals' understanding of the concept of TCL. The findings will add literature on principals' understanding of the concept of TL, which is relatively in its infancy.

## Literature Review

### 1. The concept of Teachers as Curriculum Leaders

According to Sherman and Jain (2013), roles are a set of behavioural expectations from an employee. Zombwe (2008), states that an explanation of who a teacher is describes the roles of a teacher. Yet, TL role in schools is mostly seen in the light of curriculum implementation. The definition of TL debunks this limited conception. To Diffey and Aragon (2018), TL is teachers influencing colleagues within schools, across schools and school community, to improve teaching practices for teacher and student learning. According to Sinha and Hanuscin (2017), TL is teachers being able to recognize and assume formal and informal leadership opportunities for their own and student gains. The dominant notion in these definitions is teachers being leaders, both inside and outside the classroom to improve learning. These TL activities are mostly curriculum related, planned and unplanned. Thus, teachers are curriculum leaders. Shields (2017) defines curriculum leaders as those who impact knowledge of educational leadership and curriculum studies to prepare students for society.

### 2. Roles of Teachers as Curriculum Leaders

In South Africa, the Department of Education (2000) puts forth 7 roles of teachers: as leaders, administrators, managers; subject specialist; interpreters and designers of learning programmes; facilitators; assessors; lifelong learners and pastoral caregivers. I opine that in performing these roles TCL are directly implementing the curriculum or contributing towards curriculum implementation. I now discuss these rules in greater detail.

#### *Teacher as Leaders, Administrators, and Managers*

Shahrill (2014) explains that leaders do the right things, managers do things right, while administrators do the right things in the right way. Department of Education (2000) advocates that, teachers as leaders should take part in decision making in schools. This creates a sense of ownership and is important in the development of the teaching profession (Zombwe, 2008). For effective teaching and learning to take place, teachers engage in the managerial task of planning lesson objectives as well as organizing to achieve effective and efficient learning (Putri et al., 2019).

#### *Teachers as Subject Specialists*

Department of Education (2000) stipulates that teachers of a given subject must be well grounded in its content methodology and pedagogy to disseminate that knowledge to their students, as well as share it with their colleagues. In 2012, a study in South Africa by Makgato and Ramaligela (2012) used Grade 9 technology teachers to develop criteria for textbook selection. The findings indicated that as the main criteria, teachers selected the nature of the content and pedagogy as they relate to the discipline. This action research by the teachers would not have been possible without deep content knowledge of the subject.

### *Teachers, as Interpreters and Designers of Learning Programme Materials*

Teachers are exposed to and understand students' knowledge gaps and expectations. Putri et al., (2019) believe that teachers relate this useful information to lesson objectives, student profiles, available materials, and time when they participate in designing, re-designing, and co-designing of learning and teaching materials. (LTM). Such TLM would be contextually relevant, as (Ostovar-Namaghi, 2017) reported of Iranian language teachers who modified a linear syllabus to become a cyclical model which they considered better for the students.

### *Teachers as Facilitators*

Now, more than ever, teachers endeavour to facilitate teaching and learning encounters by providing leads and diversifying instructional activities (Kotirde & Yunos, 2014) as prompted by students' prior knowledge on the topic under discussion. Thus, creating a discussion rather than lecturing atmosphere during lessons. Moorhouse and Beaumont (2020) report that a Hong Kong pre-service teacher educator facilitated his students' participation and interaction by repeated adapting his methodology which changed the passive students with high absenteeism by increasing student attendance from 10 to 28.

### *Teachers as Assessors*

Teachers assess their students formally and informally to determine student learning. Assessing also offers teachers the opportunity to reflect on their teaching strategies and plan remedial lessons, while being cognisant of the purposes, types, methods, and effects of assessment - assessment literacy (Department of Education, 2000) that improve upon student learning. From a longitudinal study on Scottish educational authorities, (Grant, 2012) reports high teacher assessment literacy evident by cross-sectional moderation of student scripts in all subjects. An aspect of teacher assessment literacy is evident in the study of Hamid et al., (2018). They found that teacher use of colour corrective feedback, increased learners' awareness of their errors and improved their writing performance. Similarly, reporting on the practice of teacher feedback (Nguyen, 2019) indicated that students actively engaged in responding to the teacher's feedback. This asserts the crucial roles of teachers' knowledge of students' learning experiences among other variables. Putri et al., (2019) emphasised that timely constructive feedback to students helps improve student learning. Aquino and Cuello (2020) reiterate the importance of written corrective feedback, which was absent in the findings of their qualitative study with 30 Manila educators, a divergence of the participants' beliefs and actuated practices.

### *Teachers as Lifelong Learners*

Zombwe (2008) holds that teachers need to move with change in terms of new methodologies. As lifelong learners, teachers explore different avenues for learning, including enrolment for further education (Polz, 2020), participating in action research (Makgato & Ramaligela, 2012) and in professional learning communities-PLC (Vuorikari et al., 2011). In South Africa, Motlhabane and Dichaba, (2013) studied teachers enrolled in the Advanced Certificate for Educators and reported improved pedagogic skills and confidence. Vuorikari et al. (2011) also reported on teacher participation in an online PLC (e-twinning), comprising over 160,000 European teachers. These teachers, network for opportunities to learn from their colleagues and develop professionally.

### *Teachers as Pastoral Caregivers and Role Models*

Teachers' role as pastoral caregivers is inseparable from their role as curriculum leaders (Sekhu, 2019). Department of Education (2000) legislates that while at school, teachers act in *loco parentis* for students-parents to students. Putri et al. (2019) indicate that teachers ought to know the personality and mental psychology of students to enable them to occupy the parental space at school. A student who is psychologically or emotionally disturbed may not concentrate during lessons. To this end, Sripai & Wanawan, (2018) opined that teachers should demonstrate interest in learners. This interest should also be evident in the competencies needed for life (Polz, 2020). Teachers are pivotal in the behavioural outcomes of students and should therefore exhibit ethical and moral values (Sripai & Wanawan, 2018). Similarly, Zombwe (2008), attests that students learn both behaviour and skills from teachers.

### 3. Principals’ Understanding of Teachers as Curriculum Leaders

Hart (2021) observes that there is hardly any available literature on principals’ understanding of the construct of TL. This may have been why her study of principals’ perceptions and understanding of TL in Georgia has no direct literature on what other researchers conducted on the subject studied (Principals’ perceptions and understanding of TL). Hart (2021) anchored her discussion of findings mainly on the conceptual framework consisting of the features of the five different waves of TL in the USA and on the position theory. Her qualitative study concludes that most principals are unsure of the definition of TL. In her words, “principals don't know what they don't know when it comes to TL, and it is unfair to hold them accountable as if they do.”

In 2022, Asegu and Godifey studied the lived experiences of school principals in practicing TL in Ethiopia. The findings revealed a positive theoretical attitude towards TL which contrasted with the traditional (individualistic) leadership in practice. Thus, although principals have some experiences of TL which embodies TCL, debatably, literature on their understanding of this concept is sparse.

### 4. Theoretical Framework

Grant’s (2012) model of teacher leadership was used as the analytical tool for this study. Grant formulated the model in 2008 only with zones (Grant, 2008) and by 2012, added six rules and several indicators. Grant (2012) articulates that teacher leaders perform their roles in four different zones: in the classroom, out of the classroom discussing curriculum matters with peers and students, within the school in whole school planning and development, and between schools and into the community. Concurring with these different areas are Fairman and Mackenzie (2012) who referred to them as spheres, and Muijs et al., (2013) who called them boundaries. Within the zones, teachers perform the following roles: classroom teaching, providing curriculum development knowledge, providing in-service training, and assisting peers, performance evaluation of teachers, participating in whole school evaluation processes for diagnosis, and in school level decision making.

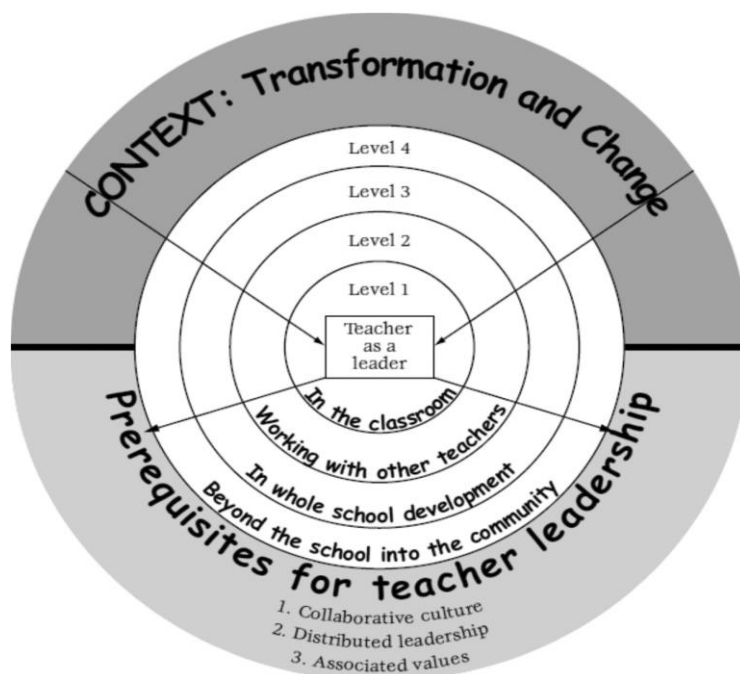


Figure 1. Teacher leadership zones (Grants, 2008 p.93)

Each role has several indicators. For brevity, I present only indicators relating to the findings of this study, those of zone one: (i) Centrality of expert practice including appropriate teaching and assessment strategies and expert knowledge; (ii) Keeping abreast of new developments (attendance at workshops and further study) for professional development; (iii) Designing of learning activities and improvisation/appropriate use of resources; (iv) Processing of record-keeping and reflection practice; (v)

Engagement in classroom action research; (vi) Maintaining effective classroom discipline and meaningful relationships with learners and (vii) Take initiative and engage in autonomous decision-making for change in the classroom, to benefit learners; and indicator (ii) of zone two- Joint curriculum development (core and extra-/co-curricular). The components of context and prerequisites in Grant's model (Grant, 2008) are central when principals understand the concept of TL. Principals must engage in distributed leadership practice to encourage teachers with leadership potentials to assume their agential roles as leaders. The associated values of trust and respect should be fostered to ensure that a collaborative culture reigns, to bring about the desired transformation and change. The presence of such context and prerequisites are favourable conditions for TL in curriculum matters within the zones.

## **Methodology**

### **1. Research Design**

A multiple-site case study qualitative design was adopted to explore what TCL means to school principals. Creswell and Creswell (2017) attest that a qualitative study is best where little or no knowledge exists of a phenomenon. Moreover, multiple-site case studies provide a broader scope from which to obtain rich data. Mohajan (2018) concurs that the subjective nature of qualitative studies is a form of social action which enables people to interpret and make sense of the experiences of others.

### **2. Sample**

Through convenience and purposeful sampling, eight secondary school principals in Soutpansberg East Circuit in Vhembe district in Limpopo Province were selected, irrespective of their longevity of service in the position because every principal deals with teacher leaders in their school.

### **3. Data Collection Process**

I constructed the semi-structured open-ended interview schedule and the meeting observation tool guided by the literature I perused. Data were collected through individual face- to- face interviews which were audio recorded, and each lasted between 30 to 60 minutes. More data were obtained from meeting observations in only two of the eight schools. This was because whole school meetings for the other schools had already taken place for the term before I commenced data collection. Prior to data collection, I piloted the interview guide with two principals who were not part of the final study.

### **4. Data Analysis**

During the final study, I returned transcribed data to participants for member checking. Some adjustments were made as recommended by three participants. Data were thematically analysed. I listened to each audio recording many times before transcribing. I coded, categorised the codes, and identified emerging themes related to the research question. I could pick some of the themes right from listening to the participants during the interview sessions.

### **5. Ethical consideration**

I obtained ethical clearance from the University of Pretoria's Ethics Committee (Number EM19/03/01). Thereafter, I obtained permissions from the Limpopo Provincial Department of Education, Vhembe District Office, Soutpansberg East Circuit, and school principals. I informed the participants of their freedom to withdraw from the study at any time without consequences on them. I respected the participants' privacy and protected their interests by ascribing pseudonyms 1 to 8 to principals (P1- P8) and their corresponding schools (S1 to S8).

## **The Findings**

The principals' understanding of TCL was revealed through their expectations of the teachers. This falls in line with teachers' roles and responsibilities. Three themes emerged from the data, namely, leadership and management, Knowledge acquisition, possession and dissemination and modelling and caregiving.

## 1. Leadership and Management

This study reveals that some principals believe TCL means teachers function both as leaders and managers at school. Some principals expressed this as follows:

*“Classroom management, uh, how to manage learners... you know, this is what educators do, educators lead the curriculum. You know, some others while going to class, they can't even see that there are some learners outside, they will just pass and go straight into his class. Yourself as a leader, you have to remind them that if you go to the class and find that you still have some learners lingering around, inform them to get inside the class because the business has already started. The learners are our clients, and there is no any other way that we can ignore them.” (P2)*

*“I think it is referring to that uhh, a teacher ought to manage his own curriculum, he ought to package his pacesetters well. examination guidelines, the files should be up to date, even when the SMT is monitoring the files, the files should be packaged well...” (P4)*

It appears that these principals understand the centrality of curriculum in education and teachers' pivotal role in realising the goals of education. Principals expect that, as curriculum leaders, teachers should bring order where there is disorder, be able to work independently and properly lead and manage classroom situations. This finding also implies that principals expect teachers as curriculum leaders to have their TLMs orderly kept as per the Department of Education's prescript. Perhaps these expectations stem from principals' functions as school leaders and managers.

## 2. Knowledge Acquisition, Possession, and Dissemination

This theme embodies teachers' role as subject specialists and life-long learners, facilitators, interpreters and designers of learning programme materials, and assessors. A common meaning of TCL articulated by principals in this study is that of teachers possessing rich content knowledge in their specific subject. This relates to the common belief that the teachers' role is to impart knowledge to students. Thus, teachers are expected to possess what they intend to transfer to others. The excerpts below convey this:

*“Teachers who's teaching specific subjects uhm, as curriculum leaders definitely have a deeper knowledge of the curriculum.” (P1)*

*“Teachers, as curriculum leaders, this essentially means that teachers have to know the content that they are teaching, yes.” (P8)*

*“As curriculum leaders, which means the educator should improve themselves, looking at the following things...number 1 enrol to some other institutions uhh which are related to education. Like myself, when I enrolled for advanced certificate in English. I've seen that I was working hard uhh... I tried to upgrade uhh... myself. Number 2, attending the workshops is very important because there, at the workshops, they learn a lot. There are some other people who are experts who can help others. Those workshops can help you know uhh...go to the next level as far as the knowledge of that particular subject is concerned.” (P5)*

To possess deep content knowledge of a subject, these principles seem to suggest that TCL should regularly improve their knowledge, skills and qualifications and stay abreast with recent developments and methodologies in the subject area by collaborating. This would assist teachers to better facilitate knowledge acquisition by students. Most of these principles consider classroom teaching as the pivotal role of TCL. This is evident from the snippets below:

*“...teachers are curriculum leaders, I see it as uhh...because curriculum is there, is planned for the implementation. Uh, whether it is working or not, it will depend on the teachers, on their attitude towards that curriculum. Yeah. So I think teachers are the real custodians of the curriculum.” (P2)*

*“they have to know, that they are curriculum leaders, the agents of curriculum delivery. When we talk about education, when you say learners have been educated, kids have been educated, we are saying that they know, if we are talking about physical sciences, if we're talking about work done, they know what is meant by work*

*done. The know what calculations are involved in work done, that's the most important thing of a teacher.” (p 7)*

The findings above indicate that these principals believe that teachers implement the curriculum by interpreting the content of documented information and serving as facilitators in the teaching and learning process. Thus, teacher talk and physical presence in class become meaningless if students are not transformed by the disseminated knowledge. Most principals in this study also expressed their understanding of the concept of TCL to mean teachers having a voice in choosing the content to be taught. These principals shared thus:

*“I would love to see that they would have more opportunities to give their input... they are leaders but uhm, they don't have any opportunities to give their inputs... people that is putting together the curriculum...must uhm, open up a platform where, for instance, grade 12 teachers will say ...this specific part of the curriculum we can leave out because it's no longer relevant.” (P1)*

*“Now the government is giving materials, work schedules, that educators are to refer to them... and it must work hand in hand with the policy documents. We don't expect somebody from the top to bring to us curriculum. But educators us should be able to say uhh this is what we want our learners to be taught. Not somebody bringing it from top. In South Africa majority of the curriculum are not relevant, very much irrelevant because we are still teaching learners that will be going out to look for jobs, instead of them creating jobs.” (P4)*

These principals did not speak directly about teachers being designers of learning programmes and materials. Rather, they did so by lamenting teacher exclusion in these activities. Most principals have been classroom teachers, and they can identify with teachers' frustration of being excluded from prior stages of curriculum development. This suggests teachers may not be satisfied with how the South African Teachers' Unions represent them during the curriculum reform processes. Another dimension of TCL from principals is teachers as assessors. Some principals explain as follows.

*“They have... to also know how to assess that content...give learner's feedback and do ...what we call item analysis that will be able to show you where the learners have understood you and where they have not, so that the educator can go back and again reteach those sections... that the learners did not understand.” (P8)*

*“...when it comes to setting, some task is by the district or by the nationals, there is also a problem some of the educators do not know how to set their questions because eh... they receive those questions that are set in the district. But we are working together with the department.” (P7)*

Incidentally, the only two whole school meetings I observed in S4 (01/10/2019) and S2 (03/10/2019) were on the analysis of Term 3 results of each school. The meeting of S4 was chaired by the school principal but that of S2 was co- chaired by two teachers, a head of department and the principal. As an outcome, the teacher suggested that they should come up with subject-specific strategies to assist underperforming students. Principal 4's inclusion of teachers to co-chair the meeting may be interpreted as his understanding and recognition of teachers' invaluable contribution in leading curriculum matters. It seems principals understand that as assessors, TCL should not only end at teachers administering tests and examinations to obtain marks for record's sake. This suggests that principals expect teachers to verify the extent of student learning since it is the ultimate purpose of schooling. It further implies that the principals expect teachers to make use of assessment data to reflect on their teaching strategies for the improvement of student learning.

### 3. Modelling and Caregiving

The theme of modelling and caregiving also surfaces in the principals' explanations of their understanding of TCL. Some principals alluded to caregiving and exemplary behaviour as aspects of their understanding of TCL as follows:

*“Ah! Leading the curriculum, educators they don't only teach. Uhh... they support the learners; they identify their problems; they are their parents here at school. As you know, learners take more time here at school than at home.” (P2)*

*“Sometimes educators have the bad words that they say to learners... “You domkop” ... even though the learner is seeing something in him or herself for a brighter future. But... in front of the mirror... they will see a “dom”, just because of those words.” (P1)*

*“Also, educators must be examples to others here at school and in the community. He can't be one person here and another out there in the community. No! Those learners are still there, and their parents are still there.” (P3)*

*“They also teach the learners good manners and how to communicate with other people and respecting the educators and also their parents.” (P6)*

These excerpts show that man is a social being who needs the love, care, guidance, and support of others. Students who are psychologically disturbed may not be able to concentrate during lessons. As curriculum leaders, teachers should prepare both the physical (classroom) and non-physical (mind) environments to ensure effective teaching and learning. Furthermore, it appears that, although most often not overtly mentioned in most written curriculum documents, principals like many other stakeholders, expect teachers to inculcate hidden aspects of every curriculum, such as morals and values. In the next section, I discuss the findings of this study. I also present these as per the themes above.

## **Discussion**

The findings from principals' understanding of TCL expressed as teachers being leaders and managers correlate with existing literature by Putri et al. (2019) who state that teachers need to plan and organise lessons for effective and efficient learning. The findings also align with some indicators in Zone one of Grant's model (Grant, 2012). Indicator 4 is on record keeping and 6 is on creating conducive teaching and learning environment. Conversely, the behaviour of teachers who fail to uphold their agential roles as curriculum leaders as P2 indicates is in tandem with the assertion of Shahrill (2014) that leaders do the right things.

According to the findings of this study, teachers should possess expert pedagogic content knowledge, as reflected by Department of Education (2000), indicator 1, role 1 in Zone one of Grant's models, (Grant, 2012), and in the findings of Makgato and Ramaligela (2012). These principals also linked deep content knowledge with being life-long learners. This implies that as connoisseurs, the rich and updated knowledge comes from continuous upgrading of oneself using formal and informal training. This finding endorses the notion by Zombwe (2008) of teachers moving with the times and exploring avenues for learning like enrolment for further education as advocated by some researchers (Motlhabane & Dichaba, 2013; Polz, 2020) and partaking in PLCs (Diffey & Aragon, 2018; Vuorikari et al., 2011). These findings also align with indicator 2 in Zone one of Grant's model (Grant, 2012) which emphasises on teachers keeping abreast of new developments through workshop attendances and furthering studies.

The findings also indicate that teachers' physical presence in class and teacher talk become meaningless if students are not transformed by the disseminated knowledge. These principals understand that TCL should interpret curriculum content and adapt their methodology as in the study of Moorhouse and Beaumont (2020) and redesign their TLMs to students' needs and interests. These findings are consistent with those of Ostovar-Namaghi (2017) and Putri et al., (2019) to ensure the impacted knowledge takes root in students' lives rather than wither and die. The findings also relate to indicator 7 of Zone one of Grant's model (Grant, 2012) which requires teachers to take initiatives and engage in autonomous decision-making for change in the classroom to the benefit of learners.

Furthermore, this study reveals that principals understand TCL means teachers participating in curriculum decision making. The findings reflect the report of Ostovar-Namaghi (2017), and indicator 1 of role 2, Zone two (Grant, 2012) on participative leadership in decision making for teachers to feel part of and own the change. Although the findings of this study contrast the practicum of Department of Education (2000) that excludes teachers from curriculum decision making, it aligns with the advocacy (seems only on paper) of



the same Department of Education (2000) for teachers to participate in decision making. In this case, the Department of Education (2000) appears to be offering leadership opportunities to teachers yet holding back on teacher agency.

From an earlier study with 30 Manila educators, Aquino and Cuello (2020) reported that teacher assessment literacy was present in theory but absent in practice. In line with the literature, this study's findings indicate the principals' understanding of teachers as assessors to mean teacher possession and demonstration of high assessment literacy qualities (Putri et al., 2019), which some principals in this study indicate is also absent in practice. This contrasts with the practices of Scottish teachers in Grant's study (Grant, 2012). The absence of high teacher assessment literacy in the South African context may be blamed on the Department of Education which provides formal assessment tasks to schools (depriving teachers of the opportunity to practise and perfect their art as assessors). The reason the Department of Education sets these assessment tasks may be attributed to its lack of confidence in the teacher's assessment literacy standards, and or ability to conceal the content of assessment tasks before students write.

Further finding portrays teachers as pastoral caregivers and role models to students. This study shows that principals, and teachers are responsible for the holistic development of students, and are agents of moral values, integrity, and respect for people in society. This finding affirms those of Polz (2020); Sripai and Wanawan (2018) and Zombwe (2008) that students learn behaviours, skills, and competencies needed for life from teachers.

The study findings also highlight the importance of positive self-esteem for students, as this motivates them to achieve their full potential. Whereas negative self-esteem instigated by what teachers say or how they treat students may demotivate students from performing at their best. These principals likened teachers' role as curriculum leaders in pastoral caregiving to being role models, as it contributes to the holistic development of students. Indicator 6 in zone one of Grant's model (Grant, 2012) emphasises on a meaningful relationship between teachers and students as stipulated in being *loco parentis* by the Department of Education (2000). The finding also aligns with Sekhu (2019), who affirms teacher provision of material, social and emotional needs of students.

## Conclusion

Although this study is based on the views of a few school principals, the meaning each principal ascribes to the concept of TCL contributes to shedding some light on what the concept of TCL means to school principals. For these principals, TCL means teachers are leaders and managers in curriculum matters, lifelong learners, interpreters and facilitators, subject specialists, assessors, role models and pastoral caregivers as legislated by Department of Education (2000).

The findings of this study reveal that the concept of TCL to school principals means teachers being decision makers in all curriculum matters. Thus, these principals are against Department of Education's denial in the practice of teachers' right to participation in curriculum decision making at the macro and meso levels thereby, advocating for teacher inclusion in curriculum decision making at all levels.

As recommendations, firstly the Department of Education should in practice include teachers in curriculum decision making at all levels, especially at the national level. There should be direct teacher representatives from the grassroots to the final committee rather than Teacher Union representatives. This will create a sense of belonging and ownership in teachers to embrace whatever emanates from curriculum reforms. Secondly, this study focused only on secondary school principals. Research could also be conducted with primary school principals to determine their understanding of the concept of TCL and check for any significant differences between principals of primary and secondary levels that may inform practice.

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**Conflicts of Interest:** The author declares no conflict of interest.

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