

## **Understanding the relationships between teacher leadership and teacher wellbeing: A narrative review of theoretical and empirical literature**

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### **Abstract**

This narrative review integrates theoretical and empirical scholarship in which relationships between teacher leadership and teacher wellbeing are addressed. The review highlights four dimensions of teacher leadership (identity, formality, practices, and level of influence) and considers potential links with domains of wellbeing that may be affected by engagement in leadership activities. Utilizing Seligman's (2011) PERMA model as a framework, this review examined 29 publications that addressed PK-12 teacher leader wellbeing. All domains of wellbeing from the PERMA framework were represented, including positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning and purpose, and accomplishment. Additionally, autonomy was an emergent theme that has previously been highlighted as a part of psychological wellbeing. The review's findings highlight potential benefits and challenges of the trend toward promoting teacher leadership as a component of school renewal efforts. While inclusion of teacher leaders is vital, thought must be given to locally relevant practices based on school context and teacher needs.

**Keywords:** flourishing, PERMA, teacher leadership, wellbeing, well-being

### **Introduction**

Interest in teacher leadership (TL) continues to grow as teacher leaders' contributions to school improvement have been increasingly recognized. Indeed, TL development has emerged as a focal point of both pre- and in-service teacher education efforts, and previous scholarship has demonstrated many potential benefits of TL (Harris & Jones, 2019; Hunzicker, 2020; Nguyen et al., 2019). However, the trend toward promoting TL also intersects with the phenomenon of teacher work intensification, which may be reducing teachers' wellbeing and contributing to their decisions to leave the profession (Price & McCallum, 2015; Sugden, 2010). Work intensification is especially acute in the United States (U.S.), where teachers report working almost 20 percent more hours than international averages (Darling-Hammond, 2015; Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD], 2018). U.S. teacher leaders also commonly assume additional responsibilities as they contribute to school improvement efforts (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). In short, shifts in responsibilities associated with TL may mean that teacher leaders, like teachers generally, experience decreased wellbeing through increased work and stress without increased reward (Baecher, 2012; Stout et al., 2018).

Given the intense emotional demands of working in PK-12 education, attention to wellbeing is necessary if school systems are to retain competent, capable teachers (Toropova et al., 2021)—let alone grow their capacity for TL. The impacts of teachers' wellbeing extend beyond teachers themselves; cascading effects have been documented for students, classrooms, and schools (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; McCallum & Price, 2010; Roffey, 2012). Research has shown effects of teacher wellbeing on classroom emotional support and productivity (Jennings et al., 2017), students' social and emotional competence (Schonert-Reichl, 2017), and academic performance (Briner & Dewberry, 2007).

Teacher wellbeing can be affected by many factors. Teachers' sense of self-efficacy and overall feelings of job satisfaction have been found to relate positively to teacher wellbeing; teacher self-efficacy is also negatively related to burnout (Zee & Koomen, 2016). Class size, school resources and climate, student behavior, and administrative support are also potentially significant influences on teachers' wellbeing (Butt & Retallick, 2002; Gray et al., 2017; Lambersky, 2016; Sugden, 2010; Wessels & Wood, 2019). Further, more nuanced factors such as the emotional demands of the job and the importance of trust in colleagues have been identified (Yin et al., 2016). Price and McCallum (2015) also cited professional skills, knowledge, feelings of competence, and a sense of belonging and connectedness with others.

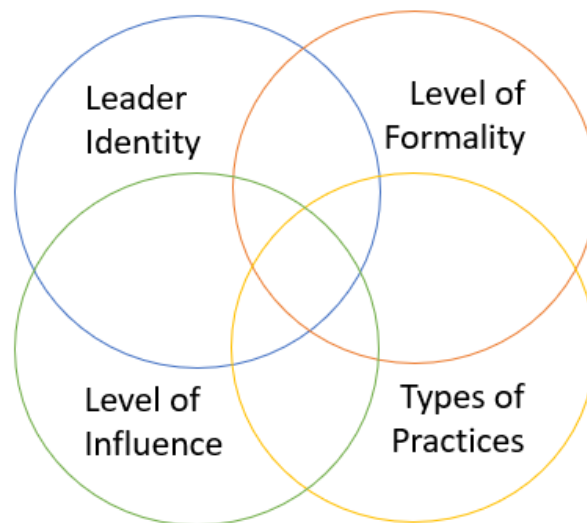
Although TL and teacher wellbeing have each been extensively investigated independently, less is known about how engaging in TL may influence the wellbeing of teacher leaders. An assumption undergirding this review is that continuing to promote TL without attending more closely to the impacts of TL on teacher leaders may limit the true potential of TL while possibly contributing to teacher burnout and departure from the teaching profession. In recognition of these concerns, the purpose of this narrative review was to identify and describe potential relationships between TL and teacher wellbeing so that future research can pursue more systematic and empirical investigations of such relationships. To accomplish this purpose, this paper begins with a brief conceptual overview of teacher leadership and wellbeing as they were understood for this review. Next, the review's narrative method is described. Finally, the findings are presented, and the paper concludes with a discussion of its significance, its implications for future scholarship, and consideration of its limitations.

### **Conceptual Overview**

Teacher leadership was conceptualized for this review according to four dimensions (see Figure 1): identity, level of formality, types of leadership practices, and scope of influence. Teacher wellbeing was conceptualized to include both subjective and psychological wellbeing components and focused on dimensions of Seligman's (2011) PERMA model of flourishing.

## Figure 1

### *Overlapping Dimensions of TL*



## Teacher Leadership

In their seminal review, York-Barr and Duke (2004) defined TL as “the process by which teachers, individually or collectively, influence their colleagues, principals, and other members of school communities to improve teaching and learning practices with the aim of increased student learning and achievement”; they also referred to TL as “an umbrella term that includes a wide variety of work at multiple levels in educational systems” (p. 288). Nguyen et al. (2019) and Wenner and Campbell's (2017) recent reviews focused more on teacher leaders who enacted the functions of leadership while maintaining their classroom responsibilities. The definition of what makes a teacher leader can depend on a host of different conditions, including whether teachers identify as leaders, level of role formality, types of leadership practices, and the scope of responsibility associated with TL.

Despite a scholarly trend toward identifying TL as a process, rather than as a role, some teachers nevertheless believe that TL requires a formal assignment that involves specific personal qualities, leadership knowledge, and skills (Hanuscin et al., 2011). Grarock and Morrissey (2013) suggested that, although teachers could successfully grow their leadership beyond the walls of their classrooms, only teachers with formal titles “expressed confidence in their ability to lead changes” outside their classrooms (p. 4). Several researchers have asserted the importance of teachers taking on leadership identities, noting that knowledge and skills alone are inadequate to foster leadership agency (Boylan, 2018; Carver, 2016; Sinha & Hanuscin, 2017). This leadership identity, whether formally given as a title by administrators, or internally felt and claimed, may affect how teachers engage in TL roles and practices.

The formality of TL can be conceptualized along a continuum; Supovitz (2018) defined four degrees of TL formality. “Organic” TL was defined as “what naturally occurs in schools with a strong sense of collective responsibility” (p. 57). “Improvised” TL occurs when teachers take on leadership roles without a fundamental school restructuring. “Quasi-formal” TL involves a role for which teachers are provided with titles and status, but, unlike in the “Formal” role, they are not given “formal authority to influence the behavior and practices of their peers” (p. 58).

The formality of a teacher's leadership role may be important in terms of compensation and recognition, as well as for the professional hierarchy in a school. The U.S. lacks well-defined teacher career pathways, unlike Singapore, where experienced teachers who excel in articulated competencies can advance and be recognized (García Torres, 2018; Goodwin, 2012). The ambiguity of TL's conceptualization and the diversity in the formality of its enactment has resulted in uncertainties among some teacher leaders about their own TL. In a study of teacher leaders in eight high-poverty schools, Supovitz found that those who lacked formal titles had "greater legitimacy with their peers" than the "formal leaders" at the school, though formal leaders had "more authority to hold teachers to account for their efforts" (p. 75). Margolis and Huggins (2012) detailed positive and negative aspects of more and less formal roles, stating that the level of formality is a "persistent dilemma" that is present in the discussion of TL.

The level of formality of the TL role can be related to the nature of the leadership work teacher leaders adopt. Woo et al. (2022) categorized this work as coordination, cooperation, or collaboration dependent on the teachers' active engagement in leadership practices. In their review, York-Barr and Duke (2004) enumerated seven different types of TL practices, including coordination and management, school/district curriculum work, participation in school change/improvement initiatives, parent and community involvement, contributions to the teaching profession, professional development of colleagues, and pre-service teacher education. Wenner and Campbell (2017) reported a similar but smaller number of practices, including supporting professional learning (e.g., formalized professional development, professional learning communities, peer classroom assistance), involvement in policy/decision making, and working on whole-school improvement/change initiatives. Each of these practices can require different levels of time and psychological investment and may impact teacher leaders' wellbeing in different ways.

Further, the scope of influence for teacher leadership practices varies widely. Sinha and Hanuscin (2017) described the scale of leadership practices as being "big" (e.g., school-level) and "small" (e.g., small group, less hierarchy). While this broad-stroke categorization may be too simplistic, it is useful to recognize that TL may be enacted at different levels. For example, Silva et al. (2000) discussed leading from inside the classroom. Others have discussed impacting peers through professional development (Wenner & Campbell, 2017; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Further, some TL roles and practices expand to the school and school community (parents/families), as well as to the district, state, and national levels (Conan Simpson, 2021; National Education Association, 2018). The scope within which leadership practices are enacted may impact teacher leaders' wellbeing, especially as it complements or conflicts with their ability to serve students. Working at an expanded level may provide additional opportunities for feelings of meaning and purpose in one's work, but working at a higher level of influence may also cause role conflict if it detracts from work in the classroom.

## **Wellbeing**

The discussion of wellbeing, explored originally by philosophers like Aristotle, has gained the interest of psychologists, sociologists, and positive psychologists to frame ways that people "live well." Wellbeing has been previously defined as two broad concepts using terms from ancient Greek philosophy; the first component, hedonic wellbeing, focuses on the pursuit of pleasure and happiness, and the avoidance of pain (DiFabio & Palazzeschi, 2015; Ryan & Deci, 2001). The second component, eudemonic wellbeing, is focused on fulfilling one's potential or realizing one's "true nature" (Ryan & Deci, 2001, p. 143).

Research on wellbeing has concentrated on two overarching themes that align with these original components. First, Ryff (1989) posited what was needed for *psychological wellbeing*; she discussed six components including self-acceptance, positive relationships, autonomy, environmental mastery, purpose in life, and personal growth. Second, wellbeing has also been considered as the subjective experience of life satisfaction (e.g., interest, engagement) along with the presence of positive emotions (e.g., joy, happiness), and the absence of negative emotions (e.g., depression, sadness) (Diener & Ryan, 2009). This subjective evaluation is more aligned with the hedonic component of wellbeing.

In recent years, the concept of wellbeing has gained attention within educational literature. Discussing wellbeing for leadership, Cherkowski and Walker (2016) described “a sense of purpose for ongoing improvement of educational experiences for students by creating a school community of care, connectedness, and trust where teachers feel engaged to share in the work of leading together for school improvement” (p. 386). Later, they specified components, including meaningful relationships, feelings of working toward a common purpose, opportunities for laughter, and feeling supported by administration to engage in their work in a way that is supportive for their students (Cherkowski & Walker, 2018). Cherkowski et al. (2020) expanded their previous definitions, borrowing two elements from Rath and Harter (2010): “career wellbeing,” which they define as finding meaning and purpose in the work that you do, and “physical wellbeing,” which includes having good enough health to get things done on a daily basis and sufficient reserves for emergencies.

The most frequently cited theoretical model of wellbeing in educational literature combines elements of both subjective and psychological wellbeing. Seligman's (2011) PERMA model of flourishing contains five elements, including “positive emotions” (positive affect and feelings of satisfaction), feelings of “engagement” or flow with work and life, positive “relationships,” feeling that your life has “meaning” and purpose, and a sense of “accomplishment” in what you choose to do. Seligman argued that each of these elements could be measured separately and could positively affect wellbeing independent of the other aspects; together, they lead to a flourishing wellbeing. Owen (2016) drew on Seligman's PERMA model but also extended the definition by invoking Roffey's (2012) description of social capital in positive learning environments, defined as “expectations and interactions that promote trust, respect, value, and collaboration” (p. 1). Norrish et al. (2013) proposed a conceptual model of flourishing for the whole school using components from Seligman's PERMA model of flourishing but adding a dimension of “positive health,” similar to Cherkowski (2020). Norrish et al. further added to the discussion on flourishing as it applied within a school environment by sharing ways to “live it,” with teachers acting as “authentic role models for students,” “teach it” both explicitly and implicitly in multiple subjects, and “embed it” in the school culture through the use of “complimentary school-wide processes” (p. 50–51).

## Method

This review used Seligman's (2011) PERMA framework as a lens for reviewing TL literature for ways in which TL may influence teacher wellbeing. Beyond just investigating *whether* TL contributes or detracts from teacher wellbeing, the review sought to elucidate a more nuanced understanding of potential connections between the two. To identify and understand these potential connections, a narrative review approach was employed (Ferrari, 2015; Green et al., 2006). Ferrari described narrative review as a way to “describe and appraise...previous

studies and a current lack of knowledge” to offer “rationales for future research” while distinguishing narrative reviews from systematic reviews in that the systematic approach requires “clearly defined criteria for the selection of articles” where the “scope is limited by the...selection criteria” (p. 231). Given the paucity of research specifically about TL and wellbeing during the authors’ initial searches, a systematic approach was deemed infeasible. Instead, a narrative approach was ultimately adopted to allow for greater flexibility and coverage of the literature while building a basis for future, systematic studies.

Literature was gathered for the narrative review in three ways. First, searches were conducted for peer-reviewed publications, available in English, multiple times between September 2020 and January 2022 using Google Scholar, ProQuest Education, ERIC, EBSCO Academic Search Complete and SAGE (Search terms: “teacher leadership” AND “teacher wellbeing/well-being”); publications had to be focused on TL within PK-12 settings. Publications that focused on how TL impacted the wellbeing of others (e.g., students, colleagues) or that solely discussed the impact of *administrative* leadership on teacher wellbeing were excluded. Second, widely cited literature for TL (e.g., Wenner & Campbell, 2017; York-Barr & Duke, 2004) was purposively reviewed; these publications were inspected for relevant information related to the overlap between TL and wellbeing. Finally, snowball sampling and citation network analysis approaches (Lecy & Beatty, 2012) were used, including bibliography review, Google Scholar “cited by,” Mendeley connected readings, and ConnectedPapers.com (Tarnavsky Eitan et al., n.d.) with the goal of identifying additional sources.

In total, 29 conceptual, empirical, and review publications were identified across all sources. Because it is widely cited and used in education, this review used the components of Seligman’s PERMA framework as a lens for reading each article and noting the ways in which wellbeing may be impacted both positively and negatively by engagement in teacher leadership roles and practices. The PERMA framework was not employed rigidly or as a code book; rather emergent themes seen in other wellbeing literature were also considered. When it was specified, the TL context (e.g., leadership identity, practices, formality, scope of influence) was also noted.

## Findings

This review concluded that each element of wellbeing as articulated by the PERMA framework is likely to be impacted by TL—in some cases positively, and in some cases negatively. The following subsections describe how teacher leaders may be impacted by their leadership in terms of their emotions, relationships, feelings of accomplishment, engagement, autonomy, and meaning and purpose. Table 1 below shows connections with wellbeing.

**Table 1**

*Wellbeing Domains Addressed Within the Reviewed Literature*

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Year	Publication			Wellbeing Domain					
	Author	Type	Source	PE	E	R	M	A	AU
2012	Baecher	Qual	Snowball	N		P		P/N	
2018	Basich	Qual	Search		N	N			P
2019	Berry	Concept	Snowball					P	
2017	Bradley-Levine	Qual	Search			N		N	
2021	Cann et al.	MM	Search					P	
2018	Cherkowski	Concept	Search	P		P	P		
2011	Chesson	MM	Snowball				P		
2010	Chew & Andrews	Qual	Snowball	P			P		
2021	Conan Simpson	Review	Snowball	P		N		P	
2021	Everett & Dunn	Concept	Search	N				NEU	
2003	Harris & Mujis	Concept	Snowball			NEU			
2020	Hollweck & Doucet	Professional	Search			P			
2017	Hunzicker	Concept	Snowball	P/N		N			
2012	Hunzicker	Qual	Snowball					P	
2021	Lai & Huang	Qual	Search	N					P
2016	Lowery-Moore et al.	Qual	Snowball				P	P	
2013	Lusty	Qual	Search						P
2012	Margolis & Huggins	Qual	Snowball			N		N	
2007	Muijs & Harris	Qual	Search					NEU	
2019	Nguyen et al.	Review	Selected	N		N		P	
1990	Smylie & Denny	Qual	Snowball			P/N		P	
2018	Stout et al.	Qual	Search		P			P/N	NEU
2014	Struyve et al.	Qual	Search			P/N			
2010	Sugden	MM	Search	N					
2018	Supovitz	Qual	Snowball			N			
2011	Taylor et al.	Qual	Snowball				P		
2011	Weiner	Qual	Snowball	N		N			
2017	Wenner & Campbell	Review	Selected	N					
2004	York-Barr & Duke	Review	Selected	P/N	P	N	P		

*Note: PE= Positive Emotions, E=Engagement, R=Relationships, M=Meaning & Purpose, A=Accomplishment, AU= Autonomy, P=Positive, N=Negative, NEU=Neutral*

### Positive Emotions

Both positive (5 publications) and negative impacts (9) were found between TL and how teachers felt on a day-to-day basis. Cherkowski (2018) discussed positive outcomes for informal teacher leaders including a “sense of joy, play, laughter, and fun” (p. 64). Feelings of satisfaction were also reported stemming from TL (Chew & Andrews, 2010; Conan Simpson, 2021; Hunzicker, 2017; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). However, teachers may also experience increased stress (Baecher, 2012; Hunzicker, 2017; Lai & Huang, 2021; Nguyen et al., 2019; Sugden, 2010;

Wenner & Campbell, 2017; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). These impacts could be brought about in different ways. Lai and Huang discussed worry, anxiety, and anger brought about by “involuntary role enactment” when teachers were compelled into leadership roles (p. 7). Similarly, Nguyen et al. (2019) reported challenges when teachers were unprepared for TL roles. Everett and Dunn highlighted that teacher leaders may experience “shame or guilt” if they engage in self-care and may suppress emotions in order to serve others (p. 4). Finally, Weiner (2011) reported frustration from teacher leaders in informal positions who were unable to compel staff to participate in supportive activities.

### **Engagement**

Seligman (2011) described the *engagement* as the ability to perform job activities more seamlessly, resulting in feelings of “flow” previously described by Csikszentmihalyi (1975). Three publications discussed TL in relation to engagement. York-Barr and Duke (2004) indicated that opportunities for TL can enhance meaning in work, leading to a higher level of engagement. In Stout et al.’s (2018) description of their “torchbearer” teacher leader, they reported the “level of ... engagement possibly prevent[ed] burnout” (p. 650). While generally one might expect higher engagement from teacher leaders, Basich (2018) suggested that “role ambiguity” may impede this sense of flow if appropriate structure is lacking.

### **Positive Relationships**

Fifteen publications discussed impacts of TL on relationships. Eleven publications indicated that TL may have deleterious effects on relationships with others. Although TL is posited to be a more collegial and less hierarchical form of leadership (Harris & Mujis, 2003), several publications addressed the challenges caused when TL changes the hierarchical structure (Bradley-Levine, 2017; Hunzicker, 2017; Nguyen et al., 2019; Smylie & Denny, 1990; Weiner, 2011; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Although teacher leaders are trying to be supportive, their leadership may still be viewed as evaluative by the teachers they are trying to help (Bradley-Levine, 2017; Conan Simpson, 2021; Smylie & Denny, 1990). This can lead to “diminished affiliation” with peers (Basich, 2018; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). York-Barr and Duke (2004) noted, “The collegial norm did not necessarily extend to teacher leaders, because the nature of the relationship was hierarchical and violated professional norms of equality and independence” (p. 267-269). Weiner (2011) discussed the norm of egalitarianism and emphasized that teacher leaders may be seen as “uppity” or lose respect from other teachers for seemingly violating this norm; this was found to be particularly problematic for younger teachers.

Margolis and Huggins (2012), in their qualitative study of hybrid teacher leaders (formalized roles with classroom and TL responsibilities), found that role ambiguity in particular led to “relationship degradation” with peer teachers, including resentment and resistance (p. 968). Supovitz (2018) found “teacher leaders lacked the techniques and leverage to take direct efforts to break down the barriers that protect prevailing practice,” and this lack of agency could strain the social relationships imperative to teacher wellbeing (p. 74). Margolis and Huggins (2012) also found challenges among teacher leaders; without clear role definition, teacher leaders reported conflicts and relationship difficulties with one another as well. Struyve et al. (2014) asserted that peer relationships, which are often put at risk when teachers take on leadership practices, were what helps teachers create a feeling of identity and provide job motivation; disruption in relationships may also negatively impact other aspects of teacher wellbeing such “positive emotions.” Teachers engaging in leadership practices may be hesitant to formalize their



roles or identify themselves as a leader because of concern that doing so would damage their peer relationships (Bradley-Levine, 2017).

Positive impacts of TL on relationships were also postulated in five publications, but the impacts appear to be more diffuse. Generally, TL may improve relations between administrators and teachers (Baecher, 2012; Smylie & Denny, 1990). In a recent conceptual paper, Cherkowski (2018) described the cultivation of more informal, organic TL as leading to an increase in a “sense of belonging to a team of colleagues” (p. 64). Similarly, Hollweck and Doucet (2020), in their discussion of TL during the COVID-19 pandemic, saw teacher leadership as a mechanism for increasing collective efficacy that allowed teachers to “lean on one another for professional and personal support” (p. 301). Further, Struyve et al. (2014), focusing on more formalized roles, reported that teacher leaders have opportunities to cultivate new professional relationships outside of traditional hierarchies.

### **Meaning and Purpose**

Six publications discussed ways in which TL contributed to feelings that one’s work has meaning and purpose. Cherkowski (2018) discussed the strengths of TL at the whole school level as increasing wellbeing through feelings of “working toward a common purpose” (p. 64). Chew and Andrews (2010) noted teacher leaders feeling “a strong sense of purpose” (p. 72), and Taylor et al. (2011) discussed teacher leaders having opportunities to “engage meaningfully with colleagues” (p. 926). Wenner and Campbell (2017), quoting Chesson (2011), stated that there was “a stronger sense of seriousness of purpose regarding academics” in a school with high levels of TL (p. 152). Further, York-Barr and Duke (2004) proposed TL as an answer to feelings of “drift and detachment” that teachers experience during their careers and as a way to restore meaning to their work (p. 282). This sense of meaning was captured by one teacher who discussed participation in a TL program saying, “This program kind of gave me my zest for life back ... it truly gave me a sense of self and direction” (Lowery-Moore et al., 2016, p. 13).

### **Accomplishment/Competence**

A total of 13 publications had references to accomplishment/competence. Ten publications directly discussed positive (9 publications) and negative impacts (4) on feelings of accomplishment/competence. TL has the potential to provide a sense of accomplishment and feelings of competence for teachers through increases in efficacy recognition and reward for their work (Berry, 2019; Conan Simpson, 2021; Hunzicker, 2012; Nguyen et al., 2019; Smylie & Denny, 1990). Cann et al. (2021) found that, for “high wellbeing” teachers, receiving a promotion to a leadership role came with a sense of accomplishment (p. 207). Stout et al. (2018) indicated that, in more formal roles, teacher leaders find that their additional work is offset by a “high level of satisfaction with being acknowledged as a school leader” (p. 645). Baecher (2012) similarly asserted that teacher leaders are more likely to be known by school administrators, indicating an elevated status and the potential for feelings of accomplishment that go along with it. Lowery-Moore et al. (2016) found that just taking part in a TL training could improve teachers’ confidence.

However, teacher leaders may also experience a diminished sense of accomplishment if asked to perform tasks without being recognized for doing so (Bradley-Levine, 2017), or if they are given responsibilities that feel beyond their capacity. Stout et al. (2018) provided an illustrative quote from one participant who said, “I sometimes feel ‘whole school’ commitments detract from my ability to do my best for the students in my classroom” (p. 647). Working at

multiple levels of influence may reduce a teacher leader's sense of competence if they feel unable to do all tasks well. Relatedly, Margolis and Huggins (2012) discussed the experience of teacher leaders who were in ill-defined roles as feeling "frustration that time was not being spent productively" (p. 976); unclear roles and responsibilities may also lead to diminished wellbeing. Related to feelings of accomplishment, four publications addressed compensation for TL. Seligman (2011) directly addressed feelings of achievement related to receiving money and/or status and the potential impact on wellbeing. Baecher (2012) offered the following quote from one teacher who provided peer professional development: "I didn't receive any compensation, which rankles a little..." (p. 323). Muijs and Harris (2007) quote a teacher who did not want to engage in leadership "unless there is some additional salary point attached" (p. 120). While this may be related to legitimate aspects of financial stress that teachers may experience, these comments also may reflect feeling a lack of recognition which can diminish one's sense of accomplishment. It has been recommended that school administrators provide opportunities for reward and compensation to teachers for leadership activities (Conan Simpson, 2021; Everett & Dunn, 2021).

### **Autonomy**

Although not directly a part of the PERMA model, four publications discussed the relationship between TL and autonomy. Autonomy has previously been addressed as a core component for psychological wellbeing (Ryff, 1989). The importance of choice to engage (or not) in leadership activities was implicated for teacher wellbeing in three studies (Basich, 2018; Lai & Huang, 2021; Lusty, 2013). Further, feelings of autonomy may be increased by engaging in more formal roles. In their narrative inquiry study, Stout et al. (2018) conceptualized teachers in more formal "acting" administrative roles, as having "a high degree of autonomy" (p. 645).

## Discussion

**Figure 2**  
*Domains of Wellbeing Affected by TL*



In the research reviewed, several aspects of wellbeing appeared to be affected by engagement in teacher TL. There was evidence that all aspects of the PERMA model posited by Seligman (2011) could be affected. Additionally, autonomy, a key area of psychological wellbeing (Ryff, 1989), also emerged. Consideration of these links are important if we wish to support and retain teacher leaders.

To support teacher autonomy, the research reviewed highlights the importance of allowing teachers to be choiceful about their leadership roles and practices. There may also generally be an increase in feelings of autonomy as being in TL roles can increase power to make decisions and affect change in their environment. Deci and Ryan (2008) have highlighted that, in addition to being a part of psychological wellbeing, autonomy may also affect feelings of self-determination and motivation.

When a teacher leader's responsibilities are well-defined, there can also be increased feelings of engagement. It is important to note, however, that responsibilities being well-defined does not necessarily mean that the role is formalized; further, just because the role is formalized does not always make it well-defined. Margolis and Huggins (2012) specifically studied those in formal, established roles and found role ambiguity in their sample as well.

Frequently, TL was reported to cause stress and reduced positive emotions. However, when the forms leadership were more organic rather than formal, it was posited that TL could

increase positive emotions (Cherkowski, 2018). Impacts on wellbeing also appeared to partially depend on whether teacher leaders were being asked to influence different levels of the school environment (e.g., classroom and school-wide) and whether they had the autonomy to engage in or stop leadership activities. It is possible that when teacher leaders feel a sense of choice about engagement in leadership practices, coupled with efficacy to affect meaningful change when they do, they experience more positive emotions and improved wellbeing.

Impacts of TL on feelings of accomplishment or competence were also indicated; the multiplicity of levels where teachers were trying to affect change and the support and acknowledgment they received from higher administration for their work impacted the experience. There also appears to be a relationship between TL identity and a sense of accomplishment, however, the directionality is more complex. In their qualitative study, Sinha and Hanuscin (2017) reported that accomplishment was linked with the development of identity such that as teachers experienced success in leadership, they were more likely to identify as a “teacher leader” regardless of role formality.

Relationships with peers, which has been implicated as a strong contributor to wellbeing was reported to be negatively impacted by TL. Teacher leaders reported feelings of resentment and resistance from colleagues, which led to disruptions in peer relationships. Especially in more formal roles, teacher identity within the school was also impacted as the leadership role shifted their place in the hierarchy. That said, these shifts may be dependent on the school culture; schools that are more collaborative may respond more positively to TL (Harris & Mujis, 2003). Further, the length of time in a leadership role may be important; while social relationships with peers may be disrupted when a teacher takes on leadership activities, those social disruptions may be temporary (Hofstein et al., 2004). In more formal positions, there may be an adjustment period that causes a reorienting of social relationships; the relationships that are disturbed as someone begins engaging in TL may be rebuilt in new ways that are appropriate for the new role. Further, these social relationships may be replaced with new social relationships for teachers who stay in leadership roles; they may experience enhanced relationships with other teacher leaders and administration (Baecher, 2012; Basich, 2018). These social relationships are more likely to exist when a network of teacher leaders exists (Boylan, 2018).

The level of formality associated with the practices also appears to be impactful for peer relationships. Organic or improvised TL may not cause the same strain on social relationships, given that this type of TL may be more about short-term task completion. While teacher leaders in these organic or improvised roles may receive some role-related resistance or some jealousy, this may fade as tasks are completed. These less-formal types of TL, although they may create some ambiguity, may have more positive effects on wellbeing; as Basich (2018) said, “Being able to pick and choose areas of interest surely must be exciting because the responsibilities and pressures of formal leadership are not present” (p. 149). While these less-formal roles may be more challenging to manage for administration, they allow more freedom for teachers to pick up and set down projects so they can focus on their classrooms as needed.

### **Implications for Practice and Future Scholarship**

In this narrative review, several ways that the conditions under which TL occurs can potentially impact aspects of teacher wellbeing were identified. Given the ways in which teachers are often asked to become leaders, especially in times of crisis, it may behoove

administrators and others involved in teacher development to attend to growing leadership and wellbeing simultaneously.

### **Implications for Practice**

It is crucial to support teacher leaders in developing skills to support their own wellbeing. During the COVID-19 pandemic, schools were forced into a variety of hybrid and remote teaching models, which resulted in an urgent need for TL through peer collaboration, professional development of technical skills, and alternative supports for children and families (Hefnawi, 2020). Novice teachers found themselves thrust into leadership roles, especially surrounding the use of technology (Rutten et al., 2022). This expansion of TL to novice teachers and those not traditionally in leadership roles can be a positive change—if educational systems offer appropriate scaffolding, training, and support.

Teaching skills for leadership and wellbeing early on in pre-service and early-career teacher education is one way to assure that teachers have the knowledge and the resilience to play the part. Recent research from Australia focuses on promoting early-career teacher resilience through supportive practices, policies and school culture, and attention to the development of relationships and teacher identity (Johnson et al., 2014). Additionally, formal programs are available to support skills through professional development (e.g., Stress Management and Resiliency Training [SMART], Cultivating Awareness and Resilience in Education [CARE]); these programs can help increase wellbeing (Crain et al., 2017; Hwang et al., 2017; Schussler et al., 2019), including for those in leadership roles (Doyle Fosco et al., 2023; Mahfouz, 2018).

Given that exposure to a multitude of stressors can reduce wellbeing, it is also imperative that, as teachers are taking on leadership roles and practices, attention is paid to workload. Teachers need time devoted to developing the skills needed for leadership and engaging in leadership activities (Berry, 2019; Harris & Mujis, 2003). Many studies indicated increased stress for teacher leaders, in part due to increased responsibilities. It is important to help with stressor management, as well as encouraging stress management to support wellbeing.

Our findings carry potentially significant implications for administrators who are poised to play a decisive role in promoting teacher leaders' wellbeing. Given challenges experienced with burnout and turnover in schools (Ingersoll et al., 2018), creating positive leadership experiences may be a way of keeping experienced teachers engaged and motivated. Recommendations to support TL in schools includes fostering a supportive school culture so that everyone is working toward similar goals; given the challenges faced by teacher leaders to with their peers, this structure is imperative (Conan Simpson, 2021). Further, administrators may consider creating flexible opportunities for teachers to explore their own leadership, checking in regularly to assessing what conditions (e.g., practices, level of influence) works best for each teacher. Administrators could determine whether a formal role is wanted and whether leadership activities are promoting or hindering aspects of teacher wellbeing. In consultation with teacher leaders, administrators would be better positioned to adjust any designated responsibilities in ways that encourage teacher autonomy and is responsive to changing needs. If administrators wish to assign formalized TL roles, appropriate titles, compensation, and recognition should be provided as research indicates that teachers who do not feel valued in their roles will likely wane in their engagement.

Regardless of role formality, it is important to develop teachers' identities as leaders so they feel empowered to affect change (Conan Simpson, 2021; Hunzicker, 2017). Administrators

can provide the infrastructure and supervision needed to form a productive and growing teacher leadership community of practice. Given that role ambiguity may impact feelings of engagement and a sense of accomplishment (Basich, 2018; Margolis & Huggins, 2012), which may impact a teacher's leadership identity, providing administrative guidance to structure TL may support wellbeing, especially when transitioning into a new role. If administrators can successfully promote mutual engagement in research-backed processes for constructing and reconstructing practice, such as practitioner inquiry (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009; Rutten, 2021), teacher leaders may be better positioned to forge the shared repertoires of practice that support the strong identities associated with increased wellbeing.

Our findings carry further implications for teacher educators involved in the preparation of teacher leaders. This review demonstrates that because the experience of TL is so multifaceted, there is no "one-size-fits-all" curriculum that could prepare teacher leaders while also promoting teacher wellbeing. Although some universities offer formalized TL programs, little is known about whether and how such programs, particularly those delivered primarily or exclusively online, attend to the wellbeing of the teacher leaders they prepare. We suggest that teacher educators working within such programs consider a developmental approach (e.g., Glickman et al., 2019) to promoting TL in conjunction with teacher wellbeing.

### **Implications for Future Scholarship**

Moving forward, researchers should consider increases and decreases in individual elements of teacher wellbeing for teacher leaders. This review found evidence of both positive and negative impacts, depending on the component examined. Further, researchers should be clear about their conceptualization of TL. Measurement of TL practices should be considered as leadership can take on different forms and have differential effects on peer relationships. For example, TL that involves evaluative practices may be met with more resistance than other approaches to TL. Finally, workplace demographic differences such as the type of institution (e.g., PK-12, public, charter), rurality, and economic standing should be considered in future research as they may impact both the experience of TL and teacher wellbeing. Additional research is also needed to explore the best approaches to TL that is supportive of wellbeing.

### **Limitations**

A key limitation of this review was the lack of scholarship that directly explores the relationships between TL and teacher wellbeing. Additionally, this review was primarily focused on the U.S. education system. Other education systems have more formalized paths to teacher leadership (Chew & Andrews, 2010; Goodwin, 2012). Further, we primarily examined workplace wellbeing, while the theories of wellbeing explored in this review extend to all aspects of one's life (Ryff, 1989; Seligman, 2011). The wellbeing of the whole teacher was beyond the scope of this review but should be considered for future research.

While this reviewed focused on TL, it is also important to acknowledge that previous studies have shown that organizational culture plays a significant role in teacher wellbeing (Khan, 2016; Rosenholtz, 1991). Without addressing TL directly, Seashore Louis (2006) examined cultural elements needed in schools to build structures that would potentially support these practices, including professional community, organizational learning, and trust; findings suggest the importance of communication and professional development and informal accountability mechanisms. Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2018) also argued for the importance of

collective culture—a shared understanding of goals and values among teachers and administration; findings demonstrated that collective culture was related to outcomes associated with teacher wellbeing, including positive relationships with job satisfaction and negative relationships with burnout. While these aspects were not explored in depth in this study, it is crucial to recognize that the wellbeing of teachers and their decision to engage in leadership is not only a personal process; there are also systemic antecedents that should be acknowledged and addressed.

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