



Beginning teachers' opportunities for enacting informal teacher leadership: perceptions of teachers and school management staff members

Jacobiene Meirink, Anna Van Der Want, Monika Louws, Paulien Meijer, Helma Oolbekkink-Marchand & Harmen Schaap

To cite this article: Jacobiene Meirink, Anna Van Der Want, Monika Louws, Paulien Meijer, Helma Oolbekkink-Marchand & Harmen Schaap (2020) Beginning teachers' opportunities for enacting informal teacher leadership: perceptions of teachers and school management staff members, European Journal of Teacher Education, 43:2, 243-257, DOI: [10.1080/02619768.2019.1672654](https://doi.org/10.1080/02619768.2019.1672654)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/02619768.2019.1672654>



© 2019 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group.



Published online: 17 Oct 2019.



[Submit your article to this journal](#)



Article views: 1602



[View related articles](#)





[View Crossmark data](#)



Citing articles: 2 [View citing articles](#)

Beginning teachers' opportunities for enacting informal teacher leadership: perceptions of teachers and school management staff members

Jacobiene Meirink^a, Anna Van Der Want^{a,b}, Monika Louws^c, Paulien Meijer^d, Helma Oolbekkink-Marchand ^{b,d} and Harmen Schaap ^d

^aICLON, Leiden University Graduate School of Teaching, Leiden, The Netherlands; ^bHAN, University of Applied Sciences, Nijmegen, the Netherlands; ^cUtrecht University, Utrecht, The Netherlands; ^dRadboud Teachers Academy, Radboud University Nijmegen, Nijmegen, The Netherlands

ABSTRACT

Teacher leadership is often connected to experienced teachers as it is assumed that a certain level of knowledge and experience is needed. Informal teacher leadership, however, can also be expected from beginning teachers. The aim of this study is to study beginning teachers' opportunities for enacting leadership. Twelve pairs, consisting of one school management staff member (e.g. principal, administrators, head of departments) and one beginning teacher, were interviewed. For the analyses, three codes describing levels of leadership (witness, participation, ownership) were used to label the situations reported by the novices and staff members in which they experienced and observed leadership. The findings of this study show that it is possible for beginning teachers to enact leadership roles. They do, however, need to develop knowledge and skills for this purpose. To optimise these leadership competencies, teacher education programmes could consider including this more explicitly in their curriculum.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 20 December 2018
Accepted 4 August 2019

KEYWORDS

Informal teacher leadership; beginning teachers; subject matter department development; school development

1. Introduction

Good education requires teachers who are able to improve their teaching practice at both the subject matter level and the school level. Schools need teacher leaders who can contribute to the quality of education and the implementation of educational innovations (Van der Heijden et al. 2018; Ketelaar et al. 2012; King and Stevenson 2017). Teacher leadership is often connected to experienced or expert teachers as it is assumed that a certain level of knowledge and experience are needed to effectively improve the quality of teaching. Informal teacher leadership, however, can also be expected from beginning teachers (Carver and Meier 2013; Muijs, Chapman, and Armstrong 2013). Beginning teachers are expected to have a professional stance that allows them to define learning

CONTACT Jacobiene Meirink  meirink@iclon.leidenuniv.nl  ICLON, Leiden University Graduate School of Teaching, Leiden, The Netherlands

With informal teacher leadership we refer to how teachers, individually and collectively, improve their teacher practice and are responsible for their own professional learning and development. Classroom leadership, which refers to how teachers lead the activities of students in their classrooms is not the focus of this study.

© 2019 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group.

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>), which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited, and is not altered, transformed, or built upon in any way.

goals that will help them to continuously improve their own teaching practice (Carver and Meier 2013; MacBeath and Dempster 2008).

Previous research shows that although novice teachers view teacher leadership along a spectrum of possibilities, they feel constrained by their own experiences and contexts (Carver and Meier 2013; Meirink and Van der Want 2018; Rogers and Scales 2013; Scales and Rogers 2017). Until now, regular initial teacher education programmes and induction programmes have not, or only in a limited manner, addressed this topic in their curriculum (Curry et al. 2008). Exceptions are some studies on teacher leadership courses in graduate programmes (Carver and Meier 2013; Henning et al. 2004; Ross et al. 2011; Van Zeer et al. 2006)

Previous studies have primarily focused on conceptualising teacher leadership (Poekert, Alexandrou, and Shannon 2016), perceptions of teacher leadership and conditions for enacting teacher leadership (Carver and Meier 2013; Rogers and Scales 2013; Scales and Rogers 2017), teacher leadership within a specific context (e.g. urban context, Henning et al. 2004), or the importance of conducting research as part of developing teacher leadership (Van Zeer et al. 2006). Although previous research has shown that novice teachers view teacher leadership along a spectrum of possibilities (Carver and Meier 2013; Meirink and Van der Want 2018; Rogers and Scales 2013; Scales and Rogers 2017), empirical research remains limited (Carver and Meier 2013; Rogers and Scales 2013).

Therefore, this study aims to provide more detailed insights into what opportunities beginning teachers can have to enact leadership in their classroom and school. These insights can contribute to better understanding of how to support and optimise the conditions for beginning teachers to develop towards strong teacher leaders.

2. Theoretical framework

Informal teacher leadership

Since York-Barr and Duke (2004) published their review study on teacher leadership, many studies have been conducted on teacher leaders and teacher leadership. The definitions of teacher leadership vary and the description of the concept 'teacher leadership' has become more diverse. Teacher leadership can be defined 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. Such leadership involves three intentional development foci: individual development, collaboration or team development, and organisational development' (York-Barr and Duke 2004, 287). Teacher leadership connects to the idea of distributed leadership, and its nature is understood as 'fluid and emergent, rather than a fixed phenomenon' (Gronn 2000, 324).

Whereas previously teacher leadership often referred to more formal leadership positions for selected teachers (such as department chair, curriculum specialist, new mentor teacher), in this study teacher leadership is viewed more informally, 'as a professional stance that all teachers can draw upon' (Carver and Meier 2013). Teacher leadership is not a choice, it is a requirement (MacBeath and Dempster 2008), or at least a potential pathway for all teachers (Carver and Meier 2013). Teacher leadership requires an 'active involvement of individuals at all levels and within all domains of an organization' (York-Barr and Duke 2004,

255). Teacher leaders can be described as hard-working colleagues who have a clearly developed philosophy on education, perceive themselves as lifelong learners, are creative and innovative, and respected and valued by colleagues. In addition, teacher leaders build trust with colleagues, are supportive, promote growth among colleagues, are effective in communicating, and able to handle conflict (York-Barr and Duke 2004). Others (MacBeath and Dempster 2008) have defined five principles of informal leadership: 1) focus on working with everyone within a school; 2) creating and sustaining conditions that favour student and teacher learning; 3) contributing to transparent communication; 4) leadership as shared leadership; and 5) accountability for their actions.

Teachers can enact leadership on different levels or areas and to different degrees. Following King and Stevenson (2017) and Frost (2008), irrespective of their formal roles, teachers in this study are perceived as (informal) leaders both inside and outside their classrooms. Whereas Poekert, Alexandrou, and Shannon (2016) defined three areas of teacher leadership (individual, teams, organisation), others have distinguished four areas: 1) the classroom; 2) the subject team focusing on curricular and instructional issues; 3) the interdisciplinary team focusing on management or general issues throughout the year; and 4) the organisation (Muijs, Chapman, and Armstrong 2013; Szeto and Cheng 2018).

Novice teacher leadership

Based on the definition of York-Barr and Duke (2004), the first focus of novice teacher leadership can include being able to lead the activities of students in their classroom. Within the boundaries of the classroom level, for novice teachers it can also refer to improving their teaching practices as well as being responsible for their own professional learning and development. Teacher education programmes in the Netherlands consider the development of such a professional attitude as an important goal for novice teachers. They aim for preparing teachers who can reflect on and analyse their teaching practices in a deliberate way (Bronkhorst et al. 2014).

In addition to these goals at the micro level, it could be argued that novice teachers could be teacher leaders with a focus on collaboration or team development, which can be referred to as the meso level. Previous research has shown that young teachers who start teaching are often highly ambitious and passionate about their new profession, and therefore want to contribute to improving education inside and outside the classroom (Levenson 2014). They are keen on exercising leadership roles (both formal and informal) (Muijs, Chapman, and Armstrong 2013). Their ideas and possible innovative practices are important contributions to the school improvement. For novice teachers, however, it is not always easy to enact their leadership roles on this school level. They may run into 'power issues' between leaders and followers; for example, colleagues who do not want to change their practices or do not take the young teachers' ideas seriously. The latter group can have concerns about novice teachers' skills and abilities to lead (Grimsæth, Nordvik, and Bergsvik 2008) and consider these leadership roles as an unwelcome distraction from learning to be a leader in the classroom. Correa, Martinez-Arbelaz, and Aberasturi-Appraiz (2015) have referred to this phenomenon as the 'postmodern reality shock', since the potential of novice teachers to change

education based on their knowledge and skills is not fully used in practice. Their ideas can lead to resistance rather than enthusiasm of their more experienced colleagues (Correa, Martinez-Arbelaz, and Aberasturi-Apraiz 2015; Ulvik and Langørgen 2012). Highly qualified beginning teachers are often not seen as a source for learning in schools. A high workload, an individualistic school culture, or low status of beginning teachers are reasons for rejecting the new input of novice teachers (Ulvik and Langørgen 2012).

Fostering novice teacher leadership

Furthermore, previous studies have shown that some novice teachers are not only willing to take up leadership roles, but they are able to enact these roles successfully. Within the context of an alternative certification programme, Teach First, Muijs, Chapman, and Armstrong (2013) have claimed that in schools where new teachers formed a large proportion of the teaching staff a significant contribution was made to the school. Rogers and Scales (2013) distinguished three levels of leadership in their study on preservice teachers' leadership. In their analyses of written essays of preservice teachers about leadership three codes were used: *witness*; *participation*; and *ownership*. *Witness* can be described as attending meetings and activities as a part of a regular responsibility. In addition, preservice teachers' describing that they share the information they got from attending a workshop were coded with this label. *Participation* is defined as assisting other teachers or school personnel during activities or meetings. Teacher leaders with *ownership* take the initiative to organise something aligning with their educational vision and providing the support needed to accomplish the task. The three levels of leadership were equally divided over the reported activities. From a development perspective, it can be argued that novice teachers need time and support to develop themselves in these leadership roles. Cheng and Szeto (2016) propose a step-by-step approach. Novices can start with leading small tasks and grow into more complex initiatives and projects in schools over time. The success of novice teachers' development into these roles depends on administrative support and facilitation, as well as novices' motivation and willingness to become or be a teacher leader. This interplay between principals' and novice teachers' actions are important to take into account in cases where teacher leadership is strived for (Cheng and Szeto 2016).

Until now, regular initial teacher education programmes and induction programmes have not, or only in a limited manner, addressed this topic in their curriculum (Curry et al. 2008; Cheng and Szeto 2016). Learning how to contribute to school development in an effective manner is not (extensively) discussed in literature on novice teachers' leadership (Snoek 2017). To support them in their development more knowledge on how informal leadership of beginning teachers connects to the contexts in which they work is needed. The aim of this study is therefore to gain more insight into beginning teachers' opportunities to enact leadership. Both the perspective of beginning teachers as well as school management members are used to investigate these opportunities.

The central research question is: *What are beginning teachers' opportunities for enacting leadership on a team and school organisation level?*

3. Method

This research can be characterised as a descriptive, exploratory study. A small number of beginning teachers ($n = 12$) were included in the study to better understand beginning teachers' possibilities for teacher leadership in the context of an alternative certification programme. These twelve beginning teachers worked at 11 different school for secondary education in different parts of the Netherlands. School management staff members ($n = 11$) were also included in this study based on previous research in which their pivotal role on teacher leadership is underlined (Oolbekkink-Marchand, Leeferink, and Meijer 2018; Ross et al. 2011; York-Barr and Duke 2004). This contributed to better understanding of school management staff members' perceptions on the level of their beginning teachers' leadership. School management staff members in this study are principals, administrators, and head of departments. School management staff members are part of the school management and formally decide on the contract and assessment of the teachers.

In total, 12 pairs consisting of one school management staff member and one novice teacher were included in this study.

The alternative certification programme

Similar to programmes like Teach First and Teach for America, in the Netherlands, alternative certification programmes were established to motivate young excellent academics to work in education. In these two-year training programmes, teachers work two or three days per week as a teacher in a school for secondary education. The other days they follow a regular university teacher-training programme and master classes specifically aimed at teacher leadership skills. The ultimate goal of the programmes is to educate young professionals who can both direct their own professional development and contribute to school development.

Participants

Novice teachers from three different teacher education institutes were asked to participate in this interview study. Twelve novice teachers agreed to participate. The novice teachers were in their twenties; all had paid jobs, working three-to-four days per week as a teacher and taught in urban or rural schools. Eight teachers were female; four teachers were male. The school management staff members ($n = 11$; two female, nine male) had paid jobs in school management. One school management staff member was paired with two novice teachers in our sample, resulting in twelve pairs of novice teachers and school management staff members.

Table 1 gives an overview of the data collection. We interviewed the novice teachers after their first and second year of teaching. The outcomes of the first interview served as a starting point to discuss beginning teachers' leadership during the second interview. The data from the second interview are the focus of this study. In both of these semi-structured interviews the beginning teachers were asked to provide some background information about themselves and describe experiences/situations at school (cf. key experiences in a story line method; Meijer, de Graaf, and Meirink 2011), which they

Table 1. Overview of data collection.

	May-July (End of first year of alternative certification programme)	April	May-July (End of second year of alternative certifica- tion programme)
Novice teachers	Interview 1		Interview 2
School management staff members		Phone interview	Phone interview

perceived as a possibility in enacting leadership. We asked them to make a distinction in possibilities they perceived in their subject matter department and possibilities at the school level. To obtain a detailed insight in these experiences, we asked them to describe when this situation occurred, who were involved (other teachers, staff members, etc.) and how this had influenced them.

In the second interview we intended to map experiences/situations (that the beginning teachers perceived as a possibility to enact leadership) additional to those mentioned in the first interview. For this purpose, a summary of the novice teachers' responses in the first interview was constructed. These summaries were presented to the novice teachers, accompanied by the question of whether any changes in their experiences had created possibilities for leadership and, if so, how these changes could be characterised. Also we asked them what contributed to these changes, or in other words what were promoting and constraining factors. Furthermore, new experiences of beginning teachers in which they could enact their leadership role were discussed. Similar to the first interview, we asked them to describe this experiences as detailed as possible, by indicating which colleagues were involved, what type of influence they had and how this influenced their development as a teacher. All interviews with the novice teachers were conducted by the first two authors and lasted about 45 to 60 minutes each. In most cases the interview took place at the school of the novice teacher.

After the first interview we asked the novice teachers who we could contact in their school to study the school management perspective on (informal) teacher leadership in the context of an alternative certification programme. Based on these contacts, 11 school management staff members were interviewed by phone. They were asked how they perceived teacher leadership in general at their school. More specifically, they were asked how they perceived beginning teachers' opportunities to enact leadership at the subject matter department level and the school level in general. If possible, they could describe concrete experiences or situations of beginning teachers' leadership opportunities. The first two authors also held the interviews with the school management staff members. The interviews were conducted by phone and lasted about 20 to 30 minutes each.

4. Data analysis

Concerning the interviews with novice teachers, the audio data were transcribed and then coded in ATLAS-ti (Friese 2012). Each situation that was described by a novice teacher as a possibility for enacting teacher leadership was perceived as a unit of analysis. The reported possibilities in the first interview were summarised based on a short description of the situation; people involved; and the role of the novice teacher. The coding scheme

Table 2. Description of used codes.

Code	Description
Subject matter department	Possibilities to enact leadership that are related to a subject (i.e. Chemistry), subject matter colleagues/team, and/or within class activities.
School	Possibilities to enact leadership related to the school in general; usually outside regular class activities (e.g. organising sports or cultural activities; initiating research projects, curriculum innovation committees).
Witness	Attending meetings and activities passively without engaging/participating in discussions.
Participation	Assisting other teachers or school personnel during activities or meetings.
Ownership	Initiating or organising something in alignment with their educational vision and providing the organisation with the support needed to accomplish the task.

was discussed with experts in the field (researchers, teacher educators, and teachers) who suggested adding the code 'context': subject matter department or school. Next, for each respondent a summary of their possibilities for leadership in 1) subject matter department and 2) school was made which was used in the second interview.

The data of the second interview with the beginning teachers were coded in a similar manner. Every situation was firstly assigned with the code: main theme (subject matter/school). Secondly, to compare beginning teachers' leadership experiences, we used three codes describing the levels of leadership (witness, participation, ownership (Rogers and Scales 2013) (see Table 2 for a description of the codes). The code 'witness' was slightly adjusted, to distinguish it more from the code 'participation'. Thirdly, a short description of the situation in key words was added for each situation. In case the codes subject matter and school were both assigned, the situation was, based on the content description of the respondent, divided into two situations that enabled one main theme (subject matter or school) to be assigned per situation. Considering the intensity level, in some cases two codes were assigned per situation.

The interviews with school management staff were transcribed and coded similarly to the second interviews with the beginning teachers. Every situation in which a school management staff member described a beginning teachers' potential in enacting leadership was assigned codes in the following two categories: main theme (subject matter/school) and intensity level (witness/participation/ownership). In addition, a short description of the situation in key words was added for each situation. In case the codes' subject matter or school was assigned, the situation was, based on the content description of the respondent, divided into two situations that enabled one main theme (subject matter of school) to be assigned per situation. Considering the intensity level, in some cases two codes were assigned per situation.

To ensure the quality and transparency of the analysis, the coding scheme of both the interviews with novice teachers and the interviews with the school management staff was developed by the first and second author in close collaboration. Parts of the data were coded together by both authors independently and afterwards compared. In case of differences, these were discussed until consensus about the codes was reached.

5. Results

Opportunities for subject matter department development

Table 3 shows that most beginning teachers perceived opportunities in enacting leadership in their subject matter department. In both groups the perception of these possibilities could be characterised with the labels ‘participation’ and ‘ownership’. Both labels were equally distributed for the reported possibilities. The exception was Jacob, whose reported possibilities for enacting leadership were coded with the label ‘witness’ (Jacob) and ‘none’ (Alex, his school management staff member). Jacob had difficulties with teaching, did not feel comfortable at the school, and did not actively engage in opportunities for leadership. Jacob stopped teaching in his second year as a result of burn out.

The opportunities related to the subject matter department as reported by both groups can be categorised in three types: 1) opportunities related to regular work/day-to-day routines (develop tests and exams, planners, etc.); 2) opportunities in terms of projects (multiple/one-day excursions to cultural/historical sites, interdisciplinary language emerging projects, etc.); and 3) opportunities linked to innovation (choosing new books, teaching methods).

Table 3. Beginning teachers’ potential for leadership in subject matter department.

Beginning teacher (alias)	Level of leadership (self-perception)	School management staff member (alias)	Level of leadership (perceived by school management staff member)	Context description of possibility for leadership
Rachel	Ownership	Howard	Ownership	Initiative for innovating current teaching practices.
Madison	Participation	Ava	Participation	Collaboration in team teaching initiative for 60 pupils.
Connor	Ownership	Liam	Participation	Beginning teacher refers to taking the lead in appointing a new technical teaching assistant. Staff member subscribes the active involvement of the beginning teacher in the subject matter department.
Leo	Ownership	Harvey	Participation	Developing materials for year 3. Staff member doesn’t see the added value for other colleagues.
Jacob	Witness	Alex	None	According to school management staff member the teaching profession doesn’t fit the beginning teacher.
Holly	Participation	Jake	Ownership	Developing materials vs. organising projects for several foreign languages.
Michelle	Ownership	Mason	Ownership	Innovative ideas and methods. Risk of not taking ideas and beliefs of colleagues into account.
Emily	Ownership	Lee	Ownership	Sharing experiments in own teaching practice. Staff member adds ‘initiative in bigger projects’.
Arthur	Ownership	Willow	<i>Not reported in interview</i>	Redesigning assessment task for students.
Charlotte	Participation	Willow	<i>Not reported in interview</i>	Structuring planning and assessment procedures + sharing ideas (not really innovative).
Abigail	Participation	Joseph	Participation	No big ideas yet to influence colleagues’ teaching practices.
Tracy	Participation	Adrian	Participation	Possibility to make new planning for next school year, but innovative ideas are not possible to enact.

In six of the total of 12 cases of teachers and school management staff members the level of leadership was comparable in the descriptions in the interviews. For example, Howard reported about beginning teacher Rachel: *'Rachel was also really inquiry oriented, she really focused on innovation of teaching methods and on developing the Cambridge programme'*. By taking initiative to continuously innovate the pedagogies used in her subject domain, this beginning teacher showed a level of leadership that was labelled with 'ownership'. Rachel herself also was very positive about the ideas for changing education within her subject matter domain (ownership). At the same time, however, she experienced that it was not always easy to enact these ideas. Her ideas for experimenting with new materials or implementing new methods were not always agreed upon by the more experienced colleagues. In this case, the openness of colleagues towards changes in the curriculum can be viewed as a constraining factor in Rachel's potential to enact leadership in her subject matter department. In the second interview, she reported about the willingness of her colleagues to cooperate with her in changing the curriculum:

'I had a conflict this year with a colleague who didn't want to use rubrics for assessing oral presentations of students. And I don't think that's an objective way of giving marks. [...] That colleague said to me: "but we have done it like this for years and it works just fine". I am really allergic to that, because then I think, that's not an argument [...].'

Next to the six cases in which the level of reported leadership possibilities was comparable between beginning teachers and school management staff members, differences were also found. In the case of beginning teacher Holly, Jake reported on a higher level of leadership possibilities compared with Holly. Jake described the level in terms of ownership, as she took the initiative to redevelop or redesign existing projects, whereas more experienced teachers sometimes complain about the amount of work it will take them to do a task. Two other beginning teachers, Connor and Leo, described in the interviews the possibilities to enact leadership in their subject matter department at the level of 'ownership', as they developed new materials for a year group or did coordinative tasks in their team. The school management staff members endorsed the active participation of both beginning teachers but did not report about taking initiative to enact leadership in their subject matter department.

Opportunities for school development

The possibilities for enacting leadership in the school were developed from a few possibilities/opportunities as perceived by a few beginning teachers in the first year of teaching, and increased to most of the beginning teachers in the second year of teaching. The opportunities were related to: 1) organising extra-curricular activities (e.g. school-wide excursions); 2) organising cross-curricular activities (e.g. projects related to ICT or self-regulated learning); 3) researching school-related issues (e.g. student retention, student excellence); and 4) participating during (formal) meetings/gatherings with colleagues.

These opportunities to enact leadership in the school could be categorised in levels varying from witness to participation and ownership. As Table 4 shows, for six beginning teachers their perceived opportunities to enact leadership in the school could be categorised as 'participation'. Four teachers perceived possibilities that could be categorised as 'ownership', and for two teachers, both 'participation' and 'ownership' were assigned as

Table 4. Beginning teachers' possibilities for leadership in school.

Alias beginning teacher	Beginning teacher	Alias school management staff member	School management staff member	Activities in key words
Rachel	Participation	Howard	Participation	Participating in school wide projects on excellence.
Madison	Participation	Ava	Participation	Participating in projects on co-teaching and ICT.
Connor	Participation Ownership	Liam	Participation	Participating in formal meetings with colleagues, organising international study trip.
Leo	Participation	Harvey	Witness	Together with others organising and participating. and cross-curricular science project.
Jacob Holly	Participation Ownership	Alex Jake	Witness Ownership	Participating in induction activities. Curriculum development, organising international study trip.
Michelle Emily	Ownership Participation Ownership	Mason Lee	Witness Ownership	Organising social activities for staff. Organising cross curricular project, coordinating 'learning lab'.
Arthur	Ownership	Willow	Ownership	Organising extra-curricular activities, simulating educational development through research.
Charlotte	Ownership	Willow	Ownership	Designing, implementing, and evaluating new subject 'study skills'.
Abigail Tracy	Participation Participation	Joseph Adrian	Participation [missing data]	Conducting research on student retention. Suggesting something during formal meetings with colleagues.

categories. These two teachers mentioned multiple opportunities that were divided into either participation or ownership.

As for the school management staff members, they experienced witness, participation, and ownership among their beginning teachers. In six cases, the perception of the school management staff member and of the beginning teacher were similar (e.g. both the school management staff members' and the beginning teachers' perceptions on the beginning teachers' leadership could be characterised as 'ownership'). This was seen, for example, with Willow, the school management staff member of both Arthur and Charlotte. Willow, Arthur, and Charlotte perceived opportunities to enact leadership concerning school development that can be categorised as 'ownership'. Willow was very content with the possibilities (and actions) of both Arthur and Charlotte concerning their enactment of leadership in the school. Arthur and Charlotte both conducted research at school to gain insight into educational issues (for instance, student retention and study skills). As a school management staff member, Willow tried to facilitate opportunities to enact leadership in the school. She explained: *'They get space in (...). Yes in terms of time. By not giving them a full schedule, they get space in time, but they also get space in terms of giving them a lot of support. Everybody knows that they are doing that research project and everybody participates. (...) You know, in our school they get a lot of space and recognition'*.

A few discrepancies could be found in this case between the perception of the teachers and the school management staff members. For instance, three school management staff members perceived hardly any possibilities to enact leadership for 'their' beginning

teacher (Leo, Jacob, Michelle); this was coded as 'witness'. The school management staff members varied in their reasoning about the lack of opportunities for the beginning teachers to enact leadership in the context of the school. Jacob was lacking the right personality and passion for teaching. Leo needed more time to develop himself as a teacher and 'should have started as an intern instead of with a paid job' and Michelle had difficulties in creating support for her innovative ideas. Although these three school management staff members did not perceive opportunities for their beginning teachers (Leo, Jacob, Michelle), the beginning teachers themselves did perceive some options that could be characterised as participation (Leo, Jacob) and ownership (Michelle).

Other discrepancies between the perception of the beginning teacher and school management staff member were the cases of Connor (participation/ownership) and Liam (participation). Whereas Connor perceived his potential to enact leadership concerning school as 'participation or ownership', his school management staff member, Liam, viewed Connors' possibilities as 'participation'.

6. Discussion and conclusion

In this study, beginning teachers' opportunities to enact their leadership roles were explored from the perspective of school management members and from the beginning teachers themselves. From previous research it is known that the interplay between principals' and novice teachers' actions is important to successfully develop leadership roles (Szeto and Cheng 2018). The semi-structured interviews with the beginning teachers and their school leaders show that efforts in enacting leadership can firstly be divided into efforts at the subject matter department level and efforts at the school level. At the subject matter department level, a more detailed division could be made into efforts related to regular work/day-to-day routines, efforts in terms of projects, and efforts linked to innovation. For the school level, the efforts could be characterised in terms of organising extra-curricular or cross-curricular activities, research projects, and participation during formal meetings with colleagues.

By comparing how beginning teachers and school management staff members reported about the level of leadership, we first found that both groups perceived many efforts in terms of active participation or even in terms of proactive efforts, the latter labelled with 'ownership'. Although the three levels assume a hierarchical order, that is 'ownership' is a more preferred way of enacting leadership than 'participation' or even 'witness', we argue that is not necessarily true for teachers in a school organisation. Especially for beginning teachers, it is important that they aim to develop and optimise their teaching knowledge and skills in their own teacher practice as soon as possible. Efforts to enact leadership roles on a more meso level can distract them from doing this. Also, merely striving for the ownership level will result in a large amount of innovative ideas, which ultimately can lead to frustration if not evenly compensated with some routines (Bransford et al. 2005).

Secondly, in about half of the cases both groups showed similarities in the level of leadership they reported. This similarity, however, does not necessarily mean that the perceptions of the effort were the same. For some beginning teachers, the efforts to innovate existing work routines within the subject matter department were not easy, as colleagues showed resistance or reacted in a reserved manner. This finding is in line with

previous research in which status issues of beginning teachers and the concept ‘post-modern reality shock’ have been described (Grimsæth, Nordvik, and Bergsvik 2008; Correa, Martinez-Arbelaiz, and Aberasturi-Apraiz 2015; Ulvik and Langørgen 2012). The school management members did not report about the obstacles in enacting leadership in the interviews, which could indicate that they did not know about these difficulties or that they did not acknowledge them. For both explanations, it could be argued that to effectively support beginning teachers in learning how to enact teacher leadership on a meso level, more interaction between both groups is necessary. Beginning teachers could intensify this relationship by discussing the issues they encounter with their colleagues more often with their school leaders and asking for advice in solving them. School management members, on the other hand, can inquire on a more regular basis with the beginning teachers regarding ideas and plans that they have and think along with them about successful ways to implement these ideas.

Next to the similarities between beginning teachers and school management members in how they report about the activeness of efforts to enact leadership, differences were also found. In most cases, the school management members reported about the efforts with a lower level of activeness. For the school level, three of them even argued that the beginning teachers only acted on a ‘witness’ level, which means that they did not employ activities that are in line with the idea of teacher leadership. The beginning teachers, on the other hand, did report about their efforts for enacting leadership on an active participation level. Again, it can be argued that more interaction between beginning teachers and school management members is needed to overcome these different perceptions in order for them to work as a team. On a more conceptual level, the necessity of alignment between teachers’ and school management members’ perceptions of leadership efforts can be debated. School management members can hold different views on what types of efforts beginning teachers should enact to be categorised with ‘ownership’; for example, organising a schoolwide innovation project on student assessment. Whereas for the beginning teachers, organising a one-day workshop is also considered a proactive level of leadership at the school level.

The findings of this study confirm previous studies that have argued that it is possible for beginning teachers in the context of an alternative certification programme to take and enact leadership roles (Muijs, Chapman, and Armstrong 2013). The difficulties teachers encounter in their actions to improve education confirm the findings of Cheng and Szeto (2016), who argued that novice teachers have to develop leadership roles gradually. They need to develop knowledge and skills for this purpose. To optimise these leadership competencies, teacher education programmes could/should consider including this more explicitly in their curriculum (Snoek 2017).

Limitations and suggestions for future research

In this study, 12 pairs of beginning teachers and school management members were interviewed to study beginning teachers’ opportunities to enact leadership in the school context in which they work. These insights can inform initiatives aimed at supporting beginning teachers in their early career phases. A possible limitation of the current design is that, although purposefully selected, the school management members were not always fully informed about all the ideas, plans, and actions of their beginning teachers.

In future research it would be worthwhile to include subject matter department colleagues as well in the research design as they interact with the beginning teachers on a more regular basis. In addition, it would be informative to include observational data as well. Most studies, including this one, rely on teachers' and school management members' self-reports. A micro analysis of how beginning teachers' efforts to improve education at their school can provide a more detailed understanding of the alignment (of teachers, school leaders, and of teachers self-perceived and researcher-observed possibilities) within the working context. Finally, it would be interesting to study beginning teachers' leadership in relation to their wellbeing, their level of innovation, and the school culture.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Funding

This work was supported by the The Dutch Research Council (NWO) under Grant [405-14-403].

Notes on contributors

Jacobiene Meirink works as an assistant professor at ICLON, Leiden University, Leiden. Her research focuses on teacher professional development in various settings.

Anna van der Want worked as a post doc researcher and teacher educator at ICLON, Leiden University. Currently, she works as a researcher at HAN, University of Applied Sciences.

Monika Louws works as an assistant professor at Utrecht University, Utrecht.

Paulien Meijer is academic director and professor at Radboud Teachers Academy, Radboud University Nijmegen

Helma Oolbekkink-Marchand works as an assistant professor at Radboud Teachers Academy, Radboud University Nijmegen and as a professor at HAN University of Applied Sciences, Nijmegen.

Harmen Schaap works as an assistant professor at Radboud Teachers Academy, Radboud University Nijmegen

ORCID

Helma Oolbekkink-Marchand  <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-6315-7652>

Harmen Schaap  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-7776-0740>

References

- Bransford, J., S. Derry, D. Berliner, and K. Hammerness. 2005. "Theories of Learning and Their Roles in Teaching." In *Preparing Teachers for a Changing World: What Teachers Should Learn and Be Able to Do*, edited by L. Darling-Hammond and J. Bransford, 40–87. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Bronkhorst, L., P. Meijer, B. Koster, and J. Vermunt. 2014. "Deliberate Practice in Teacher Education." *European Journal of Teacher Education* 37 (1): 18–34. doi:10.1080/02619768.2013.825242.

- Carver, C., and J. Meier. 2013. "Gaining Confidence, Managing Conflict: Early Career Conceptions of Teacher Leadership during Graduate Work." *The New Educator* 9 (3): 173–191. doi:10.1080/1547688X.2013.806723.
- Cheng, A., and E. Szeto. 2016. "Teacher Leadership Development and Principal Facilitation: Novice Teachers' Perspectives." *Novice Teachers' Perspectives*. *Teaching and Teacher Education* 58: 140–148. doi: 10.1016/j.tate.2016.05.003.
- Correa, J.M., A. Martinez-Arbelaz, and E. Aberasturi-Appraiz. 2015. "Post-modern Reality Shock: Beginning Teachers as Sojourners in Communities of Practice." *Teaching and Teacher Education* 48: 66–74. doi:10.1016/j.tate.2015.02.007.
- Curry, M., K. Jaxon, J. Russell, M. Callahan, and J. Bicais. 2008. "Examining the Practice of Beginning Teachers' Micropolitical Literacy within Professional Inquiry Communities." *Teaching and Teacher Education* 24: 660–673. doi:10.1016/j.tate.2006.10.007.
- Friese, S. 2012. *Qualitative Data Analysis with ATLAS.ti*. London: Sage Publications.
- Frost, D. 2008. "Teacher Leadership: Values and Voice." *School Leadership and Management* 28 (4): 337–352. doi:10.1080/13632430802292258.
- Grimstæth, G., G. Nordvik, and E. Bergsvik. 2008. "The Newly Qualified Teacher: A Leader and A Professional? A Norwegian Study." *Journal of In-Service Education* 34 (2): 219–236. doi:10.1080/13674580801950873.
- Gronn, P. 2000. "Distributed Properties: A New Architecture for Leadership." *Educational Management and Administration* 28: 317–338. doi:10.1177/0263211X000283006.
- Henning, J.E., V. Trent, D. Engelbrecht, V. Robinson, and G. Reed. 2004. "Cultivating Teacher Leadership through a School and University Partnership." *Teacher Education and Practice* 17: 400–416.
- Ketelaar, E., D. Beijgaard, H.P.A. Boshuizen, and P.J. Den Brok. 2012. "Teachers' Positioning Towards an Educational Innovation in the Light of Ownership, Sense-making and Agency." *Teaching and Teacher Education* 28: 273–282. doi:10.1016/j.tate.2011.10.004.
- King, F., and H. Stevenson. 2017. "Generating Change from Below: What Role for Leadership from Above?" *Journal of Educational Administration* 55: 657–670. doi:10.1108/JEA-07-2016-0074.
- Levenson, M. 2014. *Pathways to Teacher Leadership. Emerging Models, Changing Roles*. Cambridge: Harvard Education Press.
- MacBeath, J., and N. Dempster, eds. 2008. *Connecting Leadership and Learning: Principles for Practice*. London: Routledge.
- Meijer, P.C., B. de Graaf, and J.A. Meirink. 2011. "Key Experiences in Student Teachers' Development." *Teachers and Teaching: Theory and Practice* 17: 115–129. doi:10.1080/13540602.2011.538502.
- Meirink, J.A., and A. Van der Want. 2018. "De Ervaren Professionele Ruimte Van Beginnende Leraren in De Context Van Een Traineeship [perceived Professional Space of Beginning Teachers in the Context of Alternative Certification Programmes]." *Pedagogische Studien* 95: 153–168.
- Muijs, D., C. Chapman, and P. Armstrong. 2013. "Can Early Careers Teachers Be Teacher Leaders? A Study of Second-year Novice Teachers in the tTeach First Alternative Certification Programme." *Educational Management Administration and Leadership* 41: 767–781. doi:10.1177/1741143213494188.
- Oolbekkink-Marchand, H.W., H. Leeferink, and P.C. Meijer. 2018. "Professionele Ruimte Van Promoverende Leraren: Bijdrage Aan Professionele Ontwikkeling En Schoolontwikkeling. [teachers' Professional Agency in the Context of a Phd Scholarship]." *Pedagogische Studien* 95: 169–194.
- Poekert, P., A. Alexandrou, and D. Shannon. 2016. "How Teachers Become Leaders: An Internationally Validated Theoretical Model of Teacher Leadership Development." *Research in Post-Compulsory Education* 21: 307–329. doi:10.1080/13596748.2016.1226559.
- Rogers, C., and R.Q. Scales. 2013. "Pre-service Teachers' Perceptions of Teacher Leadership: Is It about Compliance or Understanding?" *Issues in Teacher Education* 22: 17–37.
- Ross, D., A. Adams, E. Bondy, N. Dana, S. Dodman, and C. Swain. 2011. "Preparing Teacher Leaders: Perceptions of the Impact of a Cohort-based, Job Embedded, Blended Teacher Leadership Program." *Teaching and Teacher Education* 27: 1213–1222. doi:10.1016/j.tate.2011.06.005.
- Scales, R.Q., and C. Rogers. 2017. "Novice Teacher Leadership: Determining the Impact of a Leadership Licensure Requirement after One Year of Teaching." *Professional Educator* 41: 18–33.
- Snoek, M. 2017. "'leiderschap Van Leraren Ontwikkelen En Toepassen in De School.'" [developing Teacher Leadership and Applying It in School]." In *Gespreid Leiderschap in Het Onderwijs: Elkaar*

Invloed Gunnen Voor Vernieuwing [distributed Leadership in Education: Awarding Each Other Influence for Innovation], edited by F. Hulsbos and S. van Langevelde, 98–109. Utrecht: Kessels & Smit Publishers.

- Szeto, E., and A. Cheng. 2018. "Principal–Teacher Interactions and Teacher Leadership Development: Beginning Teachers' Perspectives." *International Journal of Leadership in Education* 21: 363–379. doi:[10.1080/13603124.2016.1274785](https://doi.org/10.1080/13603124.2016.1274785).
- Ulvik, M., and K. Langørgen. 2012. "What Can Experienced Teachers Learn from Newcomers? Newly Qualified Teachers as a Resource in Schools." *Teachers and Teaching: Theory and Practice* 18: 43–57. doi:[10.1080/13540602.2011.622553](https://doi.org/10.1080/13540602.2011.622553).
- Van der Heijden, H., D. Beijaard, J.J.M. Geldens, and H.L. Popeijus. 2018. "Understanding Teachers as Change Agents: An Investigation of Primary School Teachers' Self-perception." *Journal of Educational Change* 19: 347–373. doi:[10.1007/s10833-018-9320-9](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10833-018-9320-9).
- Van Zeer, E., L. Valli, E. Van Zee, P. Rennert-Ariev, J. Mikeska, S. Catlett-Muhammad, and P. Roy. 2006. "Initiating and Sustaining a Culture of Inquiry in a Teacher Leadership Program." *Teacher Education Quarterly* 33 (3): 97–114.
- York-Barr, J., and K. Duke. 2004. "What Do We Know about Teacher Leadership? Findings from Two Decades of Scholarship." *Review of Educational Research* 74 (3): 255–316. doi:[10.3102/00346543074003255](https://doi.org/10.3102/00346543074003255).