Teacher leaders often assume roles that are critical to school reform efforts. Nearly three years of work with over 100 teacher leaders has helped us to identify some of the conditions that are important to their success in these roles.

The purpose of the BTLC Leadership Discussion Guides is to facilitate productive, focused conversations among school leaders that can lead to more efficient and more effective alignment of their leadership efforts.

Each BTLC Leadership Discussion Guide begins by introducing an issue that is critical to teachers’ experiences of their teacher leadership roles. Then, it provides professional learning materials that school leaders can work on to understand the issue—individually and together—before trying to address it. Organizational theorists point out that, “to achieve collective interpretation, people need time to understand the reasoning behind different perspectives and to question and think about that reasoning.” The members of a leadership team may not reach total agreement through these toolkits, but our goal is to engender enough agreement that action is possible.

Each guide includes the following resources to be used over three meeting sessions. While a sequence and process is suggested, educators should apply these resources flexibly to meet their needs. This Discussion Guide has four parts:

1. ** Decide **
   Read the rationale for this guide. Determine if it is for you. Decide which leaders to engage with you.

2. ** Read **
   Share copies of the provided reading selection. Ask all to read it and mark up the text to identify provocative quotes, questions raised, and important connections to your context. Meet to discuss. Guiding questions provided.

3. ** Engage and Plan **
   Meet to explore your new understandings by engaging in a shared task. Plan next steps for carrying the learning forward.

4. ** Act and Reflect **
   Carry out the actions or commitments agreed upon, then meet to consider the impact of your action plan and this professional learning experience.
Decide

About the Authority Discussion Guide

Teacher leaders are frequently asked to assume roles and responsibilities beyond their classrooms. Many agree to do so because they believe they can make a bigger difference in their schools, yet it’s not uncommon for teachers to be stymied or even burned by the lack of clarity around their authority in these roles.

Teacher leaders in the BTLC program indicated that clarity around authority within their schools was crucial to fulfilling their responsibilities confidently and feeling positive about their roles. Teacher leaders wanted to know that they were meeting expectations and that the extra time, effort, and expertise they offer to their schools was being considered useful. As one teacher noted, “Leadership opportunities increase a sense of ownership in teaching and learning and it is a great feeling for teachers to know that they have helped improve student performance. It motivates teachers to want to do more so it is a great benefit for the administration.” But school leaders play an important role in ensuring these teacher leaders are getting feedback—positive or constructive—based on agreed-upon expectations: "A truly open and honest dialogue and intent is crucial" to achieve a shared understanding of responsibilities and authority.

Many assumed they had the "freedom to manage teams." Some wished administrators would show more "faith and confidence in the [teacher] leaders... without micromanaging." Others appreciated receiving support in these areas. Still others described hesitating to take a needed action because they were unsure of the boundaries of their authority. Through dialogue, expectations and preferences can be made clear. One participant commented, "It is very frustrating when you know your potential and skills aren't being used efficiently." Administrators can support teacher leadership authority by clarifying the role or expected contributions of the teacher leader within the wider distribution of leadership and ensuring follow-through and accountability for all, "so that each feels like a valued member of the team."

Teacher leaders have a tremendous sense of agency and the will to contribute to school improvement. Through dialogue with other school leaders, they can understand the specific and important contribution they are being asked to make and make it with a clear sense of authority.

- Has the leadership team thought about how leadership is distributed in the school and whether strategic actions can be taken to improve the efficiency of that?
- Do key leaders in your school sometimes find they are duplicating efforts or stepping on toes?
- Is there a place to talk about this?
- Would you like ideas about how to enter this conversation?

This Leadership Discussion Guide can help.
Read

Purpose: To help educators to deepen their understanding of the key themes of the reading selection and make connections to their own context.

I. Reading Selection

Distributed leadership through the looking glass by Alma Harris and James Spillane

Summary (excerpts from the article)

Distributed leadership is an idea that is growing in popularity. There is widespread interest in the notion of distributing leadership although interpretations of the term vary. A distributed leadership perspective recognises that there are multiple leaders (Spillane et al., 2004) and that leadership activities are widely shared within and between organisations (Harris, 2007). A distributed model of leadership focuses upon the interactions, rather than the actions, of those in formal and informal leadership roles. It is primarily concerned with leadership practice and how leadership influences organisational and instructional improvement (Spillane, 2006). A distributed perspective on leadership acknowledges the work of all individuals who contribute to leadership practice, whether or not they are formally designated or defined as leaders. Distributed leadership is also central to system reconfiguration and organisational redesign which necessitates lateral, flatter decision-making processes (Hargreaves, 2007).

In a practical or normative sense, the chief concern is how leadership is distributed, by whom and with what effect (Harris, 2008). It is concerned with how we maximise the potential of distributed leadership for organisational improvement and transformation.

At a theoretical level, distributed leadership is an analytical frame for understanding leadership practice. Spillane et al. (2004) argue that the distributed perspective can serve as a tool for school leaders by offering a set of constructs that can be harnessed to frame diagnoses and inform the design process. In this respect, distributed leadership can serve as both a diagnostic and design tool that offers a lens on leadership practices within schools and between schools. It offers schools the opportunity to stand back and think about exactly how leadership is distributed and the difference made, or not made, by that distribution.

Citation

Harris, A. and Spillane, J. (2008). Distributed leadership through the looking glass. Management in Education, 22 (31). Accessible from:
http://www.distributedleadership.org/DLS/Publications_files/PUBLISHED%20Harris,%20Spillane.%20Distributed%20Leadership%20through%20the%20Looking%20Glass.pdf
II. Discuss

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Procedure</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Share Understandings</td>
<td>In 2000, Graetz described distributed’ leadership as “a group of experienced and trusted individuals operating at different levels of the organisation...[ensuring]...integrated thinking and acting at all levels.” (p.566) The use of the term in education today is quite different from this.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Distributed leadership” is a term that has been used in many ways over time. According to Harris and Spillane, it has been diluted and misunderstood. The term “distributed leadership” is defined or explained in several places within the article. Take some time to skim the article and pick the phrase that you find more helpful to your understanding. In “rounds,” read your quote and explain it in your own words.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Consider in Context</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The article says, A distributed perspective on leadership acknowledges the work of all individuals who contribute to leadership practice, whether or not they are formally designated or defined as leaders. Distributed leadership is also central to system reconfiguration and organisational redesign which necessitates lateral, flatter decision-making processes. (p. 31)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Discuss:</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• What is meant by “formally designated or defined”?</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Who are some leaders in your school who are not formally designated?</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Some might say: “A leader can distribute leadership.” Others might say: “Leadership is naturally distributed.” Discuss.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Why does distributed leadership theory suggest that formal leadership systems be redesigned to a “flatter,” less hierarchical decision-making process?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The article poses some of its own questions for schools on the last page. Without trying to answer the questions, discuss how you would go about answering the questions. For example,</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• How could you identify and map how leadership is distributed in your school?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• How would you go about determining if the distribution is optimal?</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

You’re going to do some of these in the next part of this guide.
- To where could we turn to learn ways to enhance distributed leadership practice in our school?
- Who would we need to talk to to learn about how parents, students and families are part of the distribution of leadership in our school?
- How can we document the impact of distributed leadership in our school?

### Identify Takeaways

Have each person complete one or more of the following sentence stems.

- I have a better understanding of...
- I have gained a new perspective on...
- One way we could apply this discussion to our work is...
- One question I still have is...
- One idea I want to think more about is...
**Engage and Plan**

**Purpose:** To guide educators to explore their individual and collective understandings of how leadership is distributed within their school.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Procedure</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Procedure</strong></td>
<td><strong>Notes</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The article says, <strong>Distributed leadership can serve as both a diagnostic and design tool that offers a lens on leadership practices within schools and between schools. It offers schools the opportunity to stand back and think about exactly how leadership is distributed and the difference made, or not made, by that distribution.</strong> (p.33)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In this activity, we’re going to explore the formal and informal ways that leadership is distributed around a particular leadership function.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **1. In order to produce learning, schools have to have some way of:** | **This framework of five leadership functions comes from the National College of School Leadership.**

- Knowing what they aim to accomplish and why *(aims, values and culture)*
- Knowing how to do it well *(knowledge)*
- Collaborating with and learning from each other *(professional dialogue)*
- Collaborating with and learning from the wider community *(community involvement)*
- Seeing how we’re doing *(impact on learning)* |

These five leadership functions are important in schools. While there is usually at least one person formally designated and taking deliberate action to ensure these functions happen, other people may influence them too.

Pick ONE function to start with. | You can also choose another framework or just write a function on your own. Be sure to pick one that identifies what has to be accomplished by leadership, not a list of tasks to be done. |

| **2. Use the provided organizer, Mapping the Distribution of Leadership at the end of this section, to help you think systematically about all of the influences (tasks, activities, people, routines, etc.) that contribute to a given leadership function.** | You can fill it in together or complete the chart individually then compare. If it’s a larger group, you might use chart paper. |

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3. Review the map overall:
   - Is this function adequately addressed? Are there gaps and redundancies?
   - Are the tasks, activities, tools systems and routines (first two columns) providing opportunities for interaction throughout the year? Or only sporadically?
   - Are these interactions that have a strong or weak influence on the leadership function?

4. Review the third column (“who”) of your map and consider some of these questions:
   - Do the leaders influencing this function all know that it is their responsibility?
   - Are they aware of who else is influencing this function (intentionally or unintentionally)?
   - Are routines in place to ensure communication and coordination among these leaders?
   - What actions might be taken to influence the formal distribution of leadership around this leadership function? By whom?
   - What actions might be taken to influence the informal distribution of leadership around this leadership function? By whom?

5. Teacher leaders tend to be formally designated but often have a lack of clarity around their authority. Use the above exercise to create or review your teacher leaders’ job description.

   Consider:
   - Which specific leadership functions are they expected to influence?
   - What are the formal ways in which they are expected to influence them? (What is the extent of their authority?)
   - Who might they overlap with?
   - Who else, besides the teacher leader, needs to know these expectations? How will they learn them? How is that best communicated?

6. Answer the following questions together:
   a. Which elements (ideas, questions, artifacts, etc.) of this experience do we want to retain for our work ahead?
b. Are there others we should inform or involve directly or indirectly? What next steps immediately come to mind?
c. What can you commit to?

Follow-up ideas:

- Map the other leadership functions, then look across them to see what you notice.
- Involve more people in mapping the leadership influences of these functions.
- Discuss the implications for a specific role.
- Read some additional articles:
  [Richard Elmore (2000) argues that the problem of scaling up school improvement, whether it is in a school or a school system, is one of capacity building and specialization. Building a broad base of capacity is not possible if control is limited to a few individuals. The solution, he argues, is the broader distribution of leadership.]
# Mapping the Distribution of Leadership

In this group exercise we will identify some of the teaching-and-learning-focused practices within this school.

## Functions necessary for learning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Functions necessary for learning</th>
<th>Aims, values and culture</th>
<th>Knowledge</th>
<th>Professional dialogue</th>
<th>Community Involvement</th>
<th>Impact on learning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The school’s aims, values and culture provide a focus on teaching and learning for students, teachers, administrators and the wider community.</td>
<td>The school has ways of building its knowledge about effective teaching and learning.</td>
<td>Dialogue among the staff about teaching and learning plays a part in influencing classroom practice.</td>
<td>Our school involves students, parents and the wider community as partners in life-long learning.</td>
<td>There is accountability for the impact of instruction on learning.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Pick ONE of the functions above. Then answer the questions below here or on chart paper.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What tasks or activities are designed or understood to influence this?</th>
<th>What tools, systems or routines are used in the execution of these tasks or activities?</th>
<th>Who is involved in the execution of these tasks or activities?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

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1 Adapted from a tool created by the National College of School Leadership: [www.ncsl.org.uk/lcl](http://www.ncsl.org.uk/lcl).

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www.teachers21.org/TLR
Act and Reflect

Purpose: To provide a structure that helps educators revisit the commitments they made and to consider the impact of actions taken and of this professional learning experience.

Review your notes from last time. Whether you committed to one set of actions jointly or separate actions individually, use the questions below to reflect on your progress and the process.

Choose 1-3 questions from each quadrant.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Looking Back</th>
<th>Looking Outward</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• How much did you know about this before we started?</td>
<td>• Did you do this the way others have? In what ways did you do it differently/ similarly?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Have you done a similar kind of work in the past?</td>
<td>• What grade would you give your performance? Why?</td>
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<tr>
<td>• What problems did you encounter while you were doing this?</td>
<td>• What’s one thing you want people to notice about it?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• What resources did you use? Which resources were especially helpful?</td>
<td>• Has anyone noticed it? What has been the response?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• What advice would you have for another just beginning this work?</td>
<td>• If someone else noticed your performance, what might they learn about who you are?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Looking Inward</th>
<th>Looking Forward</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• How do you feel about what you’ve accomplished?</td>
<td>• What is one thing you would like to continue working on?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• What parts of it are you particularly pleased with? ...did you enjoy or find satisfying?</td>
<td>• What would you do differently if you have a chance to do it again?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• What did you find frustrating about it?</td>
<td>• What would you like to improve upon?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Did you meet your goals? (What were they?) Did they change as you worked on it?</td>
<td>• What will you never do again?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• What did you learn about yourself by working on this?</td>
<td>• What do you want to try next?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Have you changed any ideas you used to have on this subject?</td>
<td>• How can you keep the learning going?</td>
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</tbody>
</table>