



RESEARCH



A transformative professional learning meta-model to support leadership learning and growth of early career teachers

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores leadership learning of seven early career teachers who attended eight leadership for inclusion community of practice (LIIn-CoP) workshops in the Republic of Ireland. A meta-model was used to inform this research drawing upon a community of practice approach using participatory action learning action research processes, evidence-based frameworks of teacher leadership development (focused on growth as a teacher, researcher, leader and personal growth) and the six facets of equity to support inclusion. Findings attest to enhanced individual competencies; growth as a teacher, researcher, leader and personal growth, with no one growth aspect more important than another. This paper adds to the existing research showing how certain growth aspects were more aligned to evolving needs at particular points in a teacher's professional learning journey. Furthermore, growth was influenced by teachers' personal and contextual challenges and needs thus questioning existing research on the use of the leadership development framework within PLCs in schools. Findings contribute empirical evidence of leadership learning among early career teachers, when prospectively using the framework, within a school university partnership model. The study answers the call for research into models of professional learning to empower teacher leadership through using the meta-model of professional learning.

Introduction

It is widely accepted that one of the big challenges facing education systems globally is inclusion and equity (Ainscow, 2020). This is reflected in an increased emphasis on equity and quality education for all as evidenced in international policy such as the United Nation's *Education 2030 Framework for Action* (United Nations Educational & Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2016). However, system level change such as this requires policies and actions at macro, meso and micro levels to make this

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happen, reflecting the need for leadership (Ainscow, 2020; Brennan et al., 2019; Chapman et al., 2012) and professional learning (Florian & Spratt, 2013; King, 2017) at all levels of the system. Change may be technically simple, but it is socially complex (Ainscow, 2020). This paper focuses on the development of teacher leadership for inclusion among early career teachers in the absence of much literature on leadership development of early career teachers (Forde et al., 2018) or evidence of transformative models of professional learning and development to support teachers as leaders for inclusion (Brennan et al., 2019).

Teachers are responsible for enacting policy ideals, of inclusion and equity, in their classrooms (Spillane et al., 2018). Focusing on teachers is important as inclusion will be won at the soul of the teacher (MacRuairc, 2016) with an ethos that is promoted from the top (King, 2017). Accepting this, it is also worth noting that ‘no individual can be responsible for creating or sustaining an inclusive school’ (Kugelmass, 2001, p. 62). Inclusion and equity require a collective will to make it happen (Ainscow, 2020; Chapman et al., 2012), a commitment to the values and beliefs around inclusion (Florian & Spratt, 2013; Kugelmass, 2001) along with collaborative practice, as developing inclusive schools is a social process (Chapman et al., 2012; Ní Bhroin, 2020). This not only requires professional learning models that support sustainable processes to allow for the development of leadership for inclusion (Brennan et al., 2019), it also involves collaborative interactions within and across spaces and contexts (Ainscow & Sandill, 2010). Though a focus on inclusion and equity may appear technically simple, it has implications for leadership and professional learning.

While there is a plethora of research on leadership and an increasing body of research on teacher leadership, a gap has been identified related to leadership development processes (Poekert et al., 2016) and in particular leadership development of pre-service and early career teachers (Forde et al., 2018; King et al., 2019) particularly in the context of inclusion (King et al., 2019). This paper draws on Poekert et al.’s (2016) theoretical framework of leadership development which was adopted prospectively to develop the aspects of leadership (growth as a teacher, leader and researcher along with personal growth) to support these early career teachers to develop as leaders for inclusion. The significance of this paper lies in the combined and unique focus on early career teacher leadership development processes, inclusion and a transformative model of professional learning within a school university partnership. It offers insights into professional learning and leadership development for teachers, teacher educators and facilitators of professional development by extending and strengthening the existing knowledge base around leadership development processes and the supporting professional learning and development (PLD) processes.

Teacher leadership for inclusion

While inclusion has generally been accepted as orthodoxy in many countries, the global challenge of inequality continues to be highlighted by many across the world. Most recently evident in the context of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal for education (SDG 4). This goal aims to ‘ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all’ by 2030 (UNESCO, 2016, p. 7). It focuses on inclusion and equity through education and commits to ‘addressing all forms

Table 1. Six facets of equity.

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1. Selecting worthwhile content & designing & implementing learning opportunities aligned to valued outcomes
 2. Connecting to students as learners, and to their lives and experiences
 3. Creating learning – focused, respectful and supportive learning environments
 4. Using evidence to scaffold learning and improve teaching
 5. Adopting an inquiry stance and taking responsibility for professional engagement and learning
 6. Recognizing and seeking to address, classroom, school & societal practices that reproduce inequity
-

of exclusion and marginalization, disparities and inequalities in access, participation and learning outcomes’ (p. 7). This is a big challenge for education systems and requires a commitment to focus on ‘the most disadvantaged, especially those with disabilities’ (UNESCO, 2016, p. 7). It reinforces the idea of inclusion to focus on all without marginalizing some (Florian & Camedda, 2020). This has precipitated education systems to move toward what is becoming known as ‘full inclusion’ (Carr, 2019; Costa, 2019).

On the one hand, many countries have committed to the ideology of inclusion and even some to ‘full inclusion’ which advocates for all learners’ needs to be met in mainstream classes. On the other hand, there is a plethora of research highlighting the need for quality teacher education for inclusive education (Blanton et al., 2011; European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education [EASNIE], 2015; Guðjónsdóttir & Óskarsdóttir, 2020). Historically, the needs of those marginalized have been addressed in specialized contexts or under the direction of special educators, with many mainstream teachers still indicating a lack of confidence and efficacy in meeting the diverse needs of all in their classrooms (Brennan et al., 2019; Florian & Camedda, 2020; Ní Bhroin & King, 2020). This paper adopts Grudnoff et al.’s (2017) evidence based framework as part of its meta-model design to support teachers in meeting the needs of all learners. The framework is a result of an analysis of international evidence about teaching practices that positively influence the learning outcomes of diverse students and resulted in the identification of six interrelated facets of equity (see Table 1).

Whilst this framework supports teachers to understand inclusion and equity, professional learning models must support teacher leadership development to enable them to embed their learning in their complex environments (Holland, 2021).

Teacher leadership

The concept of teacher leadership has been around for the past few decades, often linked to school improvement (Poekert et al., 2016; Pucella, 2014). Despite this, the terms ‘teacher leadership’ and ‘teacher leaders’ are regularly used interchangeably (King, 2017) with little consensus being reached on a definition of these terms. Some view teacher leaders as having formal roles, while others see teacher leadership as within the remit of all teachers as part of teacher professionalism (Torrance & Murphy, 2017) or reflecting an international drive toward a distributed perspective on leadership (Spillane & Coldren, 2011). Frost and Durrant (2003) offer the terms ‘positional’ and ‘non-positional’ as a means of differentiating between formal teacher roles and self-directed leadership where teachers regardless of formal roles exercise leadership. One of the challenges plausibly lies in leadership being conceptualized in terms of an individual rather than something that evolves from interactions and collaboration with others, a shared process (Spillane et al., 2004; Woods et al., 2019).

Such interactions among individuals are reflective of leadership as practice or activity (MacBeath et al., 2018). Leadership within this paper is defined as ‘the process of influencing others to understand and agree about what needs to be done and how to do it, and the process of facilitating individual and collective efforts to accomplish shared objectives’ (Yukl, 2013, p. 23). The key tenets of this definition highlight the importance of leadership as ‘influence and interaction’, rather than power and authority (Poekert, 2012, p. 117), leadership as a social process to build social capacity (Swaffield & MacBeath, 2009), and leadership based on working toward a common goal whereby teachers are empowered in a bottom-up approach (King & Stevenson, 2017) to use their individual and collective agency (MacBeath et al., 2018). Leadership learning and development for inclusion involves an enactment of teachers’ values and beliefs as these influence practices (Brown, 2006; King, 2017). Therefore, leadership is a practice and involves modeling practice to influence others (Harris, 2008; Nguyen et al., 2019). It also may involve teachers ‘stepping up’ and ‘pushing back’ (Buchanan, 2015) to challenge the existing status quo. Research has suggested that teachers struggle to exercise leadership, formally and informally, as a result of inadequate preparation for leadership competences (Nguyen et al., 2019).

Despite all of the above, it is important to question if and how early career teachers have the confidence or capacity to exercise leadership so early in their careers, as typically in education people wait quite a number of years before being seen as leaders. Supporting teachers to develop their leadership practices is one thing to consider, but so too is the readiness of the system to allow early career teachers to exercise leadership so early in their journeys (King et al., 2019). It requires supportive principals who trust their teachers and afford them the autonomy to practise leadership along with allocating them time and resources to do so (King, 2011; King & Stevenson, 2017; Poekert et al., 2016).

In the context of this paper, early career teachers were working toward a common goal of leadership for inclusion with a focus on collaborative practices (Hargreaves & O’Connor, 2017; King & Stevenson, 2017; Yukl, 2013) to develop their inclusive pedagogical skills and prevent the wash out effects of initial teacher education (Forde & Dickson, 2017; Zeichner & Tabachnick, 1981). This paper aims to extend and strengthen the empirical evidence related to the enactment of teacher leadership as called for by Nguyen et al. (2019).

Leadership learning and development

As noted before, there is a dearth of literature related to leadership learning and development of pre-service and early career teachers (Forde et al., 2018) particularly in the context of inclusion (King et al., 2019). While there is limited evidence of the positive impact of formal graduate courses on leadership learning and leadership knowledge and skills (Mongillo et al., 2012; Snoek & Volman, 2014) an analysis of 21 graduate courses on teacher leadership by Leonard et al. (2012) questioned this approach to teacher leadership development. What is evident in the literature is the importance of the university school partnership (King, Holland, & NíAngléis, *in press*; Snoek et al., 2017), job-embedded professional learning (Poekert, 2012) and leadership learning through ‘leading by learning’ and ‘learning by leading’ (Collinson, 2012).

In addition, Poekert et al. (2016) have developed an evidence-based framework for leadership learning and development processes which they advocate could be used within professional learning communities in schools. This framework proposes that through the development of four integrated constructs: growth as a teacher, researcher, leader, and personal growth, the teacher's 'self-perception of leadership' can be enhanced and can in turn influence others within their wider school community (pp. 317–318). However, both historic and recent research suggests that typical PLD provision significantly neglects to acknowledge and facilitate not only that teachers can have multiple evolving identities (Holland, 2021), but also that they should be central beneficiaries of their own PLD engagement (Huang et al., 2011; Boylan et al., 2018; Holland, 2021). Given the strong relationship between identity construction, teacher agency and long-term PLD commitment (Huang et al., 2011), it does not bode well for leadership development that current provision often fails to account 'for the diversity of capacities that ... [exist] ... in different human beings' (Dewey, 1933, p. 5). For example, teachers' incapacity to identify and develop as educational researchers is derived from research too often being done 'on' or 'for' teachers, as opposed to 'with' or 'by' them (Bruce et al., 2011; Heron & Reason, 2001; Olesen & Nordentoft, 2013). Poekert et al. (2016) insist that for teachers to cross the threshold as 'leaders', a transitive empowerment bridge must be built. However, as intimated above, the degree to which teachers can identify or develop as leaders is contingent upon their context (Argyris, 1995; Chevalier & Buckles, 2013), which has the capacity to directly influence their PLD outcomes and thus, affect the kind, and depth of growth possible as leaders. To compound this issue, PLD facilitators are criticized for 'turning a blind eye' to 'complexity theory' (Armour et al., 2015; Opfer & Pedder, 2011) and 'critical theory' when designing PLD programs and as such, shy away from issues associated with power inequalities and politics in organizational settings (Holland, 2021; Howie & Bagnall, 2013; Newman, 2012). A failure to recognize and account for complexity and inequality in teachers' contexts negatively influences growth opportunities (Cochran-Smith et al., 2014) and disempowers teachers (Cooper et al., 2016; Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995) as they strive to grow as leaders. As such, without models which explicitly and deliberately support the growth of the teacher as teacher, researcher, leader and person, the potential for effective leadership is 'washed out' (Zeichner, 1987); capacity, quality and meaningful change is lost (Lovett & Gilmore, 2003); and 'the time and resources spent on [PLD are] wasted' (Poekert et al., 2016, p. 308).

Noteworthy is that this growth needs to be supported and enhanced through collaborative professional learning models. This focus on collaborative learning aligns with Ainscow and Sandill's (2012) argument that the development of inclusive practices involves social learning processes where teachers can share problems of practice and identify solutions. Based on this, a community of practice [CoP] (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2015) approach, as suggested by Ainscow and Sandill (2012) was adopted to explore the development of leadership for inclusive practices in social contexts. Explicit details on the CoP approach used in this study are explained in the conceptual framework section.

This paper contributes to the body of literature on leadership learning and development of early career teachers by answering the following research question: To what extent did these early career teachers' grow as leaders for inclusion and through which growth aspects (teacher, researcher, leader and as a person)? The next section outlines the context for this research.

Context and participants

This study was undertaken in the Republic of Ireland with a group of early career teachers who, as pre-service teachers, had undertaken a major specialism in special and inclusive education, which included a module on ‘collaboration’ in year three and a module on ‘leadership for inclusion’ in year four. As seven out of twenty-four in the class, the teachers’ engagement with this study demonstrated a sense of efficacy and commitment at the end of their ITE (King, 2017). This indicates that engagement in leadership education at ITE inspires early career teachers to go above and beyond traditional practices by exhibiting a desire to share expertise and leadership (King et al., 2019). Whilst the teachers’ historical location (Holland, 2021; Rahman et al., 2014) in their leadership journey reflected positivity and enthusiasm, engagement in PLD does not necessarily prevent the early career socialization impact of ‘praxis shock’ (Veenman, 1984) and washout (Zeichner, 1987). With a ‘sensitivity to initial conditions’ at the fore (Rahman et al., 2014, p. 10), a PLD meta-model was designed to support the growth of these teachers resulting in the formation of a ‘Participatory Action Learning Action Research [PALAR] “Leadership for Inclusion” CoP [LIn-CoP]’. This paper focuses upon the data which were gathered from teachers’ participation during and between the first eight LIn-CoP workshops of the study (between November 2017 and April 2021). Prior to commencing this study, ethical approval was sought from the university ethics committee. Participants were assured of anonymity and confidentiality within the limitations of the law. See Table 2 for description of participants and their context/role.

‘Conceptual framework for transformative professional learning and growth’, methods and processes

There is an increasingly loud clarion call for researchers to better unveil ‘which’ and ‘how’ PLD processes result in teacher growth (Van Kruiningen, 2013; Holland, 2021). Whilst this wider research study can contribute to this knowledge base, data pertaining to the ‘which’ PLD processes and particularly the ‘how’, is reserved for the scope and depth of

Table 2. Description of participants and their context/role.

Pseudonym	School setting	Class setting	Class age group(s)
Aisling	Designated disadvantaged mainstream primary school in Dublin	2nd Class 4th Class	7–8-year-olds 9–11-year-olds
Emily	Designated disadvantaged mainstream primary school in Dublin	3rd Class 1st Class ^a (mainstream)	9–10-year-olds 6–7-year-olds
Sarah	Designated disadvantaged mainstream primary school in Dublin	Senior Infants 1st Class 2nd Class	5–6-year-olds 6–7-year-olds 7–8-year-olds
Liz	Designated disadvantaged mainstream primary school in Dublin	Senior Infants	5–6-year-olds
Edel	Mainstream primary school in Dublin	3rd Class 4th Class (SET)	8–10-year-olds
Lucia	Mainstream primary school in Co. Kildare	2nd Class ASD preschool class	7–8-year-olds 3–5-year-olds
Gráinne	Designated disadvantaged mainstream primary school in Dublin	1st Class	6–7-year-olds

^a1st Class in all schools in Ireland is the third year of schooling.

a research paper to follow. However, it is still necessary to offer both an illustrative and descriptive introduction to this paper's 'Conceptual Framework for Transformative Professional Learning and Growth'. In doing so, framework PLD processes will be listed and how a couple of these processes may be operationalized will be described, merely to offer an introductory flavor of the 'how'. Central to this work is also the acknowledgment that theoretical and methodological design and evaluation should not be considered separately (Dick and Greenwood, 2015; Holland, 2021). As such, the framework and research methods are presented together where appropriate. The conceptual framework is presented below in Figure 1 and an explanation of its various elements follow:

Meta-Model Design: This above conceptual framework answers an epistemological plea from Holland (2021) to abandon centrally designed PLD models which are transmissive, linear, disconnected, uni-dimensional and which result in predetermined repeatable outcomes, thus failing to consider the complexity of teachers' PLD and growth. In an attempt to avoid past errors, this conceptual design process stepped out of the 'undisturbed waters of old, safe approaches' and tentatively strode toward the somewhat 'daunting [and] disorientating' world of meta-design, with the aim of 'harness[ing] the powerful new energy made possible by mixing' theories, concepts and processes (Golson & Glover, 2009, p. 2). The conceptual framework presented in this paper is the first to borrow from Holland's (2021) 'Participatory Action Learning Action Research [PALAR] Community of Practice [CoP] Transformative [PDL] Meta-model' which offers a meta-framework for others to employ. Holland (2021) advised that this meta-framework should not be set in stone but instead, as is consistent with the meta-design approach, should be adapted and built upon for various phases of the teacher education continuum and through other subject and pedagogical specialisms. Where Holland's (2021) original model focused PLD of experienced ITE post-primary cooperating teachers focusing on the domain of mentoring, the meta-model used as a conceptual framework in this paper

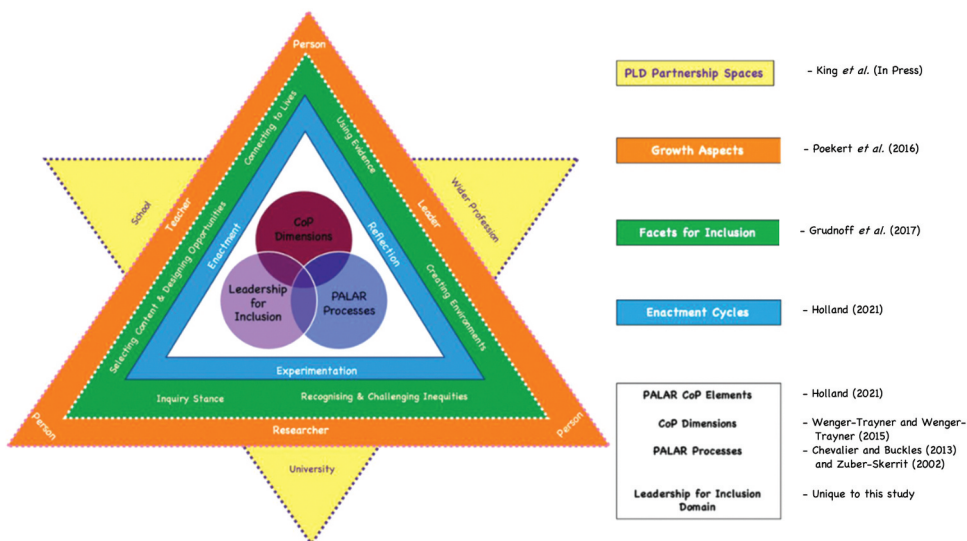


Figure 1. PALAR In-CoP transformative conceptual framework for professional learning.

explores the growth impact of PLD for recently qualified primary school teachers focusing upon the domain of 'leadership for inclusion' [LIn]. The various meta-model elements are introduced below.

Community of Practice Dimensions: A CoP (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2015) approach, as endorsed by Ainscow and Sandill (2012) was chosen to explore the development of leadership for inclusive practices in social contexts. CoPs, as a model of PLD, have the potential to be transformative (Kennedy, 2005, 2014) and allow for the development of a common language where teachers can articulate their values and talk to one another about what they do (Ainscow & Sandill, 2012). The *domain* dimension of CoPs allows for a shared focus and common goal (Holland, 2018, 2021; Saldana, 2014) around leadership for inclusion. Furthermore, the aim of developing leadership as a practice through an inquiry focus aligned with the *practice* dimension of CoPs (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2015). The practice dimension, in the case of this study, was enhanced by the community sharing their evolving hopes, fears, challenges, barriers, successes and triumphs (Chevalier & Buckles, 2013). In supporting one another to overcome contextual dilemmas, they shared tangible strategies for applying and cascading their learning to colleagues (Wood & Zuber-Skerritt, 2013). A shared bank of leadership for inclusion resources was generated (Borzillo & Kaminska-Labbe, 2011) and made available on the LIn-CoP's Google shared drive. Between community workshops, teachers also engaged with a secure online reflective wall using the software application: 'Trello'. Here, they shared strategies, resources and problems, engaging with one another at their convenience. When they then returned to the LIn-CoP for workshops, they updated one another. Holland (2018) proposed that the deliberate development of the three CoP domains can assist teachers to realize PLD benefits more deeply and broadly. However, heeding past warnings, it was important to acknowledge that CoPs can buttress the hierarchical status quo (Stoll et al., 2006; Holland, 2021) and can fail to challenge ignorance and stagnation (Hartung & Oliveira, 2013). As per the original model, this framework adopted the PALAR strategy as a way of addressing the interactional dynamics, to overcome such a threat to CoP effectiveness and to promote teachers' growth.

PALAR Strategy and Processes: In the case of this study, the teachers admitted to feeling insecure about their recently qualified status. As proposed previously, it was intended that PALAR processes would assist them in coping with these challenges. Additionally, the strategy has also been identified as providing a pedagogical framework for CoPs, addressing both research and PLD aims (Zuber-Skerritt, 2013; Holland, 2021). These co-adaptive processes included: 1) **priority setting**, defining project goals and mission; 2) setting priorities; 3) developing a resources management proposal; 4) monitoring and evaluating a project (continuous); 5) exploring problems; 6) solving a problem; 7) managing a conflict; 8) managing change; 9) evaluating a project (Chevalier & Buckles, 2013); 10) preparation for presentations and; 11) presentation and celebration (Zuber-Skerritt, 2002).

'Six Interrelated Facets for Equitable Practice' (Grudnoff et al., 2017) & 'Theory of Teacher Leadership Development' (Poekert et al., 2016): Informed prospectively by 'progressive education' (Dewey, 1916, 1933) and 'self-determination' theory (Benita et al., 2014; Ryan & Deci, 2006) principles, 'Target Setting and Action Plan' activities (TSAP) are one example of how the LIn-CoP members engaged in 'priority setting'. At

any point in time, the community and its teachers prioritized what they wished to develop. In doing so, they engaged in the above PALAR processes, hanging their TSAP growth upon Grudnoff et al.'s (2017) six interrelated facets for equitable practice: 'connecting to students lives and experiences; creating learning-focused, respectful and supportive learning environments; selecting worthwhile content and designing learning opportunities aligned to valued outcomes; adopting an inquiry stance and taking responsibility for further professional engagement and learning' and finally, 'using evidence to scaffold learning and improve teaching' (p. 16). Informed by 'experiential' and 'situated' learning theory principles, iterative and sustained opportunities for reflection, active experimentation and enactment (Clarke & Hollingsworth, 2002; Kolb, 1984; Teare, 2013) were offered by the authentic 'disorienting dilemmas' presented by their complex systems back in their respective schools (Poekert et al., 2016).

Through the above PLD processes and dimensions, this meta-model prospectively aims to facilitate growth, not only as teachers but also as leaders, researchers and people, as suggested by Poekert et al.'s (2016) 'theory of teacher leadership development' (p. 307). In this context, the framework offering Poekert et al.'s (2016) three growth aspects other than 'researcher' as hooks to hang their TSAP foci on was important to avoid triggering an initial negative reaction, which has historically been caused by educational research predominantly being done 'on' rather than 'with' teachers (Olesen & Nordentoft, 2013; Gleeson, 2012; Holland, 2021). In doing so, the model intended to democratically promote an evolving capacity to grow through various identities and to maximize the impact of PLD engagement with greater scope for connecting with contexts such as schools, university school partnerships and the wider profession. When the time is ripe, more explicit leadership and research participation are broached and facilitated. If received positively, as in the case of this study, can result in engagement with processes such as 'preparing to present' through 'talking heads' videos, presenting at conferences, acting as 'teachers in residence' and writing for publication.

Data collection and analysis

As outlined in the methods and processes above, data were gathered through e-technology interaction (Trello; Figure 2), audio-visual workshop recording and artifact generation and collection such as uploaded TSAPs (Figure 3) and 'Facets Identity Wall' (teacher; Figure 4); Talking Heads videos, and other reflective processes and activities such as 'power block bingo' and coding (Leader and Researcher; Figure 5).

LIn-CoP workshops were recorded, observed and transcribed, and all artifacts generated from the PALAR activities were photographed. Triangulation was promoted through a variety of data sources, methods and researchers (Bryman, 2016) and analysis across different data sets was conducted through the 'inductive – deductive' approach (Mouly, 1978) to facilitate 'constant comparison' of categories and codes (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Credibility and validity checks were undertaken using inter-rater reliability by the two researchers, member checking and respondent validation (Silverman, 2006) where analysis was shared with the teachers and opportunities to verify, refute or add to the data were provided to reduce researcher bias (Birt et al., 2016). The final draft of the paper was also shared with the teachers in advance of submission. Findings draw on evidence from the LIn-CoP workshops and individual and group activity on Trello.



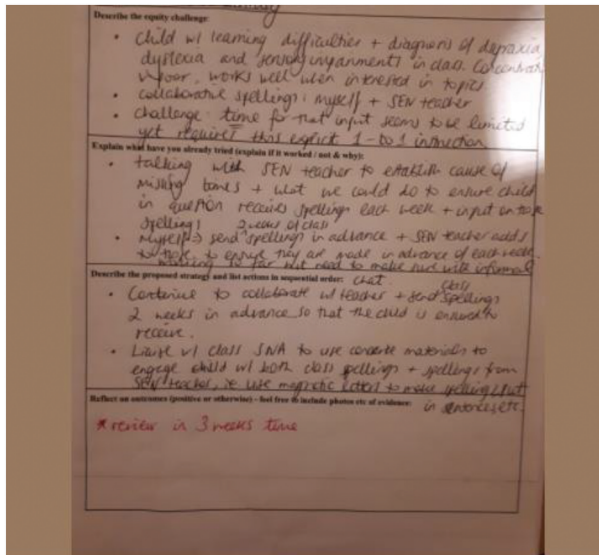
Figure 2. E-technology interaction.

Results and discussion

This paper demonstrates the application of Poekert et al.'s (2016) leadership theory-based framework and provides empirical evidence of leadership learning and growth within a school university partnership adopting a PALAR LIn-CoP model as part of a meta-model. Findings will be discussed using each of the four growth areas from Poekert et al. (2016). Examples of the overlapping constructs of growth as a teacher, researcher and leader will be provided along with evidence of how these all center on the construct of personal growth.

Growth as a teacher

Growth as a teacher was clearly evidenced by all teachers in this study. Reflecting Poekert et al.'s (2016) concept [key terms] such as 'implementing new strategies', Sarah highlighted her desire to try: "new strategies in the classroom ... [and] ... learn from other people' (LIn-CoP 2, 2018). Teachers demonstrated growth outcomes such as 'focusing on students' and 'improving child outcomes' (Poekert et al., 2016), through the use of the following facets in the meta-model: 'connecting to students lives and experiences',



Target Setting Emily

5 2

Figure 3. TSAP.



Figure 4. 'Facets identity wall'.

‘creating learning-focused, respectful and supportive learning environments’ and ‘selecting worthwhile content and designing learning opportunities aligned to valued outcomes’ (Grudnoff et al., 2017) (see King et al., 2019 for examples of strategies for each

Data (if it were a direct quote / entry on Trello etc)	Reflection / Comment	Category / Code
Who has an interest in developing inclusion?		Identifying Stakeholders
Creating networks of information (re: inclusion and / leadership)		
How can you align your goals to their responsibilities?		Aligning interests / goals
Who has the pupil in common?		
How can you align your goal's to their interests / ambitions for themselves?		
Who has the class in common?		
How can you align school mission, vision, policies etc to your goal's?		
Have just done them a favour or worked to support their interests / values (or what could you do in advance of engaging them)?		
Use your position as a bargaining chip to make requests e.g. create park benches etc / support for CPD, in inclusion and / leadership for inclusion		Sales pitch
Personally sharing resources and information		
What's in it for them (align)?		
Provide them with a well-designed implementation plan highlighting potential outcomes (aligned to their goals - needs - interests)		
Will they take your class / pupil next term / year?		

Figure 5. Coding from 'Power Block Bingo'.

facet). Further evidence of growth as a teacher outcomes from Trello shows Lucia focusing on her students, for example, citing the importance of 'prioritizing understanding of learning over coverage of curriculum' when talking about her learners with autism. She later highlighted

I am confident in my ability to support the individual needs of every child in my class and I am confident in the ability to explain the reasoning behind the strategies and resources I've chosen (Trello, 2021).

Poekert et al.'s (2016) 'Building classroom community' was also evidenced by the teachers with Liz noting on Trello the importance of 'Building community – [having a] morning meeting with a fun greeting activity/song to welcome them to class' (Trello, 2018).

Growth as a teacher was also evident through focusing on the facet 'Using evidence to scaffold learning and improve teaching' (Grudnoff et al., 2017) reflecting Poekert et al.'s (2016) concept of 'using evidence informed interactional and teaching practices to improve child outcomes'. All participants agreed that this is an important and worthwhile facet, and many attested to the conversations and dialog in the LIn-CoP supporting their self-efficacy in using evidence to support learning. Several examples were offered around 'using observations to aid planning' where it was claimed that 'difficult lessons help you improve your planning' (Trello, 2018). Teachers also talked about the use of evidence in terms of formal and informal assessments as a means of assessment of and for learning (see King et al., 2019).

When asked specifically about their growth as a teacher Sarah stated, 'Members in the group are open to share their ideas and resources. I have since incorporated these tried and tested strategies in my own classroom' (Trello, 2019). This reflects Poekert et al.'s (2016) 'implementing new strategies' concept as part of growth as a teacher.

Evidence of an overlap between growth as a teacher and as a leader is provided by Gráinne:

Developing confidence in my abilities and teaching experience led to giving advice and potential solutions to problems to my peers via Trello and TSAPs. Giving advice to peers is something that I think a 'leader' would do (Trello, 2019),

The above quote by Gráinne arguably reflects Poekert et al.'s (2016) concepts of 'having voice' and 'taking on leadership roles'. Lucia also evidences this overlap when she states, 'I now welcome other professionals into my room to see what we are learning, whereas in my early years as a teacher this is something I dreaded' (Trello, 2021).

Such interactions may be examples of leadership as practice or activity (MacBeath et al., 2018) and leadership as a process of influencing others (Yukl, 2013). It could be said that it points to evidence of early career teachers being willing and able to lead (King et al., 2019) thereby adding to the very limited literature on leadership learning for early career teachers (Forde et al., 2018). Noteworthy also is the context within which this happened, a CoP with a school university partnership responding to the call by Snoek et al. (2017) for school university partnerships to support teacher leadership development.

Aisling's point expresses how empowerment in her teaching practice overlapped with her sense of personal growth

when you start reflecting on your practice ... you make the realisation that will help you change something ... you know like, grow as a practitioner ... help you change things that you previously maybe didn't know how to change ... or what to do, to make them change' (LIn-CoP 5, 2019).

In summary, all teachers evidenced Poekert et al.'s (2016) growth outcomes as a teacher through adopting Grudnoff et al.'s (2017) facets of equity, for example, implementing new strategies, focusing on students, building classroom community and improving child outcomes.

Growth as a researcher

The teachers in this study added 'growth as researcher' to the tapestry of their PLD journey. Whilst the findings confirm that teachers can develop 'as' researchers (Holland, 2021; Poekert et al., 2016), this study also answers a call from educational research critics who charge researchers to better identify the explicit nature and levels of teachers' research participation (Dworski-Riggs & Day Langhout, 2010; Holland, 2021). Borrowing Poekert et al.'s (2016) operational definition of the 'growth as a researcher' aspect, the teachers in this study agreed that they had begun to develop 'a systematic and iterative approach to improving [their] classroom practices' (p. 317). As the co-researching community collaborated to develop their understanding of the facets: 'adopting an inquiry stance and taking responsibility for further professional engagement and learning' and 'using evidence to scaffold learning and improve teaching' (p. 16), the teachers were growing as researchers who, according to Poekert et al. (2016) should i) develop 'an inquiry stance'; ii) 'access research/theory'; iii) engage in 'critical thinking'; and iv) 'develop new perspectives' (p. 317).

Sarah's statement highlights that the LIn-CoP promoted 'inquiry as stance' (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999, p. 289): 'I'm ... co-researcher ... I will be engaging in, and with PALAR process[es] and activities with my co-researchers' (LIn-CoP 6, 2019). As the teachers engaged in critical thinking, they were actively 'linking practice to scholarship' (Edel, LIn-CoP 6, 2019) by drawing upon the 'facets' in relation to their own 'classroom situation[s]' (Aisling, LIn-CoP 6, 2019). However, the teachers were not only *accessing* research and theory as proposed by Poekert et al. (2016), they were also actively

generating it, and in doing so, were ‘professionalising the work’ they were doing as researchers (Poekert et al., 2016, p. 317). With the model promoting the stance that they were ‘always doing research’ (Olesen, 1994, p. 166), they came to recognize that they were generating data together, ‘*by sharing*’ their evolving practice (Sarah, LIn-CoP 5, 2019); through practice-based discussions; updating one another on their ‘TSAPs’ progress (Emily, LIn-CoP 6, 2019); and offering evidentiary ‘photos on Trello’ (Sarah, LIn-CoP 6, 2019).

Executing the proactive autonomy afforded to them by the PLD model (Holland, 2021; Littlewood, 1999), the teachers planned ‘to prepare for the future’ as researchers (Poekert et al., 2016, p. 317) by ‘becom[ing] more knowledgeable’ in the skill of data analysis. As Gráinne shared: ‘beginning to learn how to code will help me to become a researcher in the future. I hope to do some further study in the next few years and having an idea of coding now will help me’ (Trello, 2019). The community confirmed that engagement in the PALAR LIn-CoP contributed to their ‘reinvigoration’ as researchers (Poekert et al., 2016, p. 317). Where Sarah was ‘looking forward to doing more research’ (Trello, 2019), the LIn-CoP inspired three others to seek out independent research programs, such as Lucia:

I have grown as a researcher and through the LIn-CoP discovered the postgraduate certificate in the education of pupils on the autism spectrum. I have almost completed the course and have really enjoyed every aspect of it. The research completed with the LIn-CoP has certainly helped me (Trello, 2021).

Rather than merely accessing research and theory, LIn-CoP members were motivated to offer others the opportunity to access their research, thus growing as leaders and researchers, both simultaneously and symbiotically. The indivisible potential of these interconnected growth aspects is reflected in Aisling’s assertion that ‘the confidence that comes from being part of a research group makes a huge difference to what you kind of dare to do’ (Talking Heads, 2020). They used funding which they successfully applied for, to be released from the school day acting as ‘teachers in residence’ or boundary spanners (Pugach, 2017) where they ‘presented things [they]d done with current BEd students’, at a local Teacher Education Institution (Liz, Talking Heads, 2020). As their engagement continued, they seized the opportunity to ‘show [their] findings and research’ (Sarah, LIn-CoP 6, 2019) at ‘conferences’ (Liz, Talking Heads, 2020). Additionally, a number of LIn-CoP members collaborated to prepare and publish a research journal paper. Edel’s (LIn-CoP 5, 2019) assertion: ‘wow!’ expresses the pride they felt about such achievements as researchers (Wood & Zuber-Skerrit, 2013). This study indicates that engagement in a PALAR LIn-CoP supports the identity growth of teachers as researchers, empowering them to engage in research activities which they ‘wouldn’t have necessarily felt [they] were going to do or felt confident about at the start’ (Liz, Talking Heads, 2020). It also shows *how* teachers engaged as researchers as called for in the literature.

Growth as a leader

Findings from this study also attest to the PLD meta-model supporting the development of the professional identity of early career teachers as they added ‘growth as a leader’ to their ‘multiplicity of identities’ (Amaral-da-cunha et al., 2020). The findings below

provide empirical evidence of leadership learning, when prospectively using Poekert et al.'s framework (2016), within a school university partnership through a PALAR LIn-CoP model.

Edel's assertion demonstrates Poekert et al.'s (2016) concept of 'voice' and how adoption of a leadership stance to guide collaborative professional learning within her own school context is empowering.

... from being involved I have grown as a leader. I recently offered to share my ideas, opinions, plans and resources to a colleague about Guided Reading which I was involved in last year in school. I know that this time last year I would have not had the confidence to do this (Trello, 2019).

It also reflects Poekert et al.'s (2016) personal growth aspect in terms of confidence as does the following example by Aisling:

we're fairly new teachers but even in our schools, to feel that we can go in and have an opinion and share it and even have evidence from the work that we've done to present to people and sort of say, you know, we can try this because this is what we found out ... that makes a huge difference as well, to your confidence as a leader within your own school community where you're working. (Talking Heads, 2020).

Drawing an evolving connection between personal confidence and growth as a leader, Aisling later said:

I never saw myself as a leader in education ... When you share your own experiences and ideas and when you inspire others to try something new or to challenge themselves you are also a leader. This is what I've gained from our community of practice in terms of leadership. The confidence to share my ideas and experience although I'm only out of college a few years (Trello, 2021).

Edel also highlighted the recursive and iterative processes (Poekert et al., 2016) of growth as a leader and personal growth when she stated:

I am more confident at giving back to my school and ehm helping newly qualified teachers [NQTs] in our school (Talking Heads, 2020) ... I have facilitated many NQT observations this year and I was also asked to speak to the NQTs in our school about planning in SET [special education teaching] (Trello, 2021).

It also reflects the concept of leadership as practice or activity (MacBeath et al., 2018) and the reciprocity between this practice and individual efficacy and empowerment (King, 2017; Ruchakul et al., 2015).

As referenced above, leadership as practice to influence others (Harris, 2008) was also evident in the community writing an article to share their practice of leadership for inclusion. Their collective decision on the title of the article 'Inspiring inclusion in your classroom and beyond' (King et al., 2019) demonstrates their shift in growth from a teacher to inspiring or empowering others to be inclusive. While Edel saw the article as a way of 'sharing lived practices of teacher leadership' (Edel, LIn-CoP 8, 2019), they also saw it as an opportunity to 'raise teachers' critical consciousness levels' (Emily, LIn-CoP 8, 2019). This affirms the view of leadership as a process of influencing others (Yukl, 2013) and the importance of leadership as 'influence and interaction', rather than power and authority (Poekert, 2012, p. 117). This idea of 'how you empower others' (Aisling, LIn-CoP 7, 2019) was noted by several of the LIn-CoP members who became interested

in “being more of a driving force” (Aisling, LIn-CoP 2, 2018). Aisling felt ‘that the focus has shifted from like me, me, me and what do I need to what can I give here and what can I put out’ (LIn-CoP 2, 2018) arguably reflecting Poekert et al.’s (2016) take on leadership roles and having voice, and Buchanan’s (2015) ‘stepping up’. Lucia’s comments (2021) go one step further by evincing Buchanan’s (2015) ‘pushing back’

I am so glad to have developed as a leader within this LIn-Cop and have the ability to stand up for the rights of my children to be included. Previously I may have stood back and allowed my class [Autism Spectrum] to be forgotten about on timetables etc for fear of offending someone, but now I am happy to point out lack of inclusion where I see it and stand up for the rights of the children in my class (Trello, 2021).

Noteworthy is that sharing practices with others outside the LIn-CoP was also empowering for these early career teachers. For example, members explained that ‘doing something like the teacher in residence’ (Edel, Talking Heads, 2020), ‘that could also be like, quite an empowering thing for people involved in it’ (Liz, LIn-CoP 7, 2019), reflecting Collinson’s (2012) concept of ‘leading by learning’ and ‘learning by leading’. Emily felt leadership like this was important to ‘narrow the barriers and skills gap related to inclusive education’ (LIn-CoP 8, 2019) as leadership is an enactment of values (King et al., 2019). This also highlights the importance of a shared goal of inclusion (Hargreaves & O’Connor, 2017; King & Stevenson 2017; Yukl, 2013) as a focus within the LIn-CoP.

Findings here offer a unique contribution in terms of these early career teachers exercising leadership despite other researchers questioning the confidence and capacity of early career teachers to do this (King et al., 2019) in a profession where typically people have to wait 10–15 years to be leaders, where leadership is viewed as a right or entitlement (Harris & Sharratt, 2020). These early career teachers were motivated by their shared values and beliefs around inclusion and were ‘ready to start giving . . . ready to move on’ (Aisling, LIn-CoP 2, 2018) attesting to the importance of teacher self-motivation (Margolis & Deuel, 2009) for leadership and to the idea that leadership learning for inclusion involves an enactment of teachers’ values and beliefs as these influence practices (Brown, 2006; King, 2017). While previous research has argued the importance of years of experience impacting teacher leadership (Angelle & DeHart, 2016), this study confirms that early career teachers are motivated to and can enact leadership.

Personal growth

As the discussion above revealed, growth as a teacher, researcher and leader was not experienced singularly or linearly but instead, a symbiotic interconnectedness between and across the growth aspects culminated in each inter-dependent aspect being reinforced and enriched. Poekert et al.’s (2016) description of personal growth as being ‘situated at the nexus of the core competencies’ (p. 320) is mirrored in the teachers’ comments in this study: ‘Growth as a person is probably one of the areas in which I developed the most’ (Emily, Trello, 2019); ‘I think all the other aspects of growth are interlinked under this heading’ (Edel, Trello, 2021). Whilst Poekert et al. (2016) presented data demonstrating how engagement in their model results in a number of

key personal growth outcomes, there is limited consideration of how each of these outcomes relate to one another and interact at certain times to promote the personal growth trajectory of the teachers. With respect to Poekert et al.'s (2016) personal growth outcomes, the data in this work suggest that feelings of individual psychological empowerment are considered to be particularly important at the initial phase of a PLD journey (Holland, 2021; Zimmerman, 2000). Early in her journey, Aisling expressed: 'I kind of want to think about myself and my own learning' (LIn-CoP 2, 2018). Her comment demonstrates the importance of PLD models such as the one in this study, which place the teacher more centrally as a beneficiary of the engagement process (Holland, 2021). Supporting Poekert et al.'s (2016) definition of personal growth 'as confidence in one's ability to engage in continuous self-improvement' (p. 320), the teachers in this study claimed to feeling 'refreshed' (Sarah, Trello, 2019), 'inspired' and 'motivated' (Group Trello, 2017). They attributed their reinvigoration to the LIn-CoP's potential for offering 'positive energy' and 'support' (Group Trello, 2017). As the community relationships developed (Poekert et al., 2016) and their individual and shared practice was enhanced, members felt validated and were 'fill[ed] ... with confidence' (Emily, Trello, 2019) generally but also specifically, as teachers, leaders and researchers. Acknowledging Poekert et al.'s (2016) assertion that knowledge development is central for personal growth, the following comment shines a spotlight upon the iteratively positive linear relationship between confidence and knowledge building: 'I am delving just deeper in and that's definitely down to being more confident in my knowledge and my ideas' (Edel, Talking Heads, 2020). The longer the teachers engaged with the LIn-CoP, the more their perceptions of themselves as 'legitimate knowers' (McNiff, 2013, p. 6) became obvious to them (Dworski-Riggs & Day Langhout, 2010; Holland, 2021). Edel expressed that once they knew that their ideas were 'good, [they had] no problem sharing them with colleagues' (Edel, Trello, 2019). Indeed, scholars suggest that teachers' openness to share themselves as a resource for others, is contingent upon the degree to which they feel like experts (Russell et al., 2009 as cited in Christens, 2012; Dworski-Riggs & Langhout, 2010). As such, the community captured the linear causal relationship between personal, teacher and leader growth indicating that knowledge 'equipped [them] with the confidence and experience to share [their] thoughts and experiences with others' (Emily, Trello, 2019), which also 'led to giving advice and potential solutions' (Gráinne, Trello, 2019). Moreover, where they would previously have felt vulnerable speaking up, efforts to build relationships with those beyond the LIn-CoP came to feel like a less risky endeavor (Poekert et al., 2016), as the following quotes suggest:

Confidence in my conversations with other teachers is something I have noticed in myself from "being part of the LIn CoP" ... has led me to be more open as a teacher with colleagues in work (Emily, Trello, 2021).

I also feel that I am now more confident at starting courageous conversations with colleagues (Edel, Trello, 2021).

Whilst references to confidence and sense of expertise were plentiful across each growth aspect, it is important to share that teachers early focus was quite clearly upon their growth as a teacher, reinforcing the Holland's (2021) insistence that a 'pedagogy for

autonomy' (p. 221) should be adopted with the facilitator acknowledging and catering for the teachers initial 'salient priorities' (p. 240), which, in this case was the domain of 'leadership for inclusion'. However, as time passed, their growing commitment to professionalize their practice and plan for their future growth (Poekert et al., 2016) as leaders and as researchers was evidenced. Similar to Edell, Liz successfully applied and completed a postgraduate course in special and inclusive education. Liz also 'put [her] name forward to teach a special class' (Trello, 2019). She felt 'like this group [e.g. LIn-CoP] gave [her] the boost of confidence and validation [she] needed to apply at this stage in [her] career' (Trello, 2019).

This study also addresses Poekert et al.'s (2016) observation that 'there appears to be no rank order of importance given to the different areas' (p. 318). Like Holland (2021), this study, rather than accepting that no one growth aspect or outcome is generally more or less important, highlights instead that the salient priority which is attributed to particular growth aspects will vary depending upon the teacher's and/or community's evolving needs and interests at any point in time during their PLD journey. As found by Holland (2021), 'a prioritization of agency, autonomy, identity construction and democracy left space for' the teachers to recognize that they had various evolving identities which they could explore as and when they were ready (p. 240).

Also, whilst Poekert et al. (2016) promote that their model should be facilitated by school-based PLCs, this study indicates that the potential for growth and as such, leadership development is deeper and wider when facilitated by a cross-school CoP (Holland, 2021) which offers boundary spanning (Borzillo & Kaminska-Labbe, 2011) opportunities within and beyond the school, the university partnership, and the wider profession.

Implications and conclusions

This paper makes a number of significant contributions. It is the first paper to respond to Poekert et al.'s (2016) call for using their evidence-based framework to plan for teacher leadership development. In using the framework, this paper also strengthens the empirical evidence related to teacher leadership development based on growth as a teacher, researcher, leader and personal growth. It provides detailed examples of growth in these areas and confirms that this development is not linear, rather iterative and recursive and largely centered on personal growth, all supported by collaborative interactions and dialogue. However, this paper deepens the understanding of leadership development by highlighting the variety of evolving relationships between growth aspects and between growth outcomes, to promote personal growth trajectories whilst also acknowledging this growth is influenced by teachers' personal and contextual challenges, needs and desires. This paper therefore argues that professional learning facilitators ought to prospectively include the development of these competences in their work on leadership development with teachers.

Secondly, while Poekert et al. (2016) suggested using the framework within PLCs in schools, there was little guidance on how to do this. While PLCs have been shown to have some transformative potential (Dogan et al., 2016), more recent literature calls for further empirical studies to substantiate effects on teacher learning (Hairon et al., 2017). Given the identified challenges related to school structures, relationships, hierarchies, and cultures, it may be questionable if PLCs within schools are democratic enough to support teacher

leadership development more generally in schools. This paper endorses the call for school university partnerships for teacher leadership development to support teacher leadership development (Snoek et al., 2017). The findings provide empirical evidence of leadership learning, when prospectively using Poekert et al.'s framework (2016), within a school university partnership model.

Thirdly, this paper clearly evidences the capacity of early career teachers for teacher leadership development thereby addressing the dearth of research in this area (Forde et al., 2018; King et al., 2019). It highlights the importance of supporting newly qualified and early career teachers as they transition from university to schools and has the benefit of preventing the washout of learning of early career teachers who in this study had undertaken a major specialism in inclusion and evidenced leadership for inclusion through growth in the four areas adopting the facets of equity (Grudnoff et al., 2017). By implication, it reinforces previous calls in the literature for leadership learning at initial teacher education to be strengthened (Bond, 2011; Forde et al., 2018; King, 2017; King et al., 2019).

Finally, this paper takes a step toward addressing the dearth of literature related to teacher leadership and models of professional learning to empower teacher leadership (Nguyen et al.'s, 2019). Given the emphasis on feedback loops and interactions as important for growth as a researcher, teacher, leader and personal growth (Poekert et al., 2016), it was important to adopt a suitable model of professional learning to facilitate this (see PLD meta-model design). This led to the adoption of a CoP approach using PALAR processes, which also supported the need for social learning processes for inclusion (Chapman et al., 2012) and consideration of the facets of inclusion (Grudnoff et al., 2017). Evidence clearly points to the value of conversations with teachers from other schools which supported their learning and growth, thus reinforcing the influence of the CoP approach. Overall, the meta-model design used for this study contributes to the existing dearth of research considering professional learning for teacher leadership development (Nguyen et al., 2019). While the model is not the main focus of this paper, it is important in the context of explaining the approach used to adopt Poekert et al.'s (2016) model of teacher leadership development and therefore may be of interest to others wishing to adopt a similar approach.

Disclosure statement

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