Advocating for a Bold Brand of Teacher Leadership

● *Teacher leaders must be producers of solutions rather than just implementers of someone else's.*

—Lori Nazareno

Almost a decade ago, Jennifer York-Barr and Karen Duke put together a comprehensive review of teacher leadership, a new field of inquiry at the time of this review's publication. It is a *must-read*, even for those who are not inclined to read academic journals. They describe a great deal about the dimensions and characteristics of teacher leadership, but point out that although the literature is "relatively rich" in regard to classroom experts' potential to lead, it is light on the "evidence of such effects."[1] Nevertheless, York-Barr and Duke thoughtfully outline how teacher leadership has evolved over time, pointing to three distinct waves.

In Wave 1, teachers served in formal roles as grade-level chairs, department heads, or union representatives and took on managerial roles designed to "further the efficiency of school operations."[2] This means that teachers did the work that administrators did not want to perform.

In Wave 2, teachers took on instructional roles, helping to implement the mandated curriculum, leading staff development workshops, and mentoring new recruits or showing them the ropes as "buddies." These teacher leader roles have become a bit more commonplace today, especially with the formalization of

induction programs for new recruits. But as other researchers have made clear, few school districts implement these programs with much fidelity. For example, although more new recruits have access to induction programs, few programs have the qualities (that is, mentoring by trained veterans, a reduced teaching load, and so on) known to improve the retention of teachers in the classroom.[3]

And in Wave 3, teachers began to lead what are now called professional learning communities (PLCs) in an effort to support collaboration and continuous learning among themselves. But as Andy Hargreaves has noted, "many professional learning communities can be horrifically stilted caricatures of what they are really supposed to be."[4] Most administrators do not know how to embrace the "P" of PLC. They do not understand or know how to cultivate professionalism inside their school, and teachers often do not, as a collective, know what high-functioning PLCs look like.

York-Barr and Duke do point out that "professional norms of isolation, individualism, and egalitarianism" often undermine teacher leadership.[5] But they do not address the fact that for most of teaching's past, administrators and other powerful political and policy leaders of our nation's public school system have wanted all of those who teach to play the same roles. For example, a National Board Certified Teacher (NBCT) from the Center for Teaching Quality (CTQ) Collaboratory, whose recent essay describing a school of the future garnered a national award, shared with us that her principal directly told her not to pursue anything outside of her classroom. The reason is simple, but also troubling: if all teachers do primarily the same thing, they are easier to manage.[6]

A NEW WAVE OF TEACHER LEADERSHIP

Examples like those just given are why we are advocating for a *Wave 4* of teacher leadership—in which those who teach have time and space to lead, and are rewarded for leading, well beyond their district, state, and nation. As Lori Nazareno (whom you will get to know in Chapter Six)—an NBCT who incubated a teacher-led school in Denver, pushing both her district and her union to think differently about reform—reminded us, "In Wave 4, teacher leaders must be producers of solutions rather than just implementers of someone else's." We must make this happen—and here are a couple of compelling reasons.

First, powerful evidence speaks volumes about how teacher leadership can make a significant difference for students. Almost twenty-five years ago Susan Rosenholtz's landmark study concluded that "learning-enriched schools" were characterized by "collective commitments to student learning in collaborative settings . . . where it is assumed improvement of teaching is a collective rather than individual enterprise,

and that analysis, evaluation, and experimentation in concert with colleagues are conditions under which teachers improve."[7] Other researchers have found that students achieve more in mathematics and reading in schools with higher levels of teacher collaboration.[8] And economists, using sophisticated statistical methods and large databases, have recently concluded that students score higher on achievement tests when their teachers have had opportunities to work with colleagues over a longer period of time and to share their expertise with one another.[9] Teachers themselves put an exclamation point on these empirical findings: in a 2009 Met-Life survey of American teachers, over 90 percent of teachers reported that their colleagues contribute to their own individual effectiveness.[10]

> The current crisis in education should bring us to reexamine the essential core of teaching and learning for all students.
> —Shannon C'de Baca

Second, the challenges facing our public schools cannot be met with all teachers serving in the same narrow roles designed for a bygone era. Consider the complexity of teaching to our nation's Common Core State Standards and the personalized learning systems required to prepare a diverse mix of fifty-five million (and growing) students for career and college in a global economy. Then think about today's one in five students who do not speak English as their primary language; by 2030 the number will double to 40 percent. Almost 25 percent of our nation's public school students, because of their families' devastating economic situations, are at risk of not meeting the higher academic standards imposed by the new economy. One in ten of our nation's children live in what sociologists call *deep poverty*.* And deep poverty creates early life stresses in children—a fact proven by neuroscientists who have shown how anxiety and tensions can "disrupt the healthy growth of the prefrontal cortex," inhibiting the cognitive development that is critical to academic learning.[11] Effectively addressing these out-of-school issues requires more *teacher solutions*—a special brand of pedagogical and policy ideas generated by classroom practitioners who regularly serve students and families.

And finally, such top-performing nations as Finland (see Chapter Nine) and Singapore have built their success on reducing standardized testing and increasing curriculum flexibility. Both of these nations promote, explicitly through national policy, more teacher professionalism and greater connectivity between those who teach and those who make policy. In Finland and Singapore, which invest heavily in

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* The United States Census Bureau has created a category labeled "deep poverty" that applies to individuals more than 50 percent below the official poverty line (approximately $11,000 for a family of four, excluding food stamps or other noncash support) (Poverty in the United States: A snapshot. [n.d.]. Retrieved from http://www.nclej.org/poverty-in-the-us.php).

teacher education, there is no such thing as a shortcut into teaching. Unlike in the United States, these nations do not focus mainly on recruiting more talent into teaching for a few years and statistically identifying those who generate student test score gains. Instead, they invest *deeply* in preservice preparation and demonstrate *serious* respect for teachers by promoting the importance of teaching for a career. Finland and Singapore also, through the way teachers organize themselves into PLCs, capitalize on teachers' capacity to lead.

And their results are real.

But there is more.

Futurists claim that U.S. schools will face more, not fewer, economic disparities among the students they serve, and must organize themselves differently—including more expansive leadership, new forms of assessment, and "diverse learning agent roles."[12] Individual school principals, even with a small band of assistants, do not have the know-how or the capacity to do all that must be done as schools morph into 24/7 "hubs" for integrated academic, social, and health services. The kinds of roles teacher leaders must play include building and scoring new assessment tools tied to internationally benchmarked standards, integrating digital media into a more

Figure 1.1

Finland's and Singapore's Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) results far outpace those of the United States.

PISA 2009 Results		
Reading	**Mathematics**	**Science**
Shanghai–China (556)	Shanghai–China (600)	Shanghai–China (575)
Korea (539)	Singapore (562)	Finland (554)
Finland (536)	Hong Kong–China (555)	Hong Kong–China (549)
Hong Kong–China (533)	Korea (546)	Japan (539)
Singapore (526)	Chinese Taipei (543)	Korea (538)
Canada (524)	Finland (541)	New Zealand (532)
New Zealand (521)	Liechtenstein (536)	Canada (529)
The United States (500) is 14th out of 40.	The United States (487) is 31st out of 40.	The United States (502) is 27th out of 40.

Data courtesy of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development.

relevant curriculum for constantly wired students, and partnering with community organizations. And although technology can allow students to engage in personalized learning experiences like never before, it will take well-prepared, expert teachers to offer them deep educational opportunities. A special brand of teacher leader—one who has skills in spanning organizational boundaries—will be required to meet the demands posed by twenty-first-century schooling.

MOVING PAST OUTDATED STRUCTURES AND INADEQUATE SOLUTIONS

Dramatically improving public education for all will take both collective action and the discretionary judgment of many expert teachers, not just a few. Teaching and learning, now and in the future, are as complicated as the work of a federal judge who is issuing a decree on immigration law in contentious communities in Arizona and South Carolina; or the efforts of doctors who are interpreting an array of blood tests, MRI results, and family medical histories to determine how to treat a brain tumor. To best serve children and their families, we need far different approaches to organizing our schools—and we must enlist the help of our 7.2 million educators in both the K–12 and higher education sectors. And we should call on teacherpreneurs in particular.

However, today's conceptions of America's teacher leaders remain too narrow—often upholding the existing, and quite archaic, school structures. Educators rightly have called for teacher leaders to serve as *resource providers* (helping novices set up their classroom); *instructional specialists* (studying research-based classroom strategies and sharing findings with colleagues); *curriculum experts* (helping colleagues use common pacing charts and develop shared assessments); *classroom supporters* (demonstrating a lesson, coteaching, or observing and giving feedback); and *school leaders* (serving on committees or acting as grade-level or department chairs).[13] These are important roles, don't get us wrong, but they barely get us out of Wave 2 teacher leadership. Teachers are sometimes given a chance to lead, but they are expected to do so only inside the confines of their school or district. Granted, our public education system still needs to develop future Wave 2 teacher leaders. But students and their families and communities need teacher leaders who initiate change, much like today's reformers who are calling for education entrepreneurs to improve teaching and learning. Unlike the teacherpreneurs featured in this book, however, education entrepreneurs are not necessarily required to have deep, successful classroom experience or knowledge of students and their families.

Granted, teacher leadership has become more popular of late. Several years ago, a group of educators pieced together a string of domains and standards for teacher leaders—the Teacher Leader Model Standards—designed to delineate the

knowledge, skills, and competencies that teachers need to assume leadership roles in their school, district, and profession. And some universities have taken steps forward by using these standards to create innovative programs—as is the case with UCLA's Center X, which created a Lead Teacher Certification Program that advances more ambitious leadership from the classroom, with social justice and action research at its core to solve immediate problems of practice.

UCLA's approach may very well inspire more universities to begin building demand for teacher leaders by preparing them. But most approaches to teacher leadership training, found in a hodgepodge of higher education programs and school district workshops, can be lacking in depth and breadth and often mark teachers as targets of reform, as opposed to championing teachers' efforts to lead reform themselves. These programs promote roles and expectations that are typically defined either by administrators in response to external guidelines or by those who do not teach and remain stuck in public education's long-standing, top-heavy bureaucracy, with all of its administrative levels.

Shannon C'de Baca, an award-winning science teacher (whom you will get to know better in Chapter Five), made a powerful point as we talked about leadership in the classroom:

> The current crisis in education should bring us to reexamine the essential core of teaching and learning for all students. Rather, it has brought a host of new Band-Aid approaches that reinforce a system that is broken in deeper structural ways. In our education system here in America we let go of nothing, and this leads to an overload of work for teachers that undermines their capacity to lead.

In leading an online conversation inside the CTQ Collaboratory, Shannon called for teachers to get "out in front" by establishing learning structures for students and colleagues alike. This brand of teacher leadership calls for teachers who are "connectors." Later, at a CTQ retreat, Shannon led a brainstorming session that defined more clearly what it meant for teacherpreneurs to serve as connectors who have a wide knowledge of local and global policy issues, so they can prepare their students for an interconnected world. (See Figure 1.2.)

There is much more discussion today of leadership from those who teach. Reformers talk of developing a teaching profession with simplistic policies that focus on firing bad teachers and rewarding a few good ones, as well as promoting charter schools to compete with so-called traditional ones. However, their solutions, captured in documentaries like *Waiting for Superman*, do little more than lionize a few Hollywood-ized "superteachers"—such as Jaime Escalante, played by Edward

Figure 1.2

This brainstorm depicts some of the many ways that teacherpreneurs can lead beyond the classroom. The ideas are from the CTQ TEACHING 2030 retreat, 2011.

Image courtesy of Sunni Brown (http://sunnibrown.com).

James Olmos in *Stand and Deliver* (1988), or Erin Gruwell, played by Hilary Swank in *Freedom Writers* (2007).

Often reformers talk of supporting teachers, but many of their policies suggest that the profession is overrun by pedantic teachers like Ben Stein's character in *Ferris Bueller's Day Off* (1986), or other awful ones, like Cameron Diaz in *Bad Teacher* (2010), whose movie poster is too unseemly to reproduce in a book honoring and elevating America's teaching profession. There is just no evidence to suggest that school reform can succeed if it is carried solely on the backs of hero teachers portrayed by Olmos and Swank—or only if we get rid of the types of classroom practitioners represented by Stein and Diaz.

It is as if we have only two paths to good teaching: gush over a few extraordinary teachers who work overtime to create miracles in their own classroom, or mock or vilify those who do not teach as they should.

In a brilliant *New York Times* essay from September 14, 2012, Elizabeth Alsop unpacks the cinematic portrayal of the teaching profession as "shorthand for a character's dysfunction or even cosmic disenfranchisement" and teachers as either "psycho" or "saint."[14] She cites film scholar Dana Polan, who has identified the "problem of the pedagogue's embodiment," in which the media sources that portray teachers, the journalists who lambaste them, and the policymakers who make rules for them have difficulty "imagining the teacher as a real person."[15]

But we also know there are great challenges in educating a growing and diverse group of public school students in the "flat world," portrayed by Thomas Friedman as one in which the historical and geographical divisions in the global marketplace have become increasingly irrelevant.[16] In some respects, the "flat world" economy, driven by interdependency among people, complex systems of information, and outsourcing, will demand the power of professional capital in our public schools—a textured concept developed by Andy Hargreaves and Michael Fullan to explain that individual talent is not enough to improve schools for twenty-first-century student learning.[17] But teacherpreneurism is not just about growing numbers of classroom experts incubating and executing their own individual ideas. Instead, teacherpreneurism is about finding grounded solutions to vexing problems that have the power to redesign archaic school routines and scale up systemwide improvement.

To drive systemic change that will serve *all* of America's public school students, it will take far more than haphazardly continuing to recruit almost anyone to teach—and preparing new recruits through 1,200 different versions of university-based programs and 600 truncated training regimes that shortcut serious preparation. It will take far more than rewarding or punishing teachers on the basis of an annually administered standardized achievement test. And it definitely will take more than the efforts of a cadre of education entrepreneurs from outside the system. It will take the careful cultivation of teachers who can lead without leaving the classroom. And it will take more than the inclusion of "teacher voice" in school reform conversations.

TEACHER LEADERSHIP AND "VOICE" AND THE SLOW MARCH TO PROFESSIONALISM

Since the mid-1800s, teaching as an occupation has been on a long, slow, and wavering march to professionalism. For every step forward for teachers—drawing on a codified body of knowledge, enforcing standards among their ranks, and leading in the best interests of the students they serve—there seems to be almost three-quarters of a step backward. For most of the history of education in the United States, teachers have worked at the bottom of the school organizational chart. They are expected to do as they are told with little or no opportunity either to make their effective teaching practices visible to their colleagues or to have their ideas about smarter and more innovative ways to implement policy reforms sustainably known and embraced by school board members, state legislators, and researchers.

For the last two decades, America's public education system could have systematically used accomplished teachers as leaders. But it has yet to do so. The best opportunity began to emerge in 1987, when the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS), under the leadership of its founding president Jim

Kelly, was established and began developing an advanced certification system built around high standards of teaching practice.

With the launch of its first certifications in the early 1990s, NBPTS used "state-of-the-art" assessment tools that went "far beyond multiple choice examinations" and "[took] into account the accumulated wisdom of teachers."[18] Designed for twenty-four different subject areas and student developmental age levels, the NBPTS assessment process includes a portfolio mirroring the rigors of an Architect Registration Examination as well as an online battery measuring a teacher's content knowledge. Teachers who sit for the relatively expensive performance exam (more than $2,500) must demonstrate—through analyzing digital recordings of their teaching practice and student work samples—that they "know their subjects and how to teach those subjects to students" and "think systematically about their practice and learn from experience" (see the NBPTS Five Core Propositions: http://www.nbpts.org/five-core-propositions).

Despite some mixed empirical findings on the impact of NBCTs on student learning, the research evidence has been positive—including the gold seal of approval from the National Research Council.[19] And slowly, but surely, increasing numbers of states and districts began to offer incentives for teachers to sit for and earn the advanced certificate.

By late 2012, NBPTS had certified more than 102,000 K–12 teachers across the United States. A large share of NBCTs can be found in North Carolina (19,799); Florida (13,635); and South Carolina (8,435)—three states that had in place for some time comprehensive incentives for teachers to participate in the assessment process, meet its standards, and use their acknowledged expertise in their practice.[†]

Kelly believed NBCTs would be offered "enhanced professional roles" that would enable them to use their expertise while remaining in the classroom.[20] And he began to organize his staff's work to do so. But Kelly's vision was never realized before he retired as NBPTS president in 1999. Researchers have found that leadership from NBCTs has been undermined by: (1) administrators who lack knowledge of the assessment process, (2) too little time for teachers in general to work with one another, and (3) the critical need among NBCTs to learn how to lead.[21]

[†] North Carolina awards its NBCTs a 12 percent salary supplement (along with significant incentives to take the exam). And Florida at one time offered both a 10 percent salary increase for achieving National Board Certification and an additional 10 percent bonus if the NBCT agreed to mentor new teachers. South Carolina paid NBCTs a $7,500 salary supplement for the life of the certificate (Berry, B. [2008]. The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards and the future of a profession. Washington DC: National Board for Professional Teaching Standards).

And without any evidence that NBCTs were spreading their expertise, it was easy for those who resisted the advanced certification process (and investments in teaching as a fully realized profession) to gain ground. The number of states offering financial incentives for teachers to earn National Board Certification decreased from thirty-nine in 2005 to twenty-four in 2012."[22]

Critics claimed the assessment process was too "time-consuming and expensive"[23] and focused too much on how teachers make decisions and what they do to improve learning rather than on the test scores of their students.[24] And although both national teachers' unions supported NBCTs, and the National Education Association (NEA) sought to have their policy ideas embraced,[25] there was never any systematic attempt at scale to elevate these classroom experts and differentiate them seriously from other members. The NEA did not capitalize on NBCTs as a special brand of teacher who could promote quality control within the ranks. As Arthur Wise and Mike Usdan pointed out, because the unions "have failed to advance professional accountability . . . there is an insufficient basis for public trust in teachers as a group."[26] Teacher leadership, especially a bold brand, requires greater trust of the profession writ large.

High-ranking education officials, including U.S. secretary of education Arne Duncan, have *called for* support of NBCTs as leaders, and recently called for more "respect" for teachers in general, creating new venues to "elevate [their] voice in federal, state and local education policy."[27] However, we have seen little action (at the time of publication).

Granted, more policy groups and think tanks are turning to teachers, or at least to a select few of them, to hear what they have to say. And this increase is a good thing as well, even if some of these teachers have been chosen because they will agree with policy groups' and think tanks' predefined strategies, and not necessarily for how they teach.

Although the rhetoric suggests that teachers, especially expert ones, should *lead* reforms, most often these classroom practitioners are not much more than the targets of them. At a policy meeting late in spring 2012 in Washington DC, we sat in a room full of nonprofit staff members, state education agency employees, and administrator trade association representatives to discuss the Common Core State Standards and their implementation.

The standards have been designed to be "robust and relevant to the real world"[28] and to guide teachers toward teaching strategies that will "give students a deep understanding of the subject and the skills they need to apply their knowledge."[29]

But we were the only organization to take a practicing teacher to the meeting. And when the question of who should be involved in building global competencies into

the Common Core State Standards was raised, teachers did not make the top three. The administrators and nonprofit leaders in the room seemed to think that textbook publishers, after-school program directors, and higher education faculty should be included in this competency-building process before classroom teachers. We were disappointed by the lack of priority given to the practitioners who would actually be implementing the Common Core State Standards, yet unfortunately we were not surprised. A recurring focus of the meeting was how to make sure that "principals get the information they need" and "stay ahead of their teachers." (See more about this story in Chapter Seven.)

> Truly engaging with "teacher voice" means taking seriously the collective and individual expression of teachers' professional opinions based on their knowledge and classroom expertise.
>
> —José Vilson

At another meeting in New York City, this one hosted by an organization promoting teacher voice that was spurring conversations about tenure and evaluation reforms and attended by several CTQ virtual network members, we learned that to participate one had to "sign on" to a set of "principles" before any discussion took place. For us, *teacher voice* suggests placing limitations on the extent to which those who teach inside public schools are involved in making major decisions on how students are taught and assessed, as well as restricting how they view themselves. José Vilson (whom you will get to know better in Chapter Five) was there in New York City and warned that teachers, if they are not careful, can be used:

> Sometimes, "teacher voice" means that the convening group or individual actually wants meaningful input from educators. But more often than not, teachers are being asked to complete a project or support an agenda that needs little more than their reluctant signatures. Truly engaging with "teacher voice" means taking seriously the collective and individual expression of teachers' professional opinions based on their knowledge and classroom expertise. Anything else is just a "teacher nod." Like we're all bobble-head dolls.[30]

Policy leaders and think tanks may reach out to teachers so these teachers can *say things* but not *do things*. Teachers may *sit* at the table but may not *set* it. The powers that be may call a few teachers in to be heard, but not to be embraced as a collective. It is time to connect, ready, and mobilize teacherpreneurs, especially because of their commitment to social justice and skills, to spread their pedagogical and policy know-how in transforming their profession. And it is the

Figure 1.3
Teachers at the CTQ TEACHING 2030 retreat delved into some of the characteristics teacherpreneurs should exhibit.
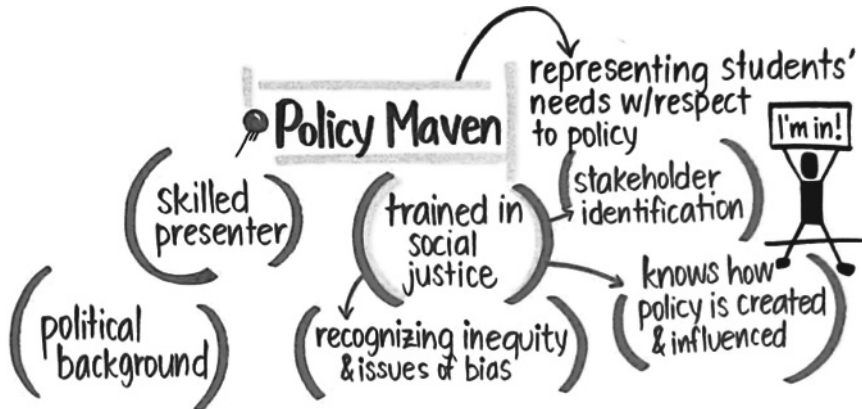
Image courtesy of Sunni Brown (http://sunnibrown.com).

policy maven-ness of teacher leaders, as information specialists and connectors, that *really* defines them as teacherpreneurs. Next we turn to defining this concept more fully, exploring the "right stuff" of a bold brand of teacher leadership.

● **Chapter One Selected Web Sites**

Following is a list of online resources that relate to the discussion in this chapter. If you find that any of these links no longer work, please try entering the information in a search engine.

Common Core State Standards: http://www.corestandards.org

PDF of the Teacher Leader Model Standards:
http://www.teacherleaderstandards.org/downloads/TLS_Brochure_sm.pdf

UCLA's Center X Lead Teacher Certification Program: http://centerx.gseis.ucla.edu/for-educators/lead-teacher-certification

Activity for Chapter One

Now What?

Create Your Map for Leading Without Leaving

Goal

You've learned about four different "waves" of teacher leadership in this chapter. Wave 1 management roles are meant to help other teachers become more efficient or compliant with existing policies. Wave 2 instructional roles focus on coaching peers to become sharper practitioners within their classroom. Wave 3 collaboration support roles are designed to help colleagues work in more effective teams inside their school. Finally, Wave 4 teacherpreneurial positions give space for teachers to develop and enact transformational approaches to challenges in their school, in their district, and beyond.

The numbers assigned to the waves reflect the order in which these types of roles evolved within our profession, but none of these kinds of positions has "expired." Roles that fit in each of these waves all exist in public schools today. And the journey among these roles isn't a linear progression. Some teacher leaders start out as mentors to new teachers (Wave 2), are then asked to move into a very circumscribed department chair position (Wave 1), become teacherpreneurs (Wave 4), and then return to their building full-time as transformational leaders of their school's team (Wave 3). Your own journey is just that: your own. The only common thread is that all these roles start at a "Wave 0" mastery of accomplished teaching practice!

You can't map your way forward as a leader until you know where you have been. This activity and the ones that follow in each of the other nine chapters suggest strategies for reflecting on the unique "map" of your career as a teacher leader and envisioning what routes you'll take next. Prompts at the end of every chapter will help you think about—and act on—ways to develop yourself as a teacherpreneur.
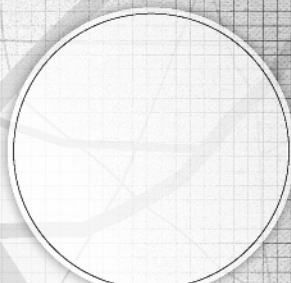
Think

By now, you may already be imagining a future role for yourself as a teacherpreneur. Let's start by seeing how your past has prepared you for it. Use the template provided to map the journey of your teacher leadership up to this point in your career.

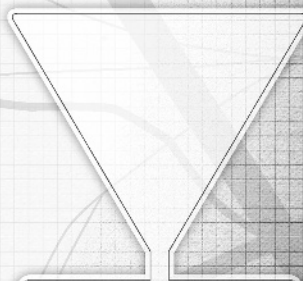# JOURNEY OF YOUR
TEACHER LEADERSHIP
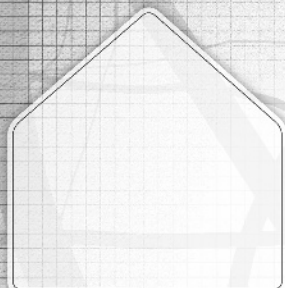
WAVE 1 EXPERIENCE

WAVE 2 EXPERIENCE

WAVE 3 EXPERIENCE

WAVE 4 EXPERIENCE

FUTURE TEACHERPRENEURIAL ROLE

In the space shown for each wave, note the titles for the roles you've held, along with a one-sentence position description for each. (You can map your Wave 0 opportunities to develop pedagogical mastery in the space surrounding the other waves!)

Now reflect. Of which waves have most of your prior roles been a part? Which waves might you want to explore more? Add notes to each wave about additional experiences you'd like to cultivate. (You may want to use a different color of ink or star these roles for the future.) Ultimately, what would your ideal teacherpreneurial role look like? Develop a one-sentence job description and add that to the space given at the bottom of your map.

Act

Think of one person who could help you learn more about the teacherpreneurial role you imagine for yourself, if it is similar to roles that already exist in your district, or who could help you create such a role if no Wave 4 positions are in place. Make time to speak with that person about what it would take to develop the role or to be selected for it.

Share

Follow the link to the CTQ Collaboratory (http://www.teachingquality.org) to join our online community, if you aren't already part of our network, and share your ideas with other teacher leaders there. As you engage in the activities in this book, we'll continue to prompt you to post ideas to our online gallery of teacherpreneurial plans.