TEACHERS AS LEADERS: EMPOWERING TEACHERS TO LEAD INSTRUCTIONAL CHANGE

A thesis presented
by
John T. Tennett Jr.

to
The School of Education

Dr. Patricia Mason
Dr. Melissa Parenti
Dr. Paula Tingley

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education

in the field of
Education

College of Professional Studies
Northeastern University
Boston, Massachusetts
December 2019
Abstract

The role of the school principal is vital to the functioning, performance and success of the school. Principals are responsible for all aspects of school management including functioning as instructional leaders, evaluators, data specialists, behavioral managers, and substitute teachers. Given the myriad of responsibilities of the school principal, their role as the leader of instruction is often forced aside due to the immediate daily demands from students, families, and staff members. Strengthening the leadership voices of classroom teachers and capitalizing on their expertise and resources has potential to lead to significant and sustained change in schools. This research study focused on the role of the building principal in developing a shared, sustainable leadership model in order to build organizational leadership capacity. In this study, teacher perceptions of current and potential leadership opportunities within their schools were explored.

Key words: teacher leaders, professional development, organizational leadership, sustainable leadership
TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION ........................................................................... 6
  The Research Problem ........................................................................... 6
  Significance of the Problem .................................................................. 7-8
  Evidence Justifying the Problem .......................................................... 8-9
  The Audience ...................................................................................... 9
  Research Questions ............................................................................ 9
  Theoretical Framework ....................................................................... 10-13
  Definition of Terms ........................................................................... 13-14
  Conclusion ........................................................................................ 14-15

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW ............................................................ 16
  Problem Statement ............................................................................. 16-17
  Evidence Justifying the Problem ........................................................ 17-18
  Significance Statement ..................................................................... 18-19
  The Multidimensional Role of the Building Principal ....................... 19-20
  Principal Burnout .............................................................................. 20-21
  History of Distributed Leadership ..................................................... 21-22
  Application of Distributed Leadership .............................................. 22
  Professional Development ................................................................. 23-25
  Defining Teacher Leadership ............................................................ 26-27
  The Need for Teacher Leadership in Schools ..................................... 27-28
  Professional Development Lead by Teacher Leaders ....................... 28-29
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Pages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Professional Learning Communities as a Catalyst for Sustained School Leadership</td>
<td>29-31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY</td>
<td>33-34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Setting</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants/Sample</td>
<td>34-35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Collection Plan</td>
<td>35-40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Survey</td>
<td>36-37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Analysis Process</td>
<td>37-40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant Rights</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informed Consent</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH FINDINGS</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analysis Method</td>
<td>41-43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presentation of Results</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual Participant Data Sets</td>
<td>44-53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holistic View of the Data</td>
<td>53-65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme One: Past Experiences</td>
<td>54-56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme Two: Characteristics of a Leader</td>
<td>56-60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme Three: Definition of Leadership</td>
<td>60-63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme Four: Definition of Teacher Leadership</td>
<td>63-66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme Five: Relationship with Building Principal</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme Six: Desired Opportunities</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connections of Findings to Theoretical Framework</td>
<td>69-70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Education is a powerful necessity in today’s global society. The demands that are placed on the people who choose a career path in education can be vast. Many educators view a career in this profession as a “calling”. The ability for educators to manage the demands and expectations of all stakeholders at local, state, and national levels can seem insurmountable. Accountability movements such as No Child Left Behind thrust school principals into the limelight with regard to academic achievement (Finkle, 2012). As Strong, Richard and Catano (2008) note, national and state mandates expect schools to ensure that all of their students achieve mastery of curriculum objectives. As a result, leading instructional efforts in the school has developed into a fundamental role of school principals. While budget cuts reel back positions such as curriculum coordinators, assistant principals and curriculum specialists, building principals are left shouldering most of the load for instructional leadership. This problem of practice focused on the building principal and the need to develop teacher leadership in order to build organizational capacity.

The Research Problem

Given the increasing demands on building principals, the time they have to dedicate to instructional leadership is decreasing considerably (Grodski, 2011; Lieberman & Miller, 2005; McBrayer, Chance, Pannell, & Wells, P, 2018; Poirel & Yvon, 2014). The problem that was reviewed in this study was a decrease in instructional leadership, specifically by the building principal, which is causing a need to build leadership capacity among teachers. Providing leadership opportunities for teachers in schools can lead to increased school improvement as
schools build on the strengths of the teachers and provide leadership opportunities that build capacity within the organization.

**Significance of the Problem**

The ability to build leadership capacity at local, state, national, and international levels is paramount in creating an educated global society. The time that building principals have to dedicate to instructional leadership is decreasing as they face multiple demands from all stakeholders across their schools and communities (Beachman & Denith, 2004; Grodski, 2011; Lieberman & Miller, 2005; McBrayer, Chance, Pannell, Wells, 2018; Poirel & Yvon, 2014). Providing leadership opportunities for teachers in schools can lead to increased school improvement (Lumpkin, Claxton & Wilson, 2014; Silva, Gimbert & Nolan, 2000; Lambert, 2005; Trust, Krutka, Carpenter, 2016). Leadership opportunities such as teacher led staff meetings, leading professional conferences, and participating in committee work helps to create a collaborative environment that promotes buy-in and a positive school culture. When teachers are empowered as leaders, the responsibility of instructional leadership does not rest solely on the building principal (Cook, 2014; Spillane, Halverson & Diamond, 2001).

Within their school organizations, school principals are responsible to be instructional leaders, evaluators, data specialists, behavioral managers, substitute teachers, and complete many district and state level tasks. Given these multifaceted responsibilities and demands, school principals are simply unable to provide the high level instructional leadership that many see as the foundation of their jobs. As Lieberman and Miller (2005) note, “principals are struggling to be instructional leaders in the face of huge management issues and teachers are trying to meet the needs of increasingly diverse students.” (p.151). They go on to say that the “tenor of school classrooms is one of anxiety, stress and confusion and at its worst hopelessness” (p. 151). Alone,
principals cannot possibly support all teachers in the manner in which they need. Ballek, O’Rourke, Provenzano & Bellamy (2005) emphasize the need to make the development of teacher leaders an intentional and purposeful act in our nation’s schools. These authors support the sentiments of Lieberman and Miller (2005) as they note that given the increasing complexity of the school principal’s job, school leadership can no longer reside with one person. The standard paradigm that the building principal is the only school leader must be challenged. Those schools with high leadership capacity amplify leadership for all (Searby & Shaddix, 2008; Trust, Krutka, Carpenter, 2016).

Research that explores the value of building teacher leadership will provide insight to a variety of stakeholders within the educational community. Principals, teachers, researchers, and school districts as a whole, will benefit from this type of research.

**Evidence Justifying the Problem**

Hickey and Harris (2005) found that teachers have positive perceptions and feelings of receiving professional development and coaching from fellow peers. Professional development is an avenue to support school reform and when peers serve as the leaders of such professional development and instructional practice, teachers emphasize feelings of collaboration and community (Hickey & Harris, 2005; Trust, Krutka, Carpenter, 2016). In their work, Hickey and Harris identified six recommendations for developing teachers as leaders. They share identifying teacher strengths, matching teacher strengths with professional development, consideration of teacher preparation time, the power of informal presentations, and ongoing collaboration as vital components to teacher leadership. They argue that keeping these considerations in mind will enhance teacher leadership for all. Jacobs (2012) posits that teacher leaders feel empowered as they begin to feel that they can make a difference in their schools. Searby & Shaddix (2008)
further discuss the need for a paradigm shift in schools as the roles of the teachers and principal evolve to meet the many diverse needs in schools. In their work, they note that “such paradigm shifts associated with developing teachers as leaders may include moving from isolation to collaboration, from privatization of practice to open sharing of practice, and from independence to interdependence” (p.6). The development of teacher leaders provides a platform for teachers to have an inclusive voice within their school and has the potential to create a culture of positive, sustainable, and shared leadership. This type of collaborative atmosphere is vital as educational reform evolves to better meet the needs of all stakeholders.

**The Audience**

This qualitative study allows teachers, administrators, and potential administrators the opportunity to explore leadership in an educational setting. The hope is that by providing leadership opportunities for teachers, they will help reform educational practices and create a collaborative, thriving educational environment and culture. An indirect impact on the local school board may be present as information from this study may affect the allocation and management of school personnel and resources.

**Research Questions**

The following are the research questions framing this study:

• How do pre-kindergarten through grade three teachers describe their personal leadership philosophy?

• What do pre-kindergarten through grade three teachers identify and describe as current leadership opportunities?

• What do pre-kindergarten through grade three teachers identify and describe as leadership roles they could acquire to support the building principal?
Theoretical Framework

The Distributed Leadership Theory challenges traditional leadership roles. As Sturm (2009) notes, this type of leadership is not shared in the sense of just creating new positions and sharing authority, it is about the conceptualization of how leadership as a process works, how it develops, and how it changes and adapts to fit the particular context. Distributed leadership is transformational in nature as it emphasizes relationships that develop in organizations over time between both formal and informal leaders. The theory of Distributed Leadership asserts that leadership expertise must be mobilized in order to build capacity for organizational improvement and interdependent interactions among stakeholders.

The Australian Government for Learning and Teaching (2017) identifies six fundamental tenets to the Distributed Leadership Theory. Tenet one, Engage With, asserts that distributed leadership gains power through a series of activities where leaders across all levels of institutional authority engage with one another. Tenet two, Enable Through, emphasizes culture and respect where collaborative relationships are cultivated and nurtured. The third tenet of the Distributed Leadership Theory, Enact Via, emphasizes the importance of supportive organizational systems that encourage the involvement of their people. Tenet four, Encourage With, encourages learning and professional development centered on raising knowledge and awareness of distributed leadership practices through learning communities, time, space, and financing. Evaluating the process and measuring the growth in leadership capacity is the fundamental premise of tenet five, Evaluate By. The final tenet, Emerge Through, engages people in distributed leadership through ongoing cycles of action research. Supporting these tenets of distributed leadership within the school setting has the potential to diversify leadership
responsibility, increase leadership capacity, and promote a collaborative culture of educators who are invested in sustained change and school reform.

At the heart of distributed leadership are four dimensions outlined by The Australian Government Office for Learning and Teaching (2017) that encapsulate the six tenets mentioned above. These include, a context of trust, a culture of autonomy, acceptance of change, and collaborative relationships. Distributed leadership is based on the notion of trust in the expertise of others in order to build leadership capacity. Respecting one another and their individual knowledge and contributions is vital as organizations accept the need for change and embrace it. Without a culture based on collaborative and supportive relationships, distributed leadership will not be successful. In their work, Harris and Spillane (2008) suggest that distributed leadership is “a way of getting under the skin of leadership practice, of seeing leadership practice differently and illuminating the possibilities for organizational transformation” (p.33). The notion of distributed leadership has been influential in shaping how leadership has been transformed over the past decade (Bolden, 2011).

**Counter-arguments for Distributed Leadership**

In his work, Harris (2009) noted that while the empirical evidence about the application of distributed leadership is encouraging, it is far from conclusive evidence. He spoke of the need to know more about the limitations and pitfalls before offering advice about its implementation, particularly in schools. Leithwood, Mascall, and Strauss, (2009) drew a similar conclusion, noting that it is unrealistic to expect a significant relationship between student achievement gains and the implementation of distributed leadership. Both of these authors suggest that researchers need to think about the configuration of distributed leadership and how it
contributes or inhibits both organizational and student performance (Harris, 2009; Leithwood et al, 2009).

In his work, Bolden (2011) suggests that insufficient consideration is taken with regard to the dynamics between distributed leadership and the hierarchical power structure in many organizations. Hatcher (2005) suggests, in schools particularly, that while leadership may often times be distributed, power is most often not. Both authors caution that while the premise of distributed leadership might encourage participation and leadership in activities within the organization, substantial imbalances of resources and power are prevalent (Bolden, 2011; Hatcher, 2005). Lumby (2017) also challenges the assertion that distributed leadership redistributes power. In his work, he cautions that there is little evidence that this redistribution of power occurs in a reliable manner. Bolden, meanwhile, emphasizes the importance of remaining vigilant regarding the dynamics of power and how this can enable or hinder individuals’ engagement in leadership practices (p. 261).

Alignment with the Theory

The foundational tenets of the Distributed Leadership Theory that emphasizes a shift from individual leadership to collaborative leadership directly connects to the development of leadership capacity in teachers and the research questions for this study. In this study, attention is focused on the myriad of responsibilities of the building principal and the vital importance of the collaboration and cultivation of teacher leaders. This notion is clearly supported by the theory of distributed leadership. Principals are responsible for all aspects of school management. Given this, their role as the leader of instruction and change is often forced aside due to the immediate daily demands from students, families and staff members. Developing classroom teachers as instructional leaders who lead professional development and change initiatives through
distributed leadership has the potential to lead to significant and sustained change in the school. When teachers are empowered as leaders, the responsibility of instructional leadership does not rest solely on the building principal. Those schools with high leadership capacity amplify leadership for all (Searby & Shaddix, 2008, Trust, Krutka, Carpenter, 2016).

**Definition of Terms**

For the purpose of this study, the following includes a list of key words associated with the study as defined by the researcher.

**Distributed Leadership:** When leadership expertise is shared in order to build capacity for organizational improvement and interdependent interactions among stakeholders (Bolden, 2011).

**Instructional Leadership:** Leading the development and management of pedagogy and curriculum within a school (Anast-May, Dozier, Gurley, O’Neal, 2016).

**Teacher Leadership:** Classroom teachers taking on leadership roles within the school (Lumpkin, Claxton & Wilson, 2014).

**Formal Leadership:** Leadership that is measured by a process or position title (i.e. grade level team leader).

**Informal Leadership:** Leadership that evolves through day-to-day interactions.

**Sustainable Leadership:** Leadership that creates lasting and meaningful improvements in schools over time.

**Professional Development:** The process of improving and increasing knowledge and capability of teachers through education and training (Hilton, Hilton, Dole & Goos, 2015).

**Building Principal:** A stationary principal who is responsible for one building.

**Teachers:** Classroom teachers who are exclusive to one building and not itinerant.
**Unconferencing:** Participant led discussion where the typical hierarchical nature of a conventional conference and formal presenters is replaced by the sharing of knowledge and ideas of those in attendance (Lynch, 2018).

**Conclusion**

The Distributed Leadership Theory calls on organizations to distribute and share leadership among all stakeholders. When examining the history and application of the Distributed Leadership Theory, it became clear that this theory lends itself strongly and supports the problem of practice identified for this study. Building principals need to develop, cultivate, and support teacher leaders. They need leaders throughout the school building that can promote and support change and achievement. Given the many responsibilities and expectations, instructional leadership is not possible by the building principal alone. Built on a culture of trust and mutual respect, leadership capacity must be cultivated and sustained. Given the foundational characteristics of distributive leadership and supporting methodology, it is evident that the theory clearly underpins and supports the notion of a school culture where leadership is shared and collaborative, and where the building of leadership capacity is a priority.

Several authors, however, have highlighted limitations to the application of the Distributed Leadership Theory in school organizations (Gronn, 2002; Gordon, 2010; Hatcher, 2005; Lumby, 2017). These authors argue that current research on the theory of distributed leadership insufficiently considers the influence of administrative power and how it is situated in the school setting. Each of these authors emphasizes that while school leaders may try to distribute leadership among staff, the traditional hierarchical nature of school organizations makes it difficult to effectively and reliably distribute power. Hatcher (2005) notes that while
administrators might encourage engagement in leadership activities, substantial power imbalances may be masked.

It is the hope of the researcher that the implementation of distributed leadership in a pre-kindergarten through grade three setting will build leadership capacity that is supportive and that will be sustained over time. The application of this theory has the potential to empower teachers to cultivate change in order to both support the building principal and to lead to increased student achievement. This research study will make contributions to the broader research community as it builds upon current and past research on the application of this theory in the school setting.
CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

It has been widely reported that the daily demands placed on school principals are very high (Federici & Skaalvik, 2012; Norton, 2003; McBrayer, Chance, Pannell & Wells, 2018; Petzko, 2008; Van Vooren, 2018). While the role of the school principal is vital to the functioning, performance and success of the school, the vast responsibilities inherent to the position can be overwhelming. Given the plethora of responsibilities of the school principal, their role as the leader of instruction and change is often forced aside due to the immediate daily demands of stakeholders. The standard idea that the building principal is the only school leader must be confronted. Developing classroom teachers as instructional leaders who lead professional development and change initiatives has the potential to lead to significant and sustained change in the school. This research study focused on the role of the building principal and the need to develop teacher leadership in order to build and sustain organizational leadership capacity.

This literature review explores the multidimensional role of the building principal, as well as, the many challenges they face in their profession. This review goes on to discuss professional development of teachers and continues with what research says about teachers leading professional development practices in their schools. Finally, how schools cultivate and support teachers as leaders in an effort to increase leadership capacity in schools and to support the building principal was investigated.

Problem Statement

Given the increasing demands on building principals, the time they have to dedicate to instructional leadership is decreasing considerably. Providing leadership opportunities for
teachers in schools can lead to increased school improvement as schools build on the strengths of the teachers and provide leadership opportunities that build capacity within the organization. The theory of distributed leadership, which underpins this study, asserts that leadership expertise be mobilized in order to build capacity for organizational improvement and interdependent interactions among stakeholders.

**Evidence Justifying the Problem**

Hickey and Harris (2005) found that teachers have positive perceptions and feelings of receiving professional development and coaching from fellow peers. Teachers emphasized the feelings of collaboration and community when their peers were serving as leaders of professional development and instructional practice. In their work, Hickey and Harris (2005) identified six recommendations for developing teachers as leaders. These include:

- Identify teacher strengths; Match teacher strengths to professional development needs;
- Develop professional development programs with these strengths and needs in mind; provide teachers with time to prepare for their presentation; Provide opportunities for informal presentations to reduce anxiety and stress of presenting; and provide time throughout the year to take advantage of collaborative opportunities (p. 12).

The study of Jacobs (2012) further supports this work, as she notes that teacher leaders feel empowered as they begin to feel that they can make a difference in their schools. Searby & Shaddix (2008) echo these sentiments as they discuss the need for a paradigm shift in schools as the roles of the teachers and principal evolve to meet the many diverse needs in schools. Searby and Shaddix emphasize the importance of shifting the standard paradigm of teaching in isolation to a culture where privatization is obsolete and open sharing of practice and interdependence is at the forefront. Lieberman, Campbell and Yashkina (2016) argue that teachers must be at the
forefront of creating, developing, and implementing their own ideas for curricular and school change and challenge the notion of teachers as passive recipients. The development of teacher leaders is paramount as educational reform evolves to better meet the needs of all stakeholders.

**Significance Statement**

The ability to build leadership capacity at local, state, national, and international levels is vital in creating an educated global society. Providing leadership opportunities for teachers in schools can lead to increased school improvement. Leadership opportunities such as teacher led staff meetings, leading professional conferences, and participating in committee work helps to create a collaborative environment that promotes buy-in and a positive school culture. When teachers are empowered as leaders, the responsibility of instructional leadership does not rest exclusively on the building principal.

Within their school organizations, school principals are responsible for providing leadership and expertise in a wide variety of educational tenets. Given these multifaceted responsibilities and demands, school principals are simply unable to solely provide the instructional leadership that many see as a top function of their jobs. In their work, Lieberman and Miller (2005) note that in the face of vast management issues and diverse student needs, principals struggle to find the time and resources necessary to be effective instructional leaders. Alone, principals cannot possibly provide the level of support to all teachers that helps enhance optimal teacher performance. Ballek, O’Rourke, Provenzano & Bellamy (2005) emphasize the need to make the development of teacher leaders an intentional and purposeful act in our nation’s schools. These authors support the sentiments of Lieberman and Miller (2005) as they note that given the increasing complexity of the school principal’s job, school leadership can no longer reside with one person. The prevailing belief that the building principal is the only school leader
must be confronted. Schools with high leadership capacity foster and promote leadership within their culture (Searby & Shaddix, 2008; Trust, Krutka, Carpenter, 2016).

Research that explores the value of building teacher leadership provides insight to a variety of stakeholders within the educational community. Principals, teachers, researchers, and school districts as a whole, will benefit from this type of research.

The Multidimensional Role of the Building Principal

The role of the school principal is vital to the functioning, performance and success of the school. In his work, Grodski (2011) notes that the job of the principal has become increasingly complex and multifaceted and “the myriad of educational reforms have only added to the demands of leadership requiring the acquisition of new kinds of skills, knowledge and dispositions” (p.1). In his study, school principals reported that they were overwhelmed with the day-to-day expectations of their jobs and that instructional leadership intentions were often superseded by more managerial demands. Principals stated that since there are so many administrative things they must attend to, the most important things (i.e. instructional leadership) become the last things they do. As Lieberman and Miller (2005) note, principals are struggling to be effective instructional leaders in the face of huge management issues and vast responsibilities. Poirel and Yvon (2014) and McBrayer, Chance, Pannell & Wells (2018) support this as they note that a school principal’s professional world is characterized by many challenges and a multitude of stress as they work to manage both the administrative and instructional functioning of their schools. Wood, Finch and Mirecki (2013) note that during recent years, the most sought after principals are instructional leaders who can create a learning atmosphere that is focused on teaching and improving student achievement. While it is readily understood that it is vital for school principals to positively shape the environment of the learning community, many
principals find themselves overwhelmed by the day-to-day exigencies of their jobs to do this effectively (Grodski, 2011; Van Vooren, 2018).

**Principal Burnout**

As noted, it certainly is not a secret that educational administration is a challenging and demanding profession. Federici and Skaalvik (2012) assert that given the dynamic state of the educational system, principals routinely cope with complex tasks and experience significant stress. At times, burnout is a manifestation of the emotional exhaustion inherent in the position and can be the endpoint of unsuccessful coping skills. When discussing building principals, Petzko (2008) notes that dedicated school administrators are leaving the profession earlier in their careers than anticipated. Everyone has a vested interest in education and with this comes intense pressure and expectations. As a result of these pressures and expectations, it is increasingly difficult to recruit and retain high quality school administrators who can sustain over time. The burnout apparent in the profession is significant. The potential of people leaving the organization because they are unable to meet the intense needs being demanded must be recognized. Chapman (2005) notes that the recruitment and retention of building principals are matters of great priority for school systems as effective leadership within a school is vital to all aspects of school reform, improvement, and perhaps most importantly, student learning. If principals are leaving positions and turnover is high, teaching and learning will most certainly be greatly impacted. Norton (2003) articulated several reasons for principals to leave the job and suggested a variety of recommendations aimed at retaining school administrators. Among the reasons for principal attrition, Norton notes changing demands, low salary, increasing time commitments, and lack of support and respect. His recommendations to keep school principals include adopting policies for retention and action plans for success.
The feelings of concern of retaining quality principals are supported by the research of Whitaker (1996) and Van Vooren (2018) who found that emotional exhaustion defined by feelings of overextension, daily work pressure and emotional overload was reason for principals to leave the profession. In Whitaker’s study, principals also spoke of increased demands and responsibilities including pressure for accountability from parents and central office, trying to be instructional leaders, trying to implement change and attempting to complete management task simultaneously as reasons for them leaving. Van Vooren cautions of the increasing layers of responsibilities for school principals and notes that as new responsibilities are added to the principal’s role, rarely are responsibilities taken away.

**History of Distributed Leadership**

In his review of the history of distributed leadership, Bolden (2011) discusses Peter Gronn’s 2000 article titled, Distributed Properties: A New Architecture for Leadership. In this article, Gronn outlined the concept of distributed leadership as a shift from the leadership behaviors of individuals to a collective leadership process developing from the interactions of many (p. 1). While it has only been since Gronn’s work in the year 2000 that distributed leadership has been embraced by scholars and practitioners, Bolden (2011) notes that the origins of such a concept date back to as far as 1250 BC, making distributed leadership one of the most antiquated notions of shared leadership. In his work, Gronn cited Gibb as the first author in 1954 to propose distributed leadership as a set of leadership functions carried out by a group. As Holden states, however, despite Gibb’s early interest in the concept of distributed leadership it lay dormant until Brown and Hoskings work in 1986. Spillane, Halverson and Diamond (2004) identified distributed cognition and active theory as the conceptual foundations of the Distributed Leadership Theory. While the theory clearly has a rich and lengthy history, it has only been in
the last couple of decades that the theory of distributed leadership has taken hold and started to significantly impact organizational structures.

**Application of Distributed Leadership**

Over the past decade, several articles and books have been published that discuss distributed leadership in school settings. These studies built on the theoretical work of distributed cognition, sociocultural activity theory, situated cognition and micro-sociological theory (Spillane & Mertz, 2015). Gronn’s studies in 2000 and 2002 reviewed the different forms of distributed leadership, offered a taxonomy of its application and extensively reviewed previous studies on the subject. Spillane, Diamond and Jita’s (2003) study took a detailed look at distributed leadership as a practice that focuses on the social distribution of leadership practices in schools. They discussed the ways leadership is stretched over both formal and informal leaders in schools and identified different levels of this distribution as it is applied across school cultures. Spillane, Diamond and Halverson also did extensive work with the Distributed Leadership Theory from 2001-2004 arguing that leadership is not a function of one individual’s ability but also those of others in the organization as well as the organizational setting. Wieczorek & Lear’s (2018) work provided a forum to understand how teacher leaders’ instructional leadership can build organizational capacity in an effort to improve teaching and learning.

**Conclusion**

It is no secret that the role of the school principal is vital to the functioning of the school, the effectiveness of the teachers, and the achievement of students. With this complex and multifaceted position comes overwhelming day-to-day expectations that frequently supersede the instructional leadership intentions of the principal. Principals simply do not have the time in
their day to provide the instructional leadership and guidance to teachers that many see as their foundational role. An added dimension to this is the frequent burnout and attrition of building principals caused by the emotional exhaustion from these demands.

**Professional Development**

Research has shown that continued professional development is necessary in building the capacity of teachers to improve their practice and promote increased student learning (Akdemir & Ayik, 2017; Hilton, Hilton, Dole & Goos, 2015; Goldsmith, Doerr & Lewis, 2014; Justi & Van Driel, 2006; McBrayer, Chance, Pannell & Wells, 2018; ). Over the past decade, researchers have noted links between high quality professional development and increased student achievement (Borko, 2004; Smith, 2010; Desimone, 2009; Darling-Hammond, Wei & Andree, 2010). Research has shown a direct relationship between the learning and professional development of teachers and the achievement of their students (DiPaola & Hoy, 2014; Nooruddin & Bhamani, 2019; Vetter, 2012). When structured purposefully, the potential for positive changes in teaching practice due to increased depth in pedagogical understanding is apparent (Stewart, 2014). Stewart notes the importance of implementing active and consistent professional development practices that are supported by peers and administrators. Stewart goes on to say, “learning communities thrive when all participants are invested in the work they are doing” (p.28). Knight (2011) lists several principles of professional learning that invite dialogue among participants and creates an environment where teachers are motivated by the goals they are invested in. Knight’s principles include:

1. Equality (teachers have input in the planning of the professional learning activities and are not just required to attend professional development),

2. Choice (teachers choose what and how they learn),
3. Voice (professional learning empowers and respects teacher voices),

4. Reflection (reflection is recognized as an integral part of learning; authentic dialogues are enabled),

5. Praxis (learning is applied to real life practice),

6. Reciprocity (participation is an expectation: all offer and receive feedback) (p.29).

The work of Wood, Goodnight, Bethune, Preston & Cleaver (2016) supports this, noting that the professional development that is often offered through occasional in service trainings “may not be sufficient with regard to time, intensity and focus to see change in teachers’ instructional skills” (p.159). They go on to say that when done right, professional development can foster teachers’ skill development, keep them abreast of current research on effective pedagogical practice, and leverage their use of evidenced based practices in their classrooms. In their study, the authors emphasized that one day in-service workshops often produced little improvement both in teacher performance and student learning as teachers have little opportunity to practice any newly learned skills and seldom received feedback on their teaching (Wood, Goodnight, Bethune, Preston & Cleaver, 2016). As Petrie & McGee (2012) note, it is now understood that meaningful learning by teachers is often an arduous, slow and gradual process. This professional learning must be supported and cultivated in a manner that is responsive to both teacher and student need and supports teachers in the application of professional learning to classroom practice. Joyce & Showers (as cited in Wood, Goodnight, Bethune, Preston & Cleaver, 2016) note that high quality professional development includes demonstration, practice and coaching. With these elements, the knowledge, skill, and application is improved. Without them, professional development often results in superficial attempts to practice and apply the strategies presented.
It has been widely reported that professional development for teachers is a fundamental vehicle in which to improve teaching and student learning and achievement (Borko, 2004; Darling-Hammond, Wei & Andree, 2010; Desimone, 2009; Petrie & McGee, 2012; Smith, 2010; Stewart, 2014; Wood, Goodnight, Bethune, Preston & Cleaver, 2016). Recent studies have shown a rise in criticism of professional development models that do not pay specific attention to the individual needs of teachers and schools. These studies indicate that effective professional development must encourage investment by teachers, be contextualized, be sufficient in duration and intensity, and be sustained over time (Petrie & McGee, 2012; Stewart, 2014; Wood, Goodnight, Bethune, Preston & Cleaver, 2016). Stewart argues that these appropriate conditions for professional development must be present in order to encourage depth in understanding that leads to pedagogical change. She notes that professional development must make a shift from passive, inconsistent and intermittent practices to those that are active, consistent and supported by colleagues in a professional learning community. As Petrie and McGee note, in order to be effective, it is absolutely vital that teachers as learners is the central focus of the professional development in schools. The authors go on to state that the developers of professional development opportunities must focus on teachers as both learners and the teachers of their students. As they state, “this means providing adequate time and support for training the advisers and then allowing adequate time for advisers to develop and implement professional development programs that reflect the unique needs of each school and teacher” (p.59).

Conclusion

While the importance of professional development of teachers in schools has been readily reported as an avenue to the build capacity of teachers to improve their teaching and promote student achievement, the manner in which it is delivered is extremely important. Professional
development that is consistent, invites investment by teachers, is purposeful in design and is responsive to the needs of teachers and students leads to depth in understanding and an increase in positive pedagogical change.

**Defining Teacher Leadership**

While definitions of teacher leadership vary, what remains constant is the notion that it is leadership that expands beyond classroom boundaries (Beachman & Dentith, 2004; Lumpkin, Claxton, Wilson, 2014). As Lumpkin, Claxton, Wilson (2014) note, teacher leaders are those who share “their specialized knowledge, expertise, and experience with other teachers to broaden and sustain school and classroom improvement efforts” (p.59). They go on to say that teacher leaders are experienced role models who garner respect and possess such characteristics as organization, collaboration and innovation (Lumpkin, Claxton, Wilson, 2014). This is supported by the work of Silva, Gimbert & Nolan (2000), who state that when implemented in schools, Teacher leaders would “slide the doors open” to collaborate with other teachers, discuss Common problems, share approaches to various learning situations, explore ways to overcome structural constraints of limited time, space, resources, and restrictive policies, or investigate motivational strategies to bring students to a deeper engagement with their learning (p.781).

Lumpkin, Claxton and Wilson (2014) detail the evolution of the notion of teacher leadership that has occurred over the past fifty years in schools. According to these authors, the evolution of teacher leaders began with the appointment of teachers to serve as department heads or master teachers. Next, teachers became instructional leaders or curriculum developers and finally teacher leaders worked with peers to improve their professional practice. This work
included such things as mentoring colleagues, attacking school wide problems and engaging and leading professional development activities.

These teacher leaders can help their building principal to deepen and sustain school and classroom change and reform. As Lumpkin, Claxton & Wilson (2014) note, developing this leadership capacity should be a top priority and should occur through continuous professional development. When teachers function as leaders, they operate in ways that support a sense of ownership, making a difference to the learning and motivation of teachers and schools (Ghamrawi, 2013; Wieczorek & Lear, 2018). Multiple researchers support the notion of teacher leaders, noting that teacher leadership breaks down the isolation of classroom teachers, promotes collaboration, improves organizational learning and change and catalyzes school improvement efforts (Ghamarawi, 2013; Ghamarawi, 2011; Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001; Harris & Townsend, 2007). When teachers work in isolation their expertise does not contribute to teaching and learning, does not enhance school culture, and creates a less than optimal teaching and learning environment.

The Need for Teacher Leaders in Schools

The demands on school leaders, particularly building principals, have increased dramatically in recent years (Beachman & Dentith, 2004). They face pressures of the accountability of student achievement, while at the same time, are seen as a building manager, administrator, politician, change agent, and instructional leader (Wood, Finch and Mirecki, 2013). The principal must also function at the pinnacle of renewal efforts and change as they leverage school reform and improvement (Beachman & Dentith, 2004). As Fullan and Hargreaves (1996) note, while the demands of school principals multiply, they have no one with whom to share these copious responsibilities. Beachman & Dentith go on to say that school
leaders can “no longer afford to serve as sole decision makers and holders of power. Models and practices of leadership that facilitate the leadership capacity of others must be developed” (p.277).

Mountain Brook school in Alabama established a Teacher Leaders program in an effort to develop a culture of continuity of leadership as the attrition rate of principals was a continual concern. This program was an intentional plan to prepare the classroom teachers for continual, consistent leadership (Searby & Shaddix, 2008). Inherent in this school department’s mission was the notion that schools with high leadership capacity are those where leadership is amplified for all. The guiding paradigm of this work was that the building principal is only one of the many leaders in the school community (Lambert, 2005; Searby & Shaddix, 2008).

**Professional Development Lead by Teacher Leaders**

While the importance of developing teachers as leaders to support the building principal in school reform and change has been reported (Beachman & Dentith, 2004; Lambert, 2005, Searby & Shaddix, 2008; Wood, Finch and Mirecki, 2013), many authors note that the principal must also be actively engaged in the professional development and ongoing learning of their classroom teachers. In the study of Ringler, O’Neal, Rawls, Cumiskey (2013), they note that the level of support of the principal is instrumental to the implementation of professional development. When principals are present and active participants in professional development training sessions teachers feel supported as they see their principal as a collaborative partner learning alongside of them.

Spillane, Halverson and Diamond (2001) emphasize that leadership sustainability is more than grooming a principal’s successor. This is supported by Cook (2014) who notes that leadership sustainability means dispersing leadership opportunities throughout and among the
professionals within the school professional community. He goes on to state that this leadership model invites other members of the school staff both individually and collectively to assume leadership roles. As he says, “The teachers are the ones who carry the brunt of the responsibility of implementing the vision, but are often overlooked as contributing to the role of leadership” (p.3). Teacher buy-in is essential to enhancing and maintaining a high quality educational environment that promotes common goals while providing authentic learning opportunities for students and staff alike.

**Professional Learning Communities as a Catalyst for Sustained School Leadership**

The concept of Professional Learning Communities has been in schools since the early 1990s (LeClerc, Moreau, Dumouchel & Sallafranque, 2012; Sims & Penny, 2015). In its most primitive form professional learning communities (PLCs) are defined as a group of educators who meet consistently, share their expertise, and work collaboratively to improve their pedagogical skills and the academic performance of their students (LeClerc, Moreau, Dumouchel & Sallafranque, 2012; Sims & Penny, 2015). In their work, LeClerc, Moreau, Dumouchel & Sallafranque uncovered seven crucial factors of effective PLCs. These include:

1. Identifying the school’s vision
2. Supporting physical and human conditions that encourage teachers to cooperate, learn and share together,
3. Establishing a cooperative school culture,
4. Manifesting leadership from both teachers and principals,
5. Disseminating expertise and sharing learning,
6. Basing topics for PLCs on concerns related to student learning,
7. Making decisions based on accurate data
As LeClerc, Moreau, Dumouchel & Sallafranque (2012) note, bringing teachers together to work and learn from one another creates capacity for sustainable changes in schools. In order for this change to progress and be continuous, the authors note four factors that must be in place: Schools must provide opportunities where teachers are encouraged to discuss instructional practice and conduct peer evaluations; schools must adopt a culture of inquiry based on student learning and need; teachers should observe one another in the classroom and provide feedback; and the expertise of fellow teachers must be disseminated (p.11).

Researchers assert that promoting the leadership of teachers is a vital piece to implementing PLCs (LeClerc, Moreau, Dumouchel & Sallafranque, 2012; Lumpkin, Claxton & Wilson, 2014; Sims & Penny, 2015; Stewart, 2014) and that leadership must be shared among stakeholders rather than shouldered solely by the school principal. In this way, PLCs develop leadership skills at all hierarchical levels.

In his study, Cook (2014) defined sustained leadership as decision making leadership that is shared among teachers and other stakeholders in the learning community. As he noted, the involvement of teachers in decision making develops both leadership skills and the capacity for teaching professionals to understand the challenges and complexities of leadership positions. Participants in this study expressed the need for shared and sustainable leadership in order to maintain academic growth of students and professional growth among teachers. Cook goes on to emphasize the need for the school principal to promote professional learning communities in order to sustain leadership and improve the leadership culture in the school building. When professional learning communities where teachers take on leadership roles are present, professional growth is ongoing as stakeholders have both an understanding and investment in the long term growth of the school community. All stakeholders must be mindful of creating a well-
balanced leadership culture that does not become solely dependent on select individuals. This leadership culture must be shared in order to develop positive momentum that instills confidence, passion, and a willingness to be an active participant for all members of the school community.

In Stewart’s (2014) work she noted that professional development that is comprised of active professional learning communities where teachers are collaborating to select learning objectives will thrive when all participants are invested. In her study, Steward identified several components of an effective professional develop cycle that promoted continuous and ongoing improvement. Throughout her work, Stewart continually emphasized the importance of cyclical collaboration where teachers work together to identify needs and continually commit to working together toward professional improvement (Stewart, 2014).

**Conclusion**

The common notion of teacher leadership is that it is leadership that extends beyond the boundaries of individual classrooms. Teacher leaders are those educators who share their expertise with colleagues in an effort to sustain school improvement efforts. When teachers function as school leaders, they support the building principal while promoting collaboration and catalyzing improvement efforts in their schools. This supportive type of environment is a conduit to a shared vision between principal and teachers. The implementation of professional learning communities is one vehicle for catalyzing sustained school leadership as groups of educators work collaboratively to improve their teaching skills and, in turn, the academic achievement of their students.

**Summation**

It is certainly no secret that with the job of the school principal comes immense responsibility and demand. As noted in this review, the demands of the building principal are
multifaceted and prodigious. Unfortunately, these demands leave some principals without the
time needed to lead the most important and foundational aspects of their jobs, instruction and
pedagogical change. When structured correctly, professional learning communities led by
teacher leaders has the potential to elicit positive and sustained change in both teacher pedagogy
and student learning and achievement. The research asserts that cultivating leadership across all
levels of the hierarchical structure in education will build organizational capacity and sustained
positive change in a time where overwhelming demands and pressure lead to the attrition of
school principals. Given the rise in principal burnout and the challenges of retaining high quality
school principals, this emphasis on sustainable leadership is vital. If a principal leaves a school, it
is important that leadership has been cultivated throughout the hierarchy so that professional
learning, instructional change, and student achievement within the school can continue should
the principal leadership change.

Empowering teachers to lead instructional change allows schools to be fluid and flexible
and promotes growth for all stakeholders. School culture, academic performance, and
educational reform are all enhanced when schools engage in collaborative leadership.
CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to examine the potential for teacher leadership opportunities within a suburban primary school. Using the foundation of the Distributed Leadership Theory, this research sought to examine the perceptions of classroom teachers with regard to current and potential leadership opportunities. Providing leadership opportunities for teachers in schools has the potential to impact school improvement. When teachers are empowered as leaders, the responsibility of instructional leadership does not rest solely on the building principal.

Creswell (2012) identifies several common characteristics of qualitative research. Among these characteristics are that qualitative researchers frequently collect data in a site where they have experienced the particular problem being researched, the researcher acts as a key instrument as the data collection agent, the research data gathered is in multiple forms, the researcher organizes the data by building patterns, categories and themes in an effort to develop a holistic account of the data, and the researcher keeps focus on the meaning and perspective that the participants bring to the research problem. Pietkiewicz & Smith (2012) note that qualitative researchers are mainly concerned with how “individuals make sense of the world, how they experience events and the meaning they attribute to phenomena” (p.1). They go on to note that qualitative researchers aim to provide descriptive accounts of the particular phenomena that is being investigated. Given that the goal of qualitative research is to promote depth in understanding of an organization as viewed by its participants (Bloomberg & Volp, 2012) it was a suitable methodology to employ for this study. This study focused specifically on the qualitative methodology of Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis.
The specific qualitative methodology of Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) provides researchers with an avenue to investigate how individuals within organizations make sense of lived experiences (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012). Smith & Osborn (2007) note the emphasis IPA places on the dynamic, active role of the researcher in the process. The premise of IPA is the foundational principles of phenomenology, hermeneutics, and ideography. Using this research methodology, researchers engage in interpreting the events, objects and people in their lives. Pietkiewicz & Smith (2012) note that IPA is descriptive and is concerned with how things appear and lets things speak for themselves. This methodology examines the individual perspectives of study participants. The framework was suitable for this research study as the study sought to analyze the perspectives of participating teachers with regard to leadership opportunities within their school.

**Setting**

The setting of this study was a suburban school in northern New England that is composed of 225 students in grades pre-kindergarten through grade three. The free and reduced lunch rate in the school fluctuates slightly around 55%. This school is one of five elementary schools in the district and employs fourteen teachers and several support staff including district shared specialists, guidance counselors, social workers, a speech language pathologist, and a literacy coach.

**Participants/Sample**

Purposeful sampling was used to select information-rich participants for this research study. Using purposeful sampling, participants were chosen who had experience with the phenomenon being studied and could contribute to the development of and answering of the research questions (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 2009). The participants for this study were six
classroom teachers within the school. Inclusion criteria required that all participants worked full time in the school, taught their own classroom of students and were neither specialists nor itinerant. Teachers who did not meet this criteria were not selected to participate in this study.

Data Collection Plan

In order to gain an in-depth study of the organization under study, multiple data sources were used. Data was collected through both semi-structured interviews of each participant and a survey that examined their perceptions of teacher leadership practices and the potential for leadership opportunities within the school. Initial interviews took place in a quiet location outside of the school and took approximately 45-60 minutes. Prior to the interviews, the interview protocol (See Appendix A) was shared as well as the purpose, potential risks and benefits of the study. An informed consent form (See Appendix B) was signed by each participant before commencement of the interview. All interviews were audio recorded and field notes were taken. Using memoing, notes were taken about the evolving patterns and later coded for themes (Creswell, 2012; Merriam, 2009). Transcription of the audio files was completed by the transcription service, Speech Pad.

The following are the questions that were asked during the semi-structured interviews (See Appendix C). Follow up questions were asked for clarification at the researcher’s discretion.

• Describe your past experiences that you would consider as being beneficial to the development of your leadership skills.

• Describe leadership experiences and opportunities that you have engaged in in your current role as a teacher.

• How do you define leadership?
• Please elaborate on how you see yourself within that definition?
• How do you define “teacher leader”?
• Describe specific characteristics that you believe epitomize the definition of a leader?
• Describe leadership opportunities that you would like to experience.
• How do you see these experiences enhancing your growth as a leader?
• In what ways do you see teacher leadership being able to help/support the building principal and organization as a whole?
• What type of district level initiative do you feel could be offered to help develop and enhance teacher leadership?
• What ideas do you have on implementing a teacher leadership program that develops and enhances teacher leadership?
• What are some ideas you have on how to create a collaborative environment between teachers and principals that is non-threatening and authentic?

Survey

Along with the semi-structured interviews, a researcher developed survey (see Appendix D) was utilized in an effort to obtain a robust data set and promote triangulation of the data. Face validity was used to determine that the open ended survey measured what it was intended to measure. The questions on the survey aligned directly to the outlined research questions for the study as well as the questions used in the interviews. This survey included the following open ended questions:

• In what ways are your leadership capabilities utilized with regard to instructional practice?
• In what ways are your leadership capabilities utilized with regard to professional development?
• What leadership roles would you participate in if provided the opportunity?
• In what ways do you actively seek out professional development opportunities?
• In what ways do you feel confident in sharing your expertise and leading colleagues in professional development?

Data Analysis Process

Throughout the interviews, field notes were used, along with memoing to create categories and themes. Field notes and memoing were used to enhance data collection by analyzing both formal and informal cuing of the participants. Hand recorded, descriptive field notes were recorded to encapsulate the entire interview experience. Reflective comments were added by the researcher to capture observations and commentary during the interviews. This served as some preliminary data analysis (Merriam, 2009). Body language and facial expressions were also incorporated in field notes and memos. The complete audio recordings were reviewed to ensure that the entire interview was captured. The audio was then transcribed using an outside transcription service (Speech Pad). The audio was listened to a third time as a way to measure and ensure the accuracy of the transcription. Interview transcriptions were shared with participants through member checking to ensure consistency and accuracy. Once the transcription was complete and checked for accuracy, the coding process began.

A hand-coding process was used to analyze data, look for themes, and create an organized process for data presentation. Throughout the analysis, both descriptive and in vivo coding (Saldana, 2016) were used as phrases were marked and taken from sections of the interview transcripts. This coding helped to highlight the individual and collective voices of the
study participants. Descriptive coding was used to summarize the primary topics of each interview and survey question and aided in the uncovering of themes. As the transcripts were reviewed, comments, observation and questions were recorded. This open coding as Meriam (2009) termed it, highlighted data that would later be categorized by theme according to the outlined research questions. Through the assignment of codes to the data, categories were constructed and codes were grouped into themes. This assisted in creating a foundation for overarching themes that were broken down into sub-themes in certain areas. The highlighted words and statements were categorized, and themes identified. Webs were created that illustrated the key components of each evolving theme. The researcher field notes were also reviewed to help further filter the data into usable data. Creswell (2012) suggests a method for the analysis of phenomenological studies that was initiated for this study. Creswell’s suggested method includes first developing a list of significant statements acquired through interview transcriptions and then grouping the statements into meaning units or themes. Creswell (2012) recommends that phenomenological researchers then develop a “textural description” of the experiences articulated by the participants using specific examples. A structural description that allows the researcher to reflect on the context of the phenomenon is the next part of this coding process, followed finally by a composite description that incorporates the textural and structural descriptions, capturing the essence of the experiences of each participant’s experiences.

Merriam (2009) notes the importance of the use of epoch and imagination variation techniques to analyze phenomenological studies. As she notes, epoch is the process in which the researcher attempts to remove their own personal prejudice and viewpoints regarding the phenomenon that is under study, enabling them to see the experience for what it is, rather than what the researcher wants it to be. She goes on to discuss imagination variation which suggests
that the researcher seek to view the phenomenon and information from various angles and through different lenses. As Moustakas (1994) states, “the aim is to arrive at structural descriptions of an experience, the underlying and precipitating factors that account for what is being experienced” (p.9). Both of these techniques were employed in the analysis of the phenomenological data gathered in this study.

Triangulation was employed throughout as a means to add credibility and validity to the research findings. Merriam (2009) notes that while qualitative researchers can never actually capture complete objective truth and reality, there are strategies such as triangulation that can increase the credibility of findings. Using multiple sources of data and comparing and cross checking the information leads to this increased credibility. Merriam suggests collecting observational data from different times and places and gathering interview data from people of varying perspectives. Interviewing participants of varying perspectives was employed in this study as a means to increase the credibility of the findings. The interview transcriptions were also member checked for accuracy and to increase the validity of the findings. As Leech & Onwuegbuzie (2007) note, member checking involves the researcher showing the findings and/or interpretations of the findings to the participants who provide an assessment of accuracy. They argue that member checking can increase the rigor and trustworthiness of the findings through triangulation. With consistency between the researcher and the participants, credibility and the descriptive and interpretive validity are improved. Findings between the research grounding this study, interview transcriptions, and analysis of participant surveys were compared and cross checked, promoting rigor and depth to the analysis.

Transferability in the findings of this research may be possible to schools and districts of similar size and demographics. Because of the small sample size of this study, the ability to
generalize the findings of this study is difficult though the findings of this research will have significant implications to the work and practices in the organization that is the focus of this study.

**Participant Rights**

The subjects of this research were volunteers and were given all pertinent information regarding the study and its purposes. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time. Through engagement in this study, there was no documented harm to participants. Potential benefits to participants included increased awareness of leadership opportunities, increased input within the organization, increased skill and knowledge in educational leadership and increased camaraderie.

**Informed Consent**

This study was reviewed by the Institutional Review Board of Northeastern University for ethical considerations. The information supplied to IRB along with the informed consent form included all information pertinent to the study including potential risks, benefits, a written description of the study and its purpose. Each participant was provided with the Informed Consent form and was informed of their right to opt out of the study at any time. Participation in the study was completely voluntary and no compensatory measures were taken to attract participants for the study. Confidentiality was achieved through the random coding of participant data and secure storage of all data. All data was stored on the researchers password protected computer and kept in a locked office. This study caused no risk to participants.
CHAPTER 4
RESEARCH FINDINGS

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to examine the potential for teacher leadership opportunities within a suburban primary school. The framework used to provide the foundation for interpreting the findings of this research was the Distributed Leadership theory. This research sought to examine the perceptions of classroom teachers with regard to current and potential leadership opportunities. Providing leadership opportunities for teachers in schools has the potential to impact school improvement. When teachers are empowered as leaders, the responsibility of instructional leadership does not rest exclusively on the building principal.

Analysis Method

In this chapter a description of the analysis of the qualitative data is included. In addition, the practical steps that comprise the analysis are discussed. The six participants in this study completed open ended surveys and interviews and these were analyzed in an effort to answer the following research questions:

**RQ 1:** How do pre-kindergarten through grade three teachers describe their personal leadership philosophy?

**RQ 2:** What do pre-kindergarten through grade three teachers identify and describe as current leadership opportunities?

**RQ 3:** What do pre-kindergarten through grade three teachers identify and describe as leadership roles they could acquire to support the building principal?

The Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis methodology (IPA) was utilized for this study as it provided an avenue to investigate how individuals within the organization make sense of lived experiences (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012). Pietkiewicz & Smith note that IPA is concerned with how things appear and lets things speak for themselves. IPA places emphasis on
the dynamic and active role of the researcher in the analysis of data (Smith & Osborn, 2007). Using the IPA methodology, this study examined the individual perspectives of study participants with regard to leadership opportunities within their school.

Several qualitative data collection methods discussed by Crewell (2012) were employed. These methods included the collection of data at a site where the researcher has experienced the particular problem under investigation, the gathering of multiple forms of data, the organization of data and development of patterns, categories and themes, the development of a holistic account of the data, and focus on the meaning and perspective that the participants bring to the research problem. The data that was collected included interview transcriptions, field notes and open ended survey responses. Interviews transcripts, field notes and memoing were utilized to analyze the data obtained. To begin the analysis, the audio from the interviews was transcribed using an outside transcription service (Speech Pad) and the complete audio recordings were reviewed to ensure that the entire interview was captured. The audio was listened to a third time as a way to measure and ensure the accuracy of the transcription. Interview transcriptions were shared with participants through member checking to ensure consistency and accuracy. Once the transcription was complete and checked for accuracy, coding was done.

Using the data from the transcribed interviews, field notes and memoing were used to enhance data analysis, noting both formal and informal cuing of the participants. Patterns, categories and themes were generated through analysis of the transcriptions. Descriptive field notes were recorded from the interview transcriptions to fully encapsulate the entire interview experience. Reflective comments were added by the researcher to capture observations and commentary during the interviews (Merriam, 2009).
A hand-coding process was used to analyze data, look for themes, and create an organized process for data presentation. Initially, the process included highlighting key words and statements. This helped to create a foundation for overarching themes. The themes were then broken down into sub-themes in certain areas. The highlighted words and statements were categorized, and themes identified. The researcher field notes were reviewed to help further filter the data into an operational data set. The analysis of this data both by individual participant and holistically by themes led to a rich data set that illustrates both individual perceptions as well as commonalities between participants.

Triangulation was employed throughout as a means to add credibility and validity to the research findings. This triangulation was accomplished through the review of existing literature on the topic, the participant interviews, and open-ended survey. Using these multiple sources of data and comparing and cross checking the information led to increased credibility. The interview transcriptions were also member checked for accuracy and to increase the validity of the findings. Findings between the research grounding this study, interview transcriptions, and analysis of participant surveys were compared and cross checked, promoting rigor and depth to the analysis.

**Presentation of Results**

Through the analysis of the data sources including the field notes, interview transcripts and open-ended survey questions, several themes were revealed. These themes included past experiences as a leader, characteristics of a leader, formal versus informal leadership, definition of a leader and teacher leader, the relationship with the principal, and desired leadership opportunities. The results and findings of this study will first be discussed individually by participant and followed by a holistic look at the themes that emerged from the analysis.
Individual Participant Data

In an effort to obtain a detailed and in depth analysis of the data under review the data garnered from each participant was analyzed both individually and holistically. Sharing the data of individual participants provides rich context to ground the study and its implications. Data from the semi-structured interviews, along with field notes and memoing were analyzed individually to create rich, qualitative data sets. In the following section, the data for each individual participant will be discussed.

Participant One

When asked to define leadership, Participant One shared that leaders set an example, are impactful, rise to the occasion to get better, and improve their practice so that it is in alignment with school and district mission and goals. Participant One stated, “I think most importantly through doing all of those things, you are inspiring other people to kind of rise to the occasion and to get better and improve their practice and to be aligned with what the goal is and what the mission is”. This participant emphasized that leaders are not simply those that talk the most but those that work to build confidence and trust in their teammates. As she stated, “I think sometimes leadership is building confidence and trust with your teammates too and kind of having them take the lead and showing that you believe in their abilities and that you trust them and need their expertise and knowledge”. The participant further shares, “When I think of leadership, for me, it’s not necessarily being the one who talks the most or being the one who follows that person’s idea. I’m always thinking about, okay, well what’s the big picture here. What’s the thing we can’t lose sight of? And making sure that we stay there”. There is clear evidence that Participant One values modeling leadership, creating a trusting environment, and building confidence within the team.
Participant One differentiated between leadership and teacher leadership, sharing that teacher leadership is when the leadership characteristics are mobilized so that teachers take the lead with their peers and encourage them to also take the lead. This participant stated, “If teachers are struggling with something, there’s someone else who is a different level of authority with a fellow teacher versus a principal”. This provides leadership opportunities to support one another with a scaffolding approach.

Characteristics such as being assertive, focused, reflective and positive were identified by this participant as vital to effective leadership. This participant emphasized the importance of being reflective, willing to learn, diplomatic, genuine, fluid and flexible. During the interview Participant One shared, “If you really want to become a better leader and to be able to work better with people, to kind of bring out the best in them, then you’re always thinking about it and reflecting”. Participant One continually spoke to the importance of building positive relationships with colleagues and being willing to step out of your comfort zone to lead others. Past leadership experiences for this participant include leading school core competency teams and leading in informal ways such as mentoring new teachers and sharing knowledge gained from university coursework. Currently this participant’s main leadership role is centered on supervising paraprofessionals who support students in her classroom.

Participant One felt that a positive relationship with the building principal is essential. The participant noted that a positive relationship must be purposefully cultivated on a foundation of honesty and trust and be reciprocal in nature. Participant One stated, “I feel that trust, like you can say what is on your mind and not feel like you’re going to be judged, but you can be honest and that you don’t have to just say the thing that you think that they want to hear. To truly be able to be honest and have open candid conversations is the root of working as a team because
some people might look like they work as a team where they just sort of pretend to be on the same page”. The participant noted that teachers can support the principal by sharing their personal expertise and working collaboratively to solve student and instructional problems. This participant also noted that colleagues may be more candid with a fellow teacher than the building principal and that this has the potential to open lines of communication between teachers. Participant one expressed that when teachers serve as leaders among their colleagues, they have the ability to develop projects and initiatives that focus directly on student achievement and the opportunity to have ongoing professional conversations centered on student need. The sharing of expertise and dissemination of information to fellow colleagues was continually mentioned by Participant One as an avenue to support and lead others. As she noted, building upon the differing strengths of all teachers has the potential to really impact the organization as a whole.

Participant Two

Throughout Participant Two’s interview, she continually noted that leadership is often subtle, noting that perhaps the best leadership is when one does not even know that they are being led. Participant Two stated, “I think actually, sometimes the best leadership is when you don’t even realize you’re being led, it’s kind of under the radar and not in your face sort of leadership”. This subtle, under the radar type of style was viewed as an important component of leadership. This participant also discussed the importance of competency, passion and being able to anticipate people’s questions when you are sharing information. This participant shared, “I would say first and foremost, you have to be competent. If you’re not competent, people are not going to follow you”. This participant did express that while others relish leadership roles and being in front of groups of people, she tends to shy away from those roles and is not interested in leading large groups or being a part of confrontational situations. She did note that
when she has data to support what she is talking about, she feels more confident and willing to take on various leadership roles.

Participant Two viewed a leader as one who is charge, is someone who people are eager to emulate, possesses a positive attitude about change, and leads by example. When asked to define teacher leadership, she thought of this as more of a formal title where the teacher leader is sharing their knowledge and competence with others. In the interview, Participant Two shared, “I think it’s super important depending on the situation that you know your topic, whatever it is you’re presenting on, you better be pretty well versed in it, especially when you’re dealing with peers”. Participant Two’s current and past leadership experiences included informally leading grade level and Response to Intervention meetings, the mentoring of pre-service teachers from local universities, conference presentations in the areas of reading and math, and day-to-day conversations and interactions with colleagues. Her goals with regard to leadership are to get out of her comfort zone and to look for additional opportunities to share topics and knowledge with colleagues. She would like to see teachers have more of a voice in curricular decisions and additional initiatives that support and encourage leadership opportunities for teachers.

With regard to a relationship with the building principal, Participant Two expressed the inherent needs of teachers to feel valued and to have a say in the day to day operations of the school. She asserted that teachers cannot simply sit back and grumble if there is an issue or problem. They need to feel heard, valued, and be working with the principal for a common end goal. She noted that if teachers feel valued, important and that their opinions matter that they will work hard for and with each other. Participant Two stated, “I think it’s all about teacher leadership. If teachers feel like they have a role where they’re important and their opinions matter, then they’re more likely to work really hard for whatever it is they are working toward”.
To support the principal, she mentioned that teachers could partake in the creation of schedules and events and have a say in curricular changes.

**Participant Three**

Participant Three has worked in multiple schools and at multiple grade levels. She is currently a Master’s degree candidate and has worked with students of diverse backgrounds. This has afforded her the opportunities to share her experience and knowledge with colleagues through ongoing conversations and grade level meetings. Participant Three sees a leader as one who is influential, deeply reflective, thoughtful, perceptive, motivated, compassionate, respectful, and one who values the viewpoints of others. The participant viewed a leader as, “somebody who can be a model, who can influence others, hopefully in a really positive direction in ways that are best for every single child, every student, and of course help each other and support each other to build a team and community”. Participant Three shared that often leadership evolves naturally and her views have shifted from thinking of a leader as one who is willing to stand in front of a crowd to someone who models and influences others in a positive way. As a teacher leader, Participant Three shared the value in prior knowledge, understanding a variety of curriculums, and framing conversations with other teachers as paramount to teacher leadership. Participant Three stated, “Background experiences with students, with curriculum, and teaching helps the teacher leaders know how to help others in order to help kids”. Participant Three continually reiterated the importance of competency and the sharing of expertise and would like opportunities for this sharing of expertise to be expanded beyond her individual school.

This participant shared that it is important for building principals to listen to teachers and that there is an open and honest exchange of thoughts and opinions. Regarding the
teacher/principal relationship this participant stated, “Showing respect to each other, listening to each other, valuing different viewpoints, recognizing that people come from different backgrounds and are not going to respond in the same way and are not going to learn in the same way”. She emphasized the need for this relationship to not be founded on directives to subordinates and emphasized that a reciprocal relationship could be mutually beneficial.

**Participant Four**

Participant Four does not see leadership as a title but as someone who sets an example of professionalism for their peers. Leaders are willing to take time to share their expertise and are open to learning from others. She noted that leaders are resources to one another, share their expertise and have the skills to relay that expertise. As she said, “I think leadership is being a resource to each other. I think it is somebody with information and experience and the skills to relay that to people. Participant Four also agreed that leadership evolves naturally, adding “I think that leadership is more subtle than that too. We all are leaders in different areas and we share that with each other in a more informal level”. Participant Four sees leaders as approachable, confident, resourceful and able to build positive relationships with others.

Past experiences for this participant include the supervision of classroom paraprofessionals, the leader of grade level and intervention meetings and the sharing of current literacy practices. Currently, this participant is a mentor to new teachers and frequently disseminates information learned from course work and conferences. This participant is interested in increasing the amount of time allotted for common planning time for teachers and a teacher led book talk on current and relevant educational topics.

Participant Four is concerned that it is too much for the building principals to carry all of the weight. She expressed that it is important for teachers to keep one another motivated and to
share specific knowledge from courses and experiences that the principal may not have, noting, “This is kind of a culture of the school thing. To me that stuff happens when everyone feels valued and listened to and motivated to pursue their perfect”. With regard to professional development, Participant Four went on to say that “the more you pursue your own professional development, the more you want to share your learning with your peers and staff. It is kind of a natural thing that happens”. She noted that it is on the teachers themselves to get to the “nitty gritty” of teaching. According to Participant Four, consistent visibility of the principal throughout the day and within the classroom is vital to building this level of comfort and developing a culture within the school where teachers feel valued and listened to. She emphasized that when the principal is visible and a part of your every day that “a comfort level is built and you are then not as intimidated to share your ideas. It is more of a collaboration because you feel like you are on the same team. The principal knows you and knows your classroom, knows how you operate because they’re visible”. The importance of collaboration and breaking down hierarchal barriers was continually emphasized by this participant as a way to share leadership responsibilities and roles within the school.

Participant Five

Participant Five shared that she has had no formal leadership training. She is interested in pursuing advanced course work with regard to leadership and has had experiences co teaching, coaching other teachers, observing in the classrooms of colleagues, and frequently sharing ideas about students with others. She believes that the school currently is a building full of people capable of leading, noting that she considers teacher leaders as anyone that you can go to as a resource for questions. As she said, “they (colleagues) kind of lead you and you kind of lead them. It is reciprocal. It is kind of an informal leadership where I might give you some guidance
you might give me some guidance”. She emphasized that this notion of teacher leadership must be cultivated through communication, relationship building, positive feedback and the building of confidence and trust, saying “It’s about communication and relationships, relationship building, getting to know one another and keeping that door open to communication”. She asserted that when both colleagues and building administration show confidence in individual teachers, it drives and pushes them to take on more significant leadership roles.

This participant defined a teacher leader as “someone you can go to with questions, concerns or guidance. A teacher leader is someone I can go to ask questions, get answers, but also give answers. For example when I was new at assessing students, I went to a teammate and she was able to guide me with that”. She went on to say that a teacher leader is someone “I can trust and someone I am going to get and give information”. She continually reiterated the importance of relationship building and communication stating “relationships are the foundation of your communication”.

**Participant Six**

Participant Six shared that characteristics of leaders include being introspective, willing to make a difference, caring and observant. This participant emphasized that leaders are those who can shape others (both children and adults), those who can listen and who can garner the respect of others. As she said, “characteristics-wise, a leader is someone who can listen, someone who can respond in a positive affirmative way and someone who others respect”. She noted that leadership can be both formal and informal in nature and that leaders often plant seeds of growth for others. When discussing teacher leadership specifically, this participant accentuated the importance of teacher leaders taking initiative, sharing knowledge and being an advocate for others. As she shared, “Whether it is standing up for an issue in your building or standing up and
advocating for a student, it is sharing the knowledge that you have with other individuals. That is a type of leadership that will look different in every situation”. This participant also echoed the sentiment of the need for deep content knowledge and competency as an avenue to garner the trust and respect of others. As she stated, “The teacher leader would need to have the content knowledge to be in that leadership role. I would say that wherever you are the leader, you need to have the knowledge in that area”.

Participant Six shared that the principal does not need to be present at every meeting and that teachers have the capacity to make things happen and make decisions without the principal present. As she said, “We can’t stop the growth and progress of the building because the principal can’t be there”. She again expressed the great benefit of teachers sharing their expertise and leveraging that expertise to make decisions and solve problems. Having the principal work to transfer leadership to teachers was also an important point continually raised by this participant.

**Conclusion**

In summary, the participants of this study readily identified multiple characteristics of effective leaders including the ability to set positive examples and to be impactful, assertive and reflective. The ability of leaders to build confidence and trust was deemed essential to their effectiveness by some participants as well. Informal, subtle leadership opportunities such as the leading of grade level meetings and sharing of expertise were mentioned, as well as, those opportunities deemed more formal such as the mentoring of new and preservice teachers and conference presentations. The participants continually emphasized the inherent need for teachers and principals to cultivate positive relationships founded on the notion of trust in an effort to mobilize leadership throughout and across the organization.
Holistic View of the Data

The following section will discuss each of the individual themes that were revealed through this research study. It is important to note that while the themes were discussed individually, there was evidence of overlap among themes. Table 1 displays the themes that were uncovered throughout this study including both examples and non-examples that illustrate evidence of the themes.

Table 1
An Outline of the Themes Generated Through Data Analysis of the Interview Questions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
<th>Examples</th>
<th>Non Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Past Experiences as a Leader</td>
<td>Teachers reported several past experiences of leadership, primarily informal in nature.</td>
<td>Grade level meeting leader</td>
<td>Dissemination of written materials from central office.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mentor to Pre Service Teachers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“One thing that has benefited my leadership skills is when I went from a classroom teacher to a Title I slash coordinator and I was kind of thrown into that.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Characteristics of a Leader</td>
<td>A myriad of characteristics of a leader were identified by participants. All participants identified several characteristics.</td>
<td>Have competency</td>
<td>Directive and behind closed doors—not accessible.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Thoughtful, motivating, compassionate</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“I would say approachable, confident, open-minded, and nonjudgmental.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definition of Leader</td>
<td>Participants noted both formal and informal roles in their definitions of leaders,</td>
<td>Leading and in charge</td>
<td>Directive and behind closed doors—not accessible.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Informal problem solving</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Someone who earns trust and respect</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“Leadership is somebody who can be a model, who can influence others hopefully in a really positive direction in ways that are best for every single child, every student, and of course to help each other and support each other to build a team and community because you’ve always said it—they are all of our kids.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definition of Teacher Leader</td>
<td>Teacher leaders were identified as those teachers who take the lead with their peers, share expertise, have knowledge and support one another</td>
<td>Someone who can shape others</td>
<td>Teachers being forced into mentoring roles when they are not interested in mentoring new teachers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Someone who can listen and respond positively</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Someone who garners respect</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“I just think it’s somebody that maybe sets an example of professionalism for their peers, and is willing to take the time to share and open themselves up.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship with Building Principal</td>
<td>Reciprocal trust, communication and value were key to the relationship between teacher and principal.</td>
<td>Incorporate principal’s strategies</td>
<td>Authoritarian and devaluing one another.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Principal transfers leadership</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“It’s just the same thing with staff and just valuing each other and every individual. You have to grow together so we support each other in different ways,”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Themes</td>
<td>Meaning</td>
<td>Examples</td>
<td>Non Example</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desired</td>
<td>The identified desired opportunities centered on additional time to share expertise and additional course work relative to leadership</td>
<td>Rotate the person leading grade level meetings Share information on topics individuals are knowledgeable about “I feel like it’s a school culture thing. To me that stuff happens when everyone feels valued and listened to and pushed to pursue their perfect. The more you pursue your own professional development, I think the more you want to share your learning with peers and staff.”</td>
<td>Directed initiatives that do not promote professional growth.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Past Experiences as Leaders**

The participants in this study identified several leadership opportunities that they have been involved in in the past. Primarily, these experiences were what they deemed informal leadership opportunities with colleagues through grade level team meetings, Response to Intervention meetings, and the sharing of information learned through advanced course work. One participant shared her current leadership opportunities, saying “My past leadership roles include things like running RTI (Response to Intervention) meetings, grade level meetings and presenting at a few conferences”. Another participant mentioned the importance of being a role model and demonstrating your leadership in and out of the classroom. As she said, “You’re a leader and demonstrating that with your students in your classroom. Every day you are a model, you’re a role model to children and colleagues and that really makes you stop and think about what you are doing and how you are modeling the qualities of a leader”. One participant shared that earning a Master’s degree coupled with having the experience of working in multiple schools with diverse populations of students has afforded her the opportunity to share expertise and informally lead her colleagues. The mentoring of new teachers was noted by two participants as a more formal avenue of leadership. All six participants shared that they had no formal leadership training.
As the authors, Van Dohlen and Karvoven (2018) report, many teacher leaders evolve through informal leadership opportunities, emphasizing that leadership is not, and should not be limited to formal positions within a hierarchical organization. In fact, Leonard and Leonard (1999), found that teachers considered informal leadership to evoke greater change than what they deemed formal leadership such as department chairs, instructional coaches and lead teachers. These findings are consistent with the outcomes of this research study. Participants readily identified multiple current past leadership experiences of which they deemed informal. These included the leading of grade level meetings, dissemination of information and the sharing of expertise and knowledge with others. Table 2 comprehensively lists all of the current and prior leadership experiences noted by the participants.

Table 2

*Identified leadership opportunities and experiences.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Identified Leadership Opportunities and Experiences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Past Experiences</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Taught in multiple schools and grade levels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Master’s degree candidate in Educational Leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Works with diverse student populations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Member of School’s Core Competency team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Mentor for new teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Engaged in University level coursework and shared this knowledge with others in the building</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Led Response to Intervention meetings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Attended conferences and disseminated information to colleagues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Mentored to pre-service teachers from local universities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Supervision of classroom paraprofessionals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Ran Response to Intervention and grade level meetings</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


As shown in Table 2 above, participants identified a myriad of past and current leadership opportunities. These opportunities ranged from more formal avenues such as the completion of an advanced degree, membership on the school’s Core Competency team and attendance of conferences, to more informal opportunities such as the running of Response to Intervention and grade level team meetings. Participants voiced the value and importance of both forms of leadership.

**Characteristics of a Leader**

The participants in this study readily discussed the importance of influence and followership. They noted the importance of the leader shaping the school culture by example. As one participant stated, “I think I’m starting to have a new definition of leadership. Leadership is somebody who can be a model who can influence others, hopefully in a really positive direction in ways that are best for every single child, every student, and of course to help each other and support each other to build team and community.” Participants also discussed the subtly of the leader. They spoke of the best leadership occurring when you don’t necessarily realize it. As one participant noted, “I think leadership is being a resource to one another. I
think it’s somebody with information and experience and the skills to relay that to people. But also I think it’s a little bit more subtle than that too”. These sentiments were supported by another participant who said, “I think actually sometimes the best leadership is when you don’t realize you’re being led, it’s kind of under the radar and not in your face sort of leadership”. The participants all discussed their dislike of a top down leadership model and shared that they are not fans of a leader who gives directives with no rationale, understanding, or investment in the decision making process.

All participants readily identified multiple specific characteristics of a leader. Among these characteristics were being assertive, focused, and a good listener. As one participant stated, “knowing when to kind of assert my opinion and being able to bring us back is an important characteristic”. Participants noted that a leader must be reflective and willing to learn and make others feel valued. As one participant said, “A leader is someone who talks a lot but can listen too. A leader is someone who listens well to others, makes them feel valued and can shape things in a way. I don’t think, the heavy handedness is necessarily the most effective leadership strategy”. The notion of subtle leadership was echoed by another participant who noted, “When it comes to my peers I like to be a little more subtle”. This participant emphasized the importance of reflection, “If you really want to become a better leader and be able to work better with people to kind of bring out the best in them, then you’re always about reflecting. How did I help my team? Did everyone have a voice here?” There was a passion about reflection, throughout participant responses.

The importance of competency was identified by several participants as another key leadership characteristic. “I would say first and foremost you have to be competent. If you are not competent, people are not going to follow you. You also have to be diplomatic because you
have to know when to push and when to pull back”. Another participant supported this saying, “You need teachers that are very cognitive”. She noted that coworkers reach out to others that they know have expertise in a particular area. Another participant noted that with regard to competency, “At the very least when you are leading a session or leading a topic, you need to be able to anticipate what kinds of questions people are going to have”. The thoughts articulated by the participants in this study are supported by established research on leaders and teacher leaders specifically. Lumpkin, Claxton and Wilson (2014) identify leaders as experienced, respected role models who are innovative, organized, collaborative, trustworthy, confident, committed, professional and passionate. These characteristics are strongly aligned to the characteristics identified in this study.

Throughout the analysis of the participant data, multiple diverse leadership characteristics were identified as foundational to the notion of a leader. Participants readily identified several characteristics that underpin the notion of a leader. Some of these characteristics included competency, reflection, approachability, confidence and connectedness. One participant shared a concise view of the importance of competency saying, “I would say first and foremost, you have to be competent. If you’re not competent, people are not going to follow you.” Relationships, passion, approachability, knowing your audience, having confidence, being able to anticipate questions, deep reflection, and positive connectedness were also characteristics identified by the participants as foundational attributes possessed by impactful leaders. As one participant states: “I think sometimes leadership is building confidence and trust with your teammates too and kind of having them take the lead and showing that you believe in their abilities and that you trust them and that you need their expertise and knowledge at times.”
**Reflection.** Of all of the characteristics for leadership, reflection was one characteristic that the majority of participants mentioned as vital to the role of a leader. As one participant stated, “You’re always thinking about reflecting. And you’re always working on, okay, did everyone have a voice there? You know, how did I help my team? Were there opportunities to kind of take charge?” She goes on to say, “Nothing happens by accident”. These sentiments were echoed by another participant who stated, “I process things deeply. So sometimes if you asked me something upfront, I might not know the answer right away but that’s just because I’m going to process and process. But then my understanding will be very strong, deeply reflective”

**Relationships.** The importance of relationships was also noted by several participants as a characteristic vital to leaders. As one participant noted, “A leader is someone other people want to work with. So I guess a leader is somebody who listens well to others, makes them feel valued and can shape things, in a way”. The importance or positive and productive relationships and the development of a collaborative culture was echoed by a second participant who stated, “It is showing respect to each other, listening to each other, valuing different viewpoints, recognizing that people come from different backgrounds and are not going to respond in the same way and are not going to learn in the same way. It is valuing each and every individual and growing together so we can support each other in different ways”. Participants emphasized the need to develop relationships in and out of your own school building and ensuring that lines of communication were open.

The findings from the analysis of the research supported the theoretical framework on this study as the transformative nature of the Distributed Leadership theory emphasizes the relationships between formal and informal leaders that develop over time within organizations. As the Distributed Leadership theory asserts, leadership expertise must be cultivated and
mobilized through interdependent interactions among various stakeholders in the organizational hierarchy (Spillane and Harris, 2008; The Australian Government Office for Teaching and Learning, 2017; Sturm, 2009).

**Definition of Leadership**

Participants in this study all agreed that leadership is when you take the lead with your peers and when you support and encourage others to take the lead as well. They saw leaders as those who are willing to leave their comfort zone to facilitate the learning of others. Competency and knowledge of the topic was a thread woven through this theme as well. As one participant said, “I think people view a leader as competent in areas we are not”. The leader must be well versed in whatever the topic may be and need a strong background and a multitude of experiences. Participants noted that leaders are resources to one another who share their expertise and have the skills to relay that expertise.

Positive influence was identified as an important component to leadership. Participants noted that leadership is not solely about being willing to stand up in front of a crowd. This was supported by one participant who stated, “Leadership, for me, is not necessarily being the one who talks the most or being the one everyone follows”. Two participants discussed the natural evolution of leadership, the vital need to maintain focus on student needs, and the importance of being a positive model who positively influences others within the organization.

Participants identified leaders as those who can shape others (both students and adults), can respond positively, garner respect from others and who can listen. They continued to note that an open door of communication and the development of positive relationships with others needs to be cultivated. The importance of a leader being impactful and setting an example that others want to emulate was noted as an important characteristic of a leader. “It is setting an
example for others. It is being impactful in shaping the direction that the group is moving and being a supportive person. And I think more importantly through doing all of those things you are inspiring people to kind of rise to the occasion and to get better and improve their practice”. This was supported by another participant who stated, “A leader is a supportive person who rises to the occasion to get better, to improve their practice and align their work with the goals and mission”. Participants emphasized that it is not the one who talks the most and that everyone follows, it is about building confidence and trust in your teammates. This notion of sharing expertise and building capacity in others was a significant theme that ran through participants’ discussion of leadership characteristics. These findings connect to the theoretical framework on this study as at the heart of the Distributed Leadership Theory is the development of a context of trust, a culture of autonomy, acceptance of change and collaborative relationships (Harris and Spillane, 2008; Bolden, 2011; The Australian Government Office for Learning and Teaching, 2017). This theory is built on the notion of trust in the expertise of others in order to build leadership capacity, which was strongly supported by participant responses in this research study.

In informal vs. formal leadership. The differentiation between formal and informal leadership emerged through analysis of the data for this study. Participants expressed that with regard to leadership, they prefer a small, informal group and a collaborative atmosphere rather than being the center of attention in a large group setting. Every participant expressed their comfort in leading their peers in a small group, informal setting. One teacher shared that “I feel more comfortable in the informal kind of setting, having kind of done both. I prefer to take on a role like that with a group of peers where I felt comfortable and respected. So I feel like they want that leadership.” This sentiment was supported by another participant who shared: “I
would say I’m more of the lead under the radar, I’m not one of those people that want to be up in front leading a whole group, but when we’re having a group discussion, I’m certainly one that if I see it going in a direction that I think isn’t helpful, I try to turn that around and get back on track, which I think can be a huge difference sometimes."

Familiarity with one another leads them to seek out and offer leadership based upon experience and expertise of team members. They discussed the grade level team structure (teachers of the same grade level gathering weekly to discuss teaching and learning) as a preferred leadership model, noting that leadership tends to naturally evolve in this structure and becomes situational based upon the expertise of individuals in the meeting. All participants shared that in grade level team meetings in-depth conversations occur centered on curriculum and instruction. This peer leadership in the grade level meeting setting leads to leadership that is contagious as differing individuals share their knowledge and lead based upon their expertise. As one participant stated, “I think conversations around student achievement sets the tone for how we work together professionally here. We have a lot of new teachers, so I think having some more veteran teachers set that tone and that example for them.” In a more formal nature, participants expressed their desire for guided leadership practice for those that are willing to lead. They spoke to the importance of teachers genuinely wanting to be leaders rather than being forced into leadership positions.

One participant discussed the different forms that leadership takes. As this participant stated, “In order for there to be leadership, someone has to follow. Sometimes it is more formal, you are leading and group and you are in charge of everybody. Sometimes it is more low key, like you are presenting options to situations or problems that you are trying to solve as a group”. This sentiment was echoed by another participant who said “It is more of a behind the scenes
influential”. These sentiments were reiterated by another participant who said, “I feel more comfortable with the informal kind of setting”. The participant further shared “I feel pretty comfortable sharing and guiding people that would like that guidance. I feel like I get more out of peer leadership. I think once you get directive and this what you have to do and research says, then you lose the other person”.

Discerning the difference between formal and informal leadership roles can be difficult for teachers (Van Dohlen, & Karvonen, 2018). Both are important in imparting positive change within schools and are supported by established research. Teachers can effectively lead in both formal and informal capacities. Teachers can lead informally by sharing innovative ideas with the school, working on instructional projects and sharing their own professional expertise (Van Dohlen & Karvonen, 2018). The sharing of expertise was continuously echoed as mechanism to lead and illicit change within the school that was the focus of this study. It was evident through this analysis that teachers preferred to take on more informal roles and as was noted by Van Dohlen & Karvonen (2018), teachers believe that informal leadership can evoke important and lasting change.

**Definition of Teacher Leadership**

When asked to define teacher leadership, specifically, the participants noted that teacher leadership is about taking the lead to support and encourage others to take the lead so that you are all working together. One participant noted that when they think of teacher leadership, they think of a more formal title where teachers are in charge or running a meeting or are in charge of actually facilitating it, “they are the focal point”. The concept of competency was identified once again in participants’ definitions of teacher leadership. “You have to know about your topic, whatever it is you are presenting, you better be pretty well versed in it, especially when you’re
dealing with peers”. This was echoed by another participant who stated, “Obviously the teacher leader would need to have the content knowledge to be in a leadership role. Whenever you’re the leader, you have to have knowledge in that area”. One participant connected the definition of teacher leader to the notion of teaching being a helping profession, as she said, “I think that as a teacher you’re a helper and you want to help and I think that helper role comes out as leaders as well. I think it (the desire to help) transfers to that because most teachers want to be caregivers, want to be supportive and I think that’s leadership”.

Participants expressed that teacher leaders have all of the identified characteristics of a leader but increased expertise and experience was identified as a distinguishing factor. The following statements by one of the participants supports this notion. As she said, “A teacher leader does all of those same things as a leader. Definitely influences others in a positive manner. But I think a teacher leader also has background and experiences with students, with curriculum, with a multitude of background and experiences that helps the teacher leaders know how to lead others to help kids”. The sentiments articulated by the participants of this study echo those of educational researchers who note that teacher leaders are those individuals and teachers who take initiative with their peers, mobilize people for common goals, monitor the progress of themselves and others, act as a liaison between faculty and administration and share their knowledge and pedagogical skills with others (Danielson, 2006; Killion & Harrison, 2006).

Ankrum (2016) adds that teacher leadership is a term that encompasses individual development, collaboration and organizational development. Throughout this study, participants emphasized the power that teachers have to influence their colleagues in the improvement of teaching and learning practices.
Table 3 contains additional quotes from participants that support and illustrate their personal definition of teacher leader and support much of the established research on teacher leadership.

Table 3.  
Defining teacher leadership: Supporting statements from participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Defining Teacher Leadership</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• “I think it is somebody that maybe sets an example of professionalism for their peers, is willing to take the time to share and like kind of open themselves up.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• “Teacher leaders have conversations and model things so that others can do it”.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• “It (teacher leadership) kind of naturally evolves and at different times one person will kind of take the lead and then another person. It just depends on the situation and we all feel pretty comfortable doing that with each other”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• “A teacher leader is someone you can go to with questions, concerns, guidance”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• “Someone that will give you information such as changes to what you are doing on a daily basis and can back that up as a leader”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• “Teacher leaders kind of set the tone for how we work together professionally. We’ve had a lot of newer teachers so I think having some more veteran teachers that set the tone and set an example for them. That’s how it naturally happens”.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Differing Strengths of the Team.** Throughout the interviews, the participants continually shared the position that teachers have expertise on a multitude of topics and when they feel competent and confident in a particular topic or new piece of learning, they are likely to take the lead and share with others. Ankrum (2016) emphasized that teacher leaders have backgrounds of accomplished teachers, leading to a shared sense of expertise and credibility. This notion of competency was continually mentioned as vital to the effectiveness of teacher
leaders. The importance of the sharing of expertise and the celebration of differing individual strengths was emphasized as important, not only in terms of teacher leadership but to the culture of the school as a whole.

**Relationships with the Principal**

Participants expressed the vital need for a strong and positive relationship with the building principal. They noted the need for a reciprocal relationship where they felt valued, supported, and heard. The importance of reciprocal trust and honesty was shared by several participants. Participants also shared that the onus of this is on teachers as well. They emphasized that teachers cannot sit back and grumble. They need to feel heard and have common end goals. Participants also shared that they need time to meet those goals and time to meet the needs of the learners in their classrooms.

It was a common sentiment that it is important that the building principal is visible and part of every day and that the teachers feel comfortable and safe in their relationship with the principal. They expressed that school needs to feel safe for the teachers just as it is safe for the students. One participant also noted that transferring leadership to teachers is an important notion with regard to teacher leadership. They noted that “great leaders inspire others to pursue that role”. Edgerson, Kritsonis and Herrington (2006) called for a shift in the relationship paradigm between principals and teachers. They discussed the need for administrative leaders who empower rather than delegate, build trust and seek to understand. They go on to discuss the inherent need of principals to adhere to the fundamental components of positive interpersonal relationships, stating that principals must be “consummate relationship builders”.
Desired Opportunities

While one participant noted that she does not have any desired goals with regard to leadership due to being toward the end of her career, all other participants noted potential opportunities that they would like the chance to pursue. This included more time to observe in other classrooms to share expertise, the rotation of leadership roles in grade level meetings, additional time to share on the topics they are knowledgeable about and perhaps extending this outside of the school building and across other schools in the district. More formal classes on educational leadership was also mentioned as a potential next step.

Figure 1 provides a visual representation of the themes that were revealed as the data was analyzed. Each of these areas is addressed through this chapter.

Figure 1.

The Themes That Were Revealed Upon Analysis of the Data for this Research Study.
The following table provides a holistic view of the ideas, themes and data uncovered through analysis of this research. This table provides key words and phrases identified by each participant based on the interview questions. These thematic areas were driven by the interview questions that were asked of each participant and include the following: the definition of teacher leadership, characteristics of a leader, past, current and desired leadership opportunities, relationship with the principal and support to the principal. From these statements, the themes were identified.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Part.</th>
<th>Define Teacher Leadership</th>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Past Opportunities</th>
<th>Current Opportunities</th>
<th>Desired Opportunities</th>
<th>Relationship with Principal</th>
<th>Support to Principal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>-Take lead with peers</td>
<td>-Assertive</td>
<td>-SCC team</td>
<td>-Supervision of Paraprofessionals</td>
<td>-More experiences in multiple classrooms</td>
<td>-Vital</td>
<td>-share expertise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-Support and encourage others to take lead.</td>
<td>-Focused</td>
<td>-Mentor</td>
<td>-Lead RTI meetings</td>
<td>-More opportunities to share and reflect on students’ needs.</td>
<td>-Reciprocal</td>
<td>-collaborate to solve problems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-Reflective</td>
<td>-Reflective</td>
<td>-Grade level meetings</td>
<td>-Lead grade level meetings</td>
<td>-More opportunities to share and reflect on students’ needs.</td>
<td>-Supportive</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-Values others</td>
<td>-Values others</td>
<td>-Conference presentations</td>
<td>-Leading grade level meetings</td>
<td>-Additional opportunities beyond the school building</td>
<td>-Trust</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-Genuine</td>
<td>-Genuine</td>
<td>-Dissemination of Information</td>
<td>-More experiences in multiple classrooms</td>
<td>-Additional opportunities beyond the school building</td>
<td>-Honesty</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-Able to shape others</td>
<td>-Able to shape others</td>
<td>-SCC team</td>
<td>-Supervision of Paraprofessionals</td>
<td>-More experiences in multiple classrooms</td>
<td>-Vital</td>
<td>-share expertise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-Fluid, flexible</td>
<td>-Fluid, flexible</td>
<td>-SCC team</td>
<td>-Supervision of Paraprofessionals</td>
<td>-More experiences in multiple classrooms</td>
<td>-Vital</td>
<td>-share expertise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>-Teachers leading</td>
<td>-Lead by example</td>
<td>-RTI meetings</td>
<td>-Lead RTI meetings</td>
<td>-Continue to share about topics knowledgeable about</td>
<td>-Teachers need to feel valued and heard</td>
<td>-Additional input in curricular decisions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-Formal title</td>
<td>-Subtle</td>
<td>-Grade level meetings</td>
<td>-Lead grade level meetings</td>
<td>-Get out of comfort zone</td>
<td>-Teachers cannot sit back</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-Competency</td>
<td>-Competent</td>
<td>-Day to day interactions</td>
<td>-Conference presentations</td>
<td>-Get out of comfort zone</td>
<td>-Teachers cannot sit back</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-Willing to leave</td>
<td>-Passion</td>
<td>-Mentor to Preservice teachers</td>
<td>-Dissemination of Information</td>
<td>-Get out of comfort zone</td>
<td>-Teachers cannot sit back</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>comfort zone</td>
<td>-Diplomatic</td>
<td>-Has worked in many schools and in many grade levels</td>
<td>-Sharing of information with co workers</td>
<td>-Not just about directives</td>
<td>-Help and share expertise other teachers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-Well versed</td>
<td>-Influential</td>
<td>-Diverse student populations</td>
<td>-Sharing of information with co workers</td>
<td>-Not just about directives</td>
<td>-Help and share expertise other teachers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-Facilitator</td>
<td>-Positive</td>
<td>-Master’s degree study</td>
<td>-Sharing of information with co workers</td>
<td>-Not just about directives</td>
<td>-Help and share expertise other teachers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>-Influence others</td>
<td>-Connected</td>
<td>-Leads to effective collaboration</td>
<td>-Sharing of information with co workers</td>
<td>-Not just about directives</td>
<td>-Help and share expertise other teachers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>positively</td>
<td>-Compassionate</td>
<td>-Ongoing conversations</td>
<td>-Sharing of information with co workers</td>
<td>-Not just about directives</td>
<td>-Help and share expertise other teachers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-Needs background and experience</td>
<td>-Thoughtful</td>
<td>-Leading grade level meetings</td>
<td>-Sharing of information with co workers</td>
<td>-Not just about directives</td>
<td>-Help and share expertise other teachers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-Models and influences</td>
<td>-Motivated</td>
<td>-Leading grade level meetings</td>
<td>-Sharing of information with co workers</td>
<td>-Not just about directives</td>
<td>-Help and share expertise other teachers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>others</td>
<td>-Values multiple view points</td>
<td>-More opportunities to share and reflect on students’ needs.</td>
<td>-Sharing of information with co workers</td>
<td>-Not just about directives</td>
<td>-Help and share expertise other teachers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-Sets an example</td>
<td>-Aware</td>
<td>-Additional opportunities beyond the school building</td>
<td>-Sharing of information with co workers</td>
<td>-Not just about directives</td>
<td>-Help and share expertise other teachers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-Willing to take time to share</td>
<td>-Aware</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-Help and share expertise other teachers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-Open to the ideas of others</td>
<td>-Supportive</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-Help and share expertise other teachers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>-Confident</td>
<td>-Approachable</td>
<td>-Supervision of Paraprofessionals</td>
<td>-Grade level team leader</td>
<td>-Increased planning time</td>
<td>-Important for teachers to feel comfortable and safe</td>
<td>-It is too much for principal to carry all of the weight</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-Resource</td>
<td>-Approachable</td>
<td>-Led grade level and RTI meetings</td>
<td>-Mentor to new teachers</td>
<td>-Increased planning time</td>
<td>-Important for teachers to feel comfortable and safe</td>
<td>-It is too much for principal to carry all of the weight</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-Approachable</td>
<td>-Shared literacy training</td>
<td>-Disseminates information</td>
<td>-Increased planning time</td>
<td>-Important for teachers to feel comfortable and safe</td>
<td>-It is too much for principal to carry all of the weight</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4. Key words and phrases relative to thematic areas

Table 4 displays the data obtained by the researcher for each of the six participants in this study. This data revealed multiple and varied responses to each of the research questions and illustrates the depth in the perceptions of participants. Analysis of this data led to the revelation of important patterns and themes revealed through the research.

**Connections of Findings to Theoretical Framework**

The theory of Distributed Leadership theory challenges traditional leadership roles. As Sturm (2009) notes, this type of leadership is not shared in the sense of just creating new positions and sharing authority, it is about the conceptualization of how leadership as a process works, how it develops, and how it changes and adapts to fit the particular context. Distributed leadership is transformational in nature as it emphasizes relationships that develop in organizations over time between both formal and informal leaders. As one study participant noted, “Leadership is building confidence and trust with your teammates and having them take the lead and showing that you believe in their abilities and that you trust them and that you need their expertise and knowledge. To have leadership skills is essential for organizations to grow more leaders”. The theory of distributed leadership asserts that leadership expertise be mobilized
in order to build capacity for organizational improvement and interdependent interactions among stakeholders. These sentiments were echoed throughout the participant responses.

Analysis of the data in this study supports the tenets of the Distributed Leadership theory as the theoretical framework. Participants supported the foundational elements of this theoretical framework by sharing the importance of relationships evolving over time to enhance organizational leadership. Participants shared that a reciprocal relationship between teachers and principals provide an opportunity for teachers to be heard and valued within the organization. As one participant stated in their interview, “I think one piece of it is a principal who is highly visible. If you have a principal who is part of your every day, there is more collaboration because you feel like you’re all on the same team. The principal knows you and knows your classroom”.

Participants felt that open and honest lines of communication between teachers and principals enhanced the ability of the organization to grow relationships between the two entities and create leadership opportunities that may be both formal and informal in nature. This is an important tenet to the theory that grounded this study. As one participant noted, “How does your principal make you feel supported? How do they help you grow through impactful things? How open are the administrators to your own ideas that you might bring forth? Is that relationship that you have with the principal and how does the principal make you feel and how much do you trust the principal? It’s all about trust for me”. This quote as it speaks to the value of trust and communication and its connection to the fundamental pieces of the Distributed Leadership theory.
CHAPTER 5
CONCLUSION

Introduction

The purpose this qualitative research study was to examine the potential for teacher leadership opportunities within a suburban primary school. This chapter includes a discussion of the findings as they relate to the literature and theory on teacher leadership, and the implications as they relate to research and practice. A discussion of the limitations of the study is also included. This section includes discussion and potential research opportunities to help answer the following research questions:

1. How do pre-kindergarten through grade three teachers describe their personal leadership philosophy?
2. What do pre-kindergarten through grade three teachers identify and describe as current leadership opportunities?
3. What do pre-kindergarten through grade three teachers identify and describe as leadership roles they could acquire to support the building principal?

The next section will discuss the findings in relation to the outlined research questions for this study.

Research Question 1: How do pre-kindergarten through grade three teachers describe their personal leadership philosophy?

Based on the information gained from this study, it is clear that participants’ personal leadership philosophies are grounded in competency and a focus on student need. Participants expressed that leading others in a positive direction that is beneficial to every student is vital. Participants echoed the sentiments that a leader is someone who is a model and influences others,
can shape both students and adults in a positive manner and affirm them. As one participant stated, “a leader definitely influences others in a positive manner and also has multitude of background and experience with students and curriculum”. The importance of being a role model who garners respect and being a resource to one another was emphasized as well. Participants frequently mentioned that leadership is not just about the one who talks the most or has the loudest but those who build confidence, trust and capacity in others. Participants identified characteristics such as being assertive, focused, reflective and positive. Participants in the study emphasized that leadership is often subtle and that the keys to leadership philosophy include competency, passion and being able to anticipate the needs and questions of others. One participant also viewed a leader as someone who leads by example and someone that people are eager to emulate. As she stated, “leading by example is not necessarily about people doing what you want them to do but doing things in a way that people want to emulate you. Sometimes people are leading without even realizing they are doing it. The tone of the work environment and how you handle challenges is a big part of this, I think”. These sentiments are supported by the work of Lumpkin, Claxton and Wilson (2014) who state that teacher leaders are those who share their expertise and experience with other teachers to broaden knowledge of others and school improvement efforts. One participant stated that she does not see leadership as a title but as someone who sets positive examples of professionalism for their peers. As she stated, “leaders are approachable, confident, resourceful and able to build productive relationships with others”. Another participant emphasized that leadership must be cultivated through communication, relationship building, positive feedback, and the building of confidence and trust. This participant added, “A teacher leader is someone who is impactful in the direction that the group is moving, being a supportive person and most important doing all of those things that
inspire people to rise to the occasion to get better and improve their practice in alignment with the goal and mission of the school”. Many researchers have discussed the notion that teacher leaders break down the isolation of classroom teachers, promote collaboration, improve organizational learning and catalyze improvement efforts within the school (Ghamarawi, 2013; Ghamarawi, 2011; Katzenmeyer & Mollerm 2001; Harris & Townsend, 2007). Participants readily identified a variety of characteristics of leaders that is supported by the literature reviewed for this study.

Research Question Two: What do pre-kindergarten through grade three teachers identify and describe as current leadership opportunities?

With regard to current opportunities, the participants echoed their sentiments of informal leadership opportunities. They identified day to day interactions and ongoing conversations with colleagues as two current opportunities that afforded them the chance to share expertise, discuss student issues and disseminate information learned through advanced coursework. As one participant said, “leadership evolves naturally and is situational. At different times one person will kind of take the lead and then another person will based on the situation and their experience”. This was supported by a second participant who stated, “Leadership is building confidence and trust with your teammates too and kind of having them take the lead showing that you believe in their abilities and that you trust them and need their knowledge and expertise at times. These skills are essential for organizations to grow leaders”.

The mentoring of new teachers, as well as pre-service teachers was also noted as a current leadership opportunity. The importance of competency and the ability to inspire and build positive relationships was continually mentioned as vital to productivity within the identified leadership opportunities. When discussing current opportunities, participant two
expressed that in addition to the roles she has currently taken on, her goals include “working to get out of her comfort zone and look for new opportunities to share topics and knowledge with colleagues”. She also mentioned that she would like to see teachers have more of a voice in decisions regarding curriculum within the school and district. The sentiment of informal leadership and the notion of teachers sharing their expertise and knowledge in ways other than a formal setting continually emerged as a theme in response to this research question.

Leveraging the expertise of teachers to lead professional development of their colleagues is supported by research as a way to foster teachers’ skill development and keep them up to date on current research and pedagogical practice (Wood, Goodnight, Bethune, Preston and Cleaver, 2006). Petrie and McGee (2012) assert that professional learning must be supported and cultivated in a manner that is responsive to both student and teacher need. The findings in this study indicate that teachers can be at the forefront of the professional learning and support of their colleagues. Ringler, O’Neal, Rawls, Cumiskey (2013) do emphasize that the level of support of the building principal in such initiatives is instrumental to its success. These authors note that the presence and active participation of the principal in such professional learning and training of the teachers is instrumental in its success. In their 2001 study, Spillane, Halverson and Diamond emphasize that the sustainability of leadership is much more than grooming a successor. Cook (2014) noted that leadership sustainability is about dispersing opportunities throughout and among the professionals within the school community. As he states, “the teachers are the ones who carry the brunt of the responsibility of implementing the vision, but are often overlooked as contributing to the role of leadership” (p.30.) It is evident both through the established literature and the findings of this study that a partnership between teachers and
building principals is essential to the building and sustainability of leadership capacity and school growth and change.

**Research Question 3: What do pre-kindergarten through grade three teachers identify and describe as leadership roles they could acquire to support the building principal?**

The data in this study continually illustrated the importance of teachers supporting, teaching and being a resource to one another. The work of Lieberman and Miller (2005) and McBrayer, Chance, Pannell & Wells (2018) emphasized that principals are continuing to struggle to be the face of instructional leadership as they juggle the demands of management issues and very diverse student populations. They go on to discuss that principals simply cannot support all teachers in the way in which they need. McBrayer, Chance, Pannell and Wells (2018) assert that the job of the school administrator is daunting and they continually struggle to complete all of the administrative tasks every day. These authors assert that distributed leadership supports change, builds capacity among teachers and expands the possibilities of educational reform.

The participants in this study discussed how they can serve as a resource to one another as a means to support the building principal. As one participant said, “If teachers are struggling with something, there’s someone else who is able to help. I think maybe a teacher would be more open to admitting that they need help with something or more open to talk about that with another teacher versus the principal. There’s a different level of authority.” Participants also shared that being a problem solving resource to one another in the areas of planning and instruction frees up the building principal to handle situations that require more authoritative types of leadership. As one participant said, “I think it’s a different type of leadership role and when the principal’s carrying all the weight to do all of the types of leadership roles, it’s just too much and you can’t be expected to be an expert at every grade level and specific content in the
classrooms. So there’s roles that are appropriate for an administrator to handle and then there’s things you would hope teachers can handle ourselves like keeping each other motivated.”

Teachers leveraging their own expertise and serving as a resource to one another was continually mentioned as a vital component to the notion of teacher leadership and supporting the building principal in multiple capacities. This is supported by the work of Ballek, O’Rourke, Provenzano and Bellamy (2005) who note that schools need to make the development of teacher leaders an intentional and purposeful act. Lieberman and Miller (2005) note that given the increasing complexity of the principal’s job, school leadership simply cannot reside with one person. They emphasize that the belief that the building principal is the only school leader must be challenged. As one participant said, the principal is about the “big picture” (functioning of the school, safety, professionalism) and the teachers are about the details. The importance of increasing the leadership capacity of teachers was emphasized by one participant who stated, “We can’t stop the growth and progress of the building because the principal can’t be the department head and is attending to other needs. We’ve got to have some capacity to grow. That doesn’t happen by accident. It is teachers”. This notion is supported in the reviewed literature. As Trust, Krutka & Carpenter (2016) note in their work, enhancing leadership capacity through collaboration will lead to school improvement, student achievement and teacher growth.

**Interpretation of Findings**

**Implications for Theory**

The Distributed leadership theory was used as they theoretical framework for this study. Through analysis of the study, many findings confirm the components of this theory and indicated areas for further research.
The Australian Government for Teaching and Learning (2017) identified six fundamental tenets of the Distributed Leadership Theory. These include Engage With, Enable Through, Enact Via, Encourage With, Evaluate By and Emerge Through. Evidence of some these tenets were evident through analysis of the collected data and areas of potential study were revealed. The first tenet, Engage With, asserts that distributed leadership gains momentum when leaders across all levels of institutional authority engage with one another. In their study, Ringler, O’Neal, Rawls and Cumiskey (2013) noted the importance of the investment of teachers as well as the building principal in enacting professional development. They emphasized the instrumental nature of principal engagement in professional development. Spillane, Halverson and Diamond (2001) emphasized that leadership sustainability is more than grooming a principal’s successor. Cook (2014) further supports this stating that leadership sustainability means “distributing leadership throughout the school’s professional community” (p.3). In his work, he emphasized that this leadership model invites other members of the school staff both individually and collectively to assume leadership roles. Participants in this study continually expressed their interest and experience in sharing their expertise and practices with one another. Providing opportunities for leadership amplification for all teachers was echoed throughout this study as a manner to increase leadership capacity and sustainability.

Participants also expressed the importance of collaboration and school culture of trust, which aligns with the tenet of the Distributed Leadership theory, Enact Via. This tenet emphasizes the importance of supportive organizational systems that encourage the involvement of its people. Participants in this study identified multiple informal collaborative leadership opportunities including the sharing of expertise, dissemination of information gained from conference and course work, ongoing conversations with colleagues and mentoring
opportunities. In their work, Harris and Kemp-Graham (2017) encourage educators to share responsibility among staff and administrators to “intentionally create a collaborative team mindset and to include all teachers without hierarchal barriers to overcome” (p.68). As Conzemius and Morganti-Fisher (2012) found, as building leadership increases, the culture within the school evolves and the vision of the school becomes more shared and unified.

The tenet, Encourage With (Australian Government for Teaching and Learning, 2017), encourages learning and professional development centered on raising knowledge and awareness of distributed leadership practices. While the participants in this study have not had specific training or professional development specifically on distributed leadership practices, the experiences they identified aligned with the theory. Additional training, professional development and resources have the potential to enhance these identified practices. Additional study focused on the final two tenets, Evaluate By and Emerge Through has the potential to increase leadership capacity, measure and evaluate distributed leadership practices, diversify leadership responsibility and promote a culture of teacher leaders who are invested in sustained change and school reform.

As Beachman & Dentith (2004) and Lumpkin, Claxton, Wilson (2014) noted, while definitions of teacher leadership tend to vary, what remains consistent is the notion that teacher leadership is leadership that extends beyond classroom boundaries. The participants in this study readily identified ways in which they share their knowledge and expertise to broaden the knowledge of their colleagues. There was evidence from participant interviews that both formal and informal measures are used to gain and share knowledge with colleagues. The participants continually emphasized the importance of competency and the sharing of their knowledge with others.
Implications for Practice

Throughout the analysis of the data for this study, several implications to educational practice were revealed. Based upon this analysis, these implications included: the need to purposefully and strategically schedule opportunities for teachers to run their own meetings based upon their professional needs and the needs of their students, the use of unconferencing as a forum to share expertise with one another, across the district and to administration, the planning of professional development by grade level teams, time for teachers to visit the classrooms of their colleagues, and balancing formal and informal leadership opportunities and professional development.

Scheduled opportunities for teachers to run their own meetings. Throughout the school year, there are multiple curriculum and grade level meetings held where teachers could be encouraged to take the helm and lead based upon their knowledge, passions and expertise. These include grade level meetings, Response to Intervention meetings, faculty meetings, district professional development and in-service, and regional conferences. This notion is supported by the work of Silva, Gimbert and Nolan (2000) who argue that teacher leaders should “slide the doors open” to collaborate with other teachers to do such things as discuss common challenges, investigate new pedagogical practice and investigate ways to bring students to a state of deeper engagement in learning. Scheduling time for individual teachers to lead meetings within the school has the potential to do just that and will also provide teachers with an avenue to share their expertise in an effort to build their capacity for leadership and share their knowledge with colleagues. As Ghamrawi (2013) noted, when teachers function as leaders, they develop a sense of ownership in the entire school community. Providing strategic and purposeful opportunities
for teachers to lead meetings clearly supports the notion of the development of leadership capacity and sustainability.

**Unconferencing as a forum to share expertise.** Unconferencing is defined as a participant led discussion where the typical hierarchical nature of a conventional conference and formal presenters is replaced by the sharing of knowledge and ideas of those in attendance (Lynch, 2018). The purpose of the unconference is to provide a forum for teachers to share their expertise. Holding unconferences would provide teachers the opportunity to share the content rich details of pedagogy and practice that are relevant to their day-to-day teaching and the varying needs of their students. Unconferencing is one way to allow teachers to establish the agenda based upon both their expertise and the needs of their colleagues and students. Involving administrators and principals as active partners has the potential to increase the knowledge and capacity of all involved. Unconferencing can be implemented as part of regular staff and grade level meetings as well and integrated more formally during annual faculty development times.

**Grade level teams develop professional development.** Enabling teachers to have a voice in the professional development that they need and desire to improve their teaching craft has the potential to lead to increased achievement for both students and teachers. Self-reflection provides a foundation for teachers to unpack their strengths and areas to improve upon. Through the thoughtful action of self-reflection, teachers could identify and implement professional development opportunities to enhance their various areas of need. Multiple researchers have found that continued professional development is vital in developing the capacity of teachers to improve their own pedagogical practice and to increase student learning and achievement (Hilton, Hilton, Dole & Goos, 2015; Goldsmith, Doerr & Lewis, 2014; Justi & Van Driel, 2006). In his study, Stewart (2014) posited that when all stakeholders are engaged in the work they are
Doing and have investment and voice in professional development opportunities, learning communities flourish. Professional learning must be cultivated in a manner that is responsive to both teacher and student need (Petrie & McGee, 2012). A balanced approach in selecting professional development opportunities would meet the needs of both teachers and administrators.

**Time for teachers to get into the classrooms of their colleagues.** Creative and flexible class scheduling would afford teachers the opportunity to observe their colleagues and has the potential to enhance their teaching craft. Observations that are purposeful, with specific learning targets, would provide the opportunity for an open dialogue between teachers. Throughout this study participants shared their desire for rich discussion and professional development centered on student success. Hendry and Oliver (2012) found that observing peers has reciprocal benefits. Evidence from their study indicated that the process of observing is as valuable as being observed and receiving feedback. Bell (2001) reported that peer observers gained significantly from the opportunity to observe their colleagues teaching. This notion of peer observation was further supported by Bell and Mlademovic (2008) who found that the majority of participants found peer observation valuable and a catalyst for changes in their teaching. Classroom observations have the potential to provide critical learning for teachers, and desired teacher models for principals.

**Balance formal and informal leadership and professional development.** Balancing formal and informal leadership in regards to professional development has the potential to create valuable learning experiences for teachers and principals alike. Participants in this study were comfortable in both formal and informal leadership roles, however the majority of participants preferred the informal leadership role. The informal leadership piece allows teachers to stay in
their comfort zone with familiar faces and established norms. In a more formal setting, some teachers would be forced to extend their leadership and share their knowledge with a larger audience.

Implications for Research

In an effort to increase the validity and reliability of the data gathered in this study, additional research studies should be conducted to increase the breadth and depth of this work. Additional research on professional development led by teachers has the potential to enhance the leadership practices discussed in this study. The research of Stewart (2014) and Knight (2011) asserts that teachers must be invested in the work they are doing and that choice, voice and input are hallmarks of effective professional development. Established research has shown that such continued professional development is necessary to build leadership capacity in an effort to improve their practice and improve student learning (Hilton, Hilton, Dole & Goos, 2015; Goldsmith, Doerr & Lewis, 2014; Justi & Van Driel, 2006). Further investigation regarding how this might fit into the organization that was the focus of this study is warranted. In addition, supplemental study focused on the final two tenets of the Distributed Leadership theory (Evaluate By and Emerge Through) has the potential to validate the findings of this study, as well as, to increase leadership capacity, measure and evaluate distributed leadership practices, diversify leadership responsibility and promote a culture of teacher leaders who are invested in sustained change and school reform.

Recommendations for future study. Future research topics that would increase the depth of this work include a study on the effectiveness of teacher lead professional development including the instructional impact of professional development, a study on the perceptions of teachers with regard to professional development led by their colleagues, a longitudinal study
that looks at teacher leadership across a longer period of time, and a study that incorporates additional schools and districts in the area. The findings of this research strongly suggest that teachers are eager and willing to share their knowledge and expertise with colleagues and that they welcome opportunities for increased leadership roles within their school. LeClerc, Moreau, Dumouchel & Sallafranque (2012) assert that bringing teachers together to work and learn from one another creates capacity for sustainable change within schools. The findings of this study indicate that teachers within the organization are willing and eager to share their expertise with one another in an effort to build sustained leadership and support the building principal. Also given the sentiments of participants that establishing a culture that is supportive of teacher leadership is important, a study focused on the cultivation of teacher leadership within a school also has the potential to lead to important and powerful data with regard to learning, leadership and instructional practice.

**Potential Limitations**

Because the researcher works within the organization that was the focus of this study, steps were taken to ensure ethical and valid research practices. None of the work for this study was completed within the researcher’s work office. All interviews were conducted in a neutral location and all research materials were kept outside of the school office. Emails that were sent to participants were from a non-work email. Personal bias may have caused the data to be analyzed in a manner that suits the researcher’s personal agenda. In an effort to lessen researcher bias, member checks were completed for the interview transcriptions, data was verified across the interview and survey sources and the findings of the study were reviewed by educational peers. The recording of descriptive and reflective field notes and memoing were also used to increase the credibility of the analysis and to serve as a means for triangulation. Additional
limitations to this study include the researcher’s skill in data analysis, competence and interpretation bias as data was interpreted. The small sample size of six participants is another limitation as it makes it difficult to generalize any findings across other school organizations. Due to the nature of this study, transferability to other schools of similar demographic and size may be possible.

**Conclusion**

It is no secret that the role of the school principal is vital to the functioning of the school, the effectiveness of the teachers, and the achievement of students. With this complex and multifaceted position comes overwhelming day-to-day expectations that frequently supersede the instructional leadership intentions of the principal. Principals are challenged to dedicate the time in their day to provide the instructional leadership and guidance to teachers that many see as their foundational role. Providing a systemic platform to enhance and increase opportunities for teachers to lead is essential with the changing landscape of education.

The common notion of teacher leadership is that it is leadership that extends beyond the boundaries of individual classrooms. Teacher leaders are those educators who share their expertise with colleagues in an effort to sustain school improvement efforts. When teachers function as school leaders, they support the building principal while promoting collaboration and catalyzing improvement efforts in their schools. With the job of the school principal comes immense responsibility and demand. As noted in the literature review of this study, the demands of the building principal are multifaceted and prodigious (Beachman & Dentith, 2004; Brayer, Chance, Pannell, Wells, 2018; Grodski, 2011; Liberman & Miller, 2005; Poirel & Yvon, 2014). These demands can leave some principals without the time needed to lead the most important and foundational aspects of their jobs, instruction, and pedagogical change. The established
research reviewed for this study asserts that cultivating leadership across all levels of the hierarchical structure in education will build organizational capacity and sustained positive change. The findings of this study support the existing literature that teachers can and want to take on additional leadership roles to support the building principals in their day-to-day work (Ballek, O’Rourke, Provenzano & Bellamy, 2005; Lumpkin, Claxton & Wilson, 2014; Trust, Krutka, & Carpenter, 2016; Searby & Shaddix, 2008.). The participants in this study continually stressed the importance of leveraging their own expertise and serving as a resource to one another as a support to the building principal. The analysis of the data in this study continually revealed that empowering teachers to lead within their schools has the potential to promote growth for all stakeholders. These findings support the established research that school culture, academic performance, and educational reform are all enhanced when schools engage in collaborative leadership.
References


Desimone, L.M. (2009). Improving impact studies of teachers' professional development:


Ghamarawi, N. (2013). In principle, it is not only the principal! Teacher leadership architecture in schools. *International Education Studies, 6*(2), 148-158.


Leech, N. & Onwuegbuzie, A. (2007). An array of data analysis tools: A call for data analysis


Smith, C. (2010). The great dilemma of improving teacher quality in adult learning and


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
<th>Examples</th>
<th>Non Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Past Experiences as a Leader</td>
<td>Teachers reported several past experiences of leadership, primarily informal in nature.</td>
<td>Grade level meeting leader, Mentor to Pre Service Teachers “One thing that has benefited my leadership skills is when I went from a classroom teacher to a Title I slash coordinator and I was kind of thrown into that.”</td>
<td>Dissemination of written materials from central office.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Characteristics of a Leader</td>
<td>A myriad of characteristics of a leader were identified by participants. All participants identified several characteristics.</td>
<td>Have competency, Thoughtful, motivating, compassionate “I would say approachable, confident, open-minded, and nonjudgmental.”</td>
<td>Directive and behind closed doors—not accessible.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definition of Leader</td>
<td>Participants noted both formal and informal roles in their definitions of leaders,</td>
<td>Leading and in charge, Informal problem solving Someone who earns trust and respect “Leadership is somebody who can be a model, who can influence others hopefully in a really positive direction in ways that are best for every single child, every student, and of course to help each other and support each other to build a team and community because you’ve always said it—they are all of our kids.”</td>
<td>Directive and behind closed doors—not accessible.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definition of Teacher Leader</td>
<td>Teacher leaders were identified as those teachers who take the lead with their peers, share expertise, have knowledge and support one another</td>
<td>Someone who can shape others, Someone who can listen and respond positively Someone who garners respect “I just think it’s somebody that maybe sets an example of professionalism for their peers, and is willing to take the time to share and open themselves up.”</td>
<td>Teachers being forced into mentoring roles when they are not interested in mentoring new teachers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship with Building Principal</td>
<td>Reciprocal trust, communication and value were key to the relationship between teacher and principal.</td>
<td>Incorporate principal’s strategies Principal transfers leadership “It’s just the same thing with staff and just valuing each other and every individual. You have to grow together so we support each other in different ways, but keeping it that way and not one person telling somebody else, this is what you have to do because…”</td>
<td>Authoritarian and devaluing one another.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desired Opportunities</td>
<td>The identified desired opportunities centered on additional time to share expertise and additional course work relative to leadership</td>
<td>Rotate the person leading grade level meetings Share information on topics individuals are knowledgeable about “I feel like it’s a school culture thing. To me that stuff happens when everyone feels valued and listened to and pushed to pursue their perfect. The more you pursue your own professional development, I think the more you want to share your learning with peers and staff.”</td>
<td>Directed initiatives that do not promote professional growth.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 2
*Identified leadership opportunities and experiences.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Identified Leadership Opportunities and Experiences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Past Experiences</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Taught in multiple schools and grade levels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Master’s degree candidate in Educational Leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Works with diverse student populations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Member of School’s Core Competency team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Mentor for new teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Engaged in University level coursework and shared this knowledge with others in the building</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Led Response to Intervention meetings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Attended conferences and disseminated information to colleagues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Mentored to pre-service teachers from local universities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Supervision of classroom paraprofessionals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Ran Response to Intervention and grade level meetings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Shared literacy training information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Current Leadership Opportunities</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Dissemination of information learned in current Master’s degree coursework</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Mentor for new teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Ongoing conversations with co workers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Sharing of practices with colleagues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Supervision of paraprofessionals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Mentor to pre-service teachers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3.
Defining teacher leadership: Supporting statements from participants

Defining Teacher Leadership

• “I think it is somebody that maybe sets an example of professionalism for their peers, is willing to take the time to share and like kind of open themselves up.

• “Teacher leaders have conversations and model things so that others can do it”.

• “It (teacher leadership) kind of naturally evolves and at different times one person will kind of take the lead and then another person. It just depends on the situation and we all feel pretty comfortable doing that with each other”

• “A teacher leader is someone you can go to with questions, concerns, guidance”

• “Someone that will give you information such as changes to what you are doing on a daily basis and can back that up as a leader”

• “Teacher leaders kind of set the tone for how we work together professionally. We’ve had a lot of newer teachers so I think having some more veteran teachers that set the tone and set an example for them. That’s how it naturally happens”.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Part.</th>
<th>Define Teacher Leadership</th>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Past Opportunities</th>
<th>Current Opportunities</th>
<th>Desired Opportunities</th>
<th>Relationship with Principal</th>
<th>Support to Principal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>-Take lead with peers</td>
<td>-Assertive</td>
<td>-SCC team</td>
<td>-Supervision of Paraprofessionals</td>
<td>-More experiences in multiple classrooms</td>
<td>-Vital</td>
<td>-share expertise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-Support and encourage others to take lead.</td>
<td>-Focused</td>
<td>-Mentor</td>
<td>-Lead RTI meetings</td>
<td>-Continue to share about topics knowledgeable about</td>
<td>-Reciprocal</td>
<td>-collaborate to solve problems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-Listener</td>
<td>-University Courses</td>
<td>-Lead grade level meetings</td>
<td>-Get out of comfort zone</td>
<td>-Supportive</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-Reflective</td>
<td></td>
<td>-Conference presentations</td>
<td></td>
<td>-Trust</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-Values others</td>
<td></td>
<td>-Dissemination of Information</td>
<td></td>
<td>-Honesty</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-Genuine</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-Able to shape others</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-Fluid, flexible</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>-Teachers leading</td>
<td>-Lead by example</td>
<td>-RTI meetings</td>
<td>-Lead RTI meetings</td>
<td>-Teachers need to feel valued and heard</td>
<td>-Teachers cannot sit back</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-Formal title</td>
<td>-Subtle</td>
<td>-Grade level meetings</td>
<td>-Lead grade level meetings</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-Competency</td>
<td>-Competent</td>
<td>-Day to day interactions</td>
<td>-Leading grade level meetings</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-Willing to leave comfort zone</td>
<td>-Passion</td>
<td>-Mentor to Preservice teachers</td>
<td>-Dissemination of Information</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-Well versed</td>
<td>-Diplomatic</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-Facilitator</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>-Influence others</td>
<td>-Influential</td>
<td>-Has worked in many schools and in many grade levels</td>
<td>-Sharing of information with co workers</td>
<td>-More opportunities to share and reflect on students’ needs.</td>
<td>-Not just about directives</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>positively</td>
<td>-Positive</td>
<td>-Connected</td>
<td>-Ongoing conversations</td>
<td></td>
<td>-Principal needs to listen to teachers and be open to their thoughts and opinions.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-Needs background and experience</td>
<td>-Connected</td>
<td>-Compassionate</td>
<td>-Leading grade level meetings</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-Models and influences others</td>
<td>-Thoughtful</td>
<td>-Motivated</td>
<td>beyond the school building</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-Sets an example</td>
<td>-Values multiple view points</td>
<td>-Diverse student populations</td>
<td>-More opportunities to share and reflect on students’ needs.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-Willing to take time to share</td>
<td>-Master’s degree study</td>
<td>-Master’s degree study</td>
<td>-Additional opportunities beyond the school building</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-Open to the ideas of others</td>
<td>-Aware</td>
<td></td>
<td>-Additional opportunities beyond the school building</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-Supportive</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-Approachable</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-Confident</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-Resource</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>-Someone others go to with questions, concerns or for guidance</td>
<td>-Supervision of Paraprofessionals</td>
<td>-Grade level team leader</td>
<td>-Increased planning time</td>
<td>-Important for teachers to feel comfortable and safe</td>
<td>-It is too much for principal to carry all of the weight</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-a resource</td>
<td>-Led grade level and RTI meetings</td>
<td>-Mentor to new teachers</td>
<td>-Book talks</td>
<td>-Principal must keep one another motivated</td>
<td>-Teachers can share knowledge with one another</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-Shared literacy training</td>
<td>-Disseminates information</td>
<td></td>
<td>-Additional leadership coursework</td>
<td>-Teachers shared knowledge with one another</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-School wide leadership projects</td>
<td>-Help other teachers</td>
<td>-Share expertise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>-Need content knowledge</td>
<td>-builds trust, relationships, confidence and communication</td>
<td>-Supervising paraprofessionals</td>
<td>-Additional leadership coursework</td>
<td>-Should be reciprocal</td>
<td>-Help other teachers</td>
<td>-Share expertise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-takes initiative</td>
<td>-provides positive feedback</td>
<td>-No formal leadership training</td>
<td>-School wide leadership projects</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-shares knowledge</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-Additional leadership coursework</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-earns respect and trust</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-School wide leadership projects</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>-short content knowledge</td>
<td>-introspective</td>
<td>-led grade level meetings</td>
<td>-lead grade level meetings</td>
<td>No desired opportunities identified</td>
<td>-Principal should model leadership and work to transfer it to teachers</td>
<td>-Principal does not need to be present at all meetings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-takes initiative</td>
<td>-observant</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-Teachers share expertise</td>
<td>-Teachers share expertise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-shares knowledge</td>
<td>-wants to make a difference</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-earns respect and trust</td>
<td>-can shape others</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4. Key words and phrases relative to thematic areas
Figure 1.

*The Themes That Were Revealed Upon Analysis of the Data for this Research Study.*
Appendix A

Interview Protocol

Initial interviews will take place in a quiet location within the school and take approximately 45-60 minutes. Second follow up interviews will be scheduled individually with participants at the researcher’s discretion. Prior to the interviews, the interview protocol will be shared as well as the purpose, potential risks and benefits of the study. An informed consent form will be signed by each participant before commencement of the interview. All interviews will be audio recorded and field notes will be taken.

The following are the questions that will be asked during the semi-structured interviews. Follow up questions will be asked for clarification at the researcher’s discretion.

- Describe your past experiences that you would consider as being beneficial to the development of your leadership skills.
- Describe leadership experiences and opportunities that have you engaged in in your current role as a teacher.
- How do you define leadership?
- Please elaborate on how you see yourself within that definition?
- How do you define “teacher leader”?
- Describe specific characteristics that you believe optimize the definition of a leader?
- Describe leadership opportunities that you would like to experience.
- How do you see these experiences enhancing your growth as a leader?
- In what ways do you see teacher leadership being able to help/support the building principal and organization as a whole?
- What type of district level initiative do you feel could be offered to help develop and enhance teacher leadership?
- What ideas do you have on implementing a teacher leadership program that develops and enhances teacher leadership?
- What are some ideas you have on how to we create a collaborative environment between teachers and principals that is non-threatening and authentic?
Appendix B

Informed Consent

Northeastern University, CPS

Name of Investigator(s): Patty Mason, Student Researcher’s name: John Tennett

Title of Project: Teachers as Leaders: Empowering Teachers to Lead Instructional Change

Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Study
We are inviting you to take part in a research study. This form will tell you about the study, but the researcher will explain it to you first. You may ask this person any questions that you have. When you are ready to make a decision, you may tell the researcher if you want to participate or not. You do not have to participate if you do not want to. If you decide to participate, the researcher will ask you to sign this statement and will give you a copy to keep.

Why am I being asked to take part in this research study?
You are being asked to participate in this study because you are a classroom teacher.

Why is this research study being done?
The purpose of this qualitative research study is to examine the potential for teacher leadership opportunities. This research seeks to examine the perceptions of classroom teachers with regard to current and potential leadership opportunities. Providing leadership opportunities for teachers in schools has the potential to lead to increased school improvement. When teachers are empowered as leaders, the responsibility of instructional leadership does not rest solely on the building principal.

What will I be asked to do?
If you decide to take part in this study, we will ask you to answer questions on an online survey at the onset of the study and engage in an interview with John Tennett, the student researcher. These interviews will be aimed at documenting your perceptions with regard to current and potential leadership opportunities.

Where will this take place and how much of my time will it take?
You will first be asked to complete an online survey. This will take you no longer than 20 minutes to complete. You will be interviewed in a quiet location within the school at a time that is convenient for you. The interview will take about 45 minutes to one hour.

Will there be any risk or discomfort to me?
It is anticipated that this study will pose no risks to you.

Will I benefit by being in this research?
The potential benefit of this study will be an increase in information about teacher leadership practices which has the potential to impact practices within the school. It is anticipated that the
benefits of this study to teachers, administrators and students outweighs the minimal risks associated with this study.

Who will see the information about me?
Your name will not be associated with the research findings in any way. The rights of you and all participants will be protected as all identifying information will be removed from surveys and interviews to ensure confidentiality. All information will be kept confidential and all information will be stored on a password protected hard drive and in locked files in the researcher’s office. The information provided by one individual will not be shared with others and the findings will be presented in a way that ensures individual participants cannot be identified.

If I do not want to take part in the study, what choices do I have?
Your participation is completely voluntary and you may withdraw at any time without affecting your relationship with the researcher or the institution.

Who can I contact if I have questions or problems?
If you have any questions about the study, please feel free to contact John Tennett (tennett.jo@husky.neu.edu, 207-570-9750, the person mainly responsible for the research. You can also contact Patty Mason (Pa.Mason@northeastern.edu, principal investigator.

Who can I contact about my rights as a participant? If you have any questions about your rights in this research, you may contact Nan C. Regina, Director, Human Subject Research Protection, Mail Stop: 560-177, 360 Huntington Avenue, Northeastern University, Boston, MA 02115. Tel: 617.373.4588, Email: n.regina@neu.edu. You may call anonymously if you wish.

Will I be paid for my participation? You will not be given any compensation for your participation and this study will not cost anything to participate.

I agree to take part in this research.

_________________________________________
Signature of person agreeing to take part      Date

_________________________________________
Printed name of person above

_________________________________________
Signature of person who explained the study to the participant      Date participant above obtained consent
Appendix C

Interview Questions

- Describe your past experiences that you would consider as being beneficial to the development of your leadership skills.
- Describe leadership experiences and opportunities that have you engaged in in your current role as a teacher.
- How do you define leadership?
- Please elaborate on how you see yourself within that definition?
- How do you define “teacher leader”?
- Describe specific characteristics that you believe optimize the definition of a leader?
- Describe leadership opportunities that you would like to experience.
- How do you see these experiences enhancing your growth as a leader?
- In what ways do you see teacher leadership being able to help/support the building principal and organization as a whole?
- What type of district level initiative do you feel could be offered to help develop and enhance teacher leadership?
- What ideas do you have on implementing a teacher leadership program that develops and enhances teacher leadership?
- What are some ideas you have on how to create a collaborative environment between teachers and principals that is non-threatening and authentic?
Appendix D

Survey Questions

• In what ways are your leadership capabilities utilized with regard to instructional practice?

• In what ways are your leadership capabilities utilized with regard to professional development?

• What leadership roles would you participate in if provided the opportunity?

• In what ways do you actively seek out professional development opportunities?

• In what ways do you feel confident in sharing your expertise and leading colleagues in professional development?