IMPLEMENTING THE NEW EDUCATOR EVALUATION SYSTEM
INTO PRACTICE AT AN URBAN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
THROUGH DISTRIBUTED LEADERSHIP

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Implementing the New Educator Evaluation System Into Practice at an Urban Elementary School Through Distributed Leadership

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# Table of Contents

Acknowledgement ........................................................................................................... 6  
Abstract .......................................................................................................................... 8  
Chapter I: Introduction ..................................................................................................... 9  
  Statement of the Problem ............................................................................................. 9  
  Significance of the Problem ......................................................................................... 13  
  Positionality Statement ............................................................................................... 14  
  Purpose Statement ....................................................................................................... 16  
  Research Questions ...................................................................................................... 17  
  Theoretical Framework ................................................................................................. 18  
  Summary ....................................................................................................................... 22  
Chapter II: Literature Review ........................................................................................... 23  
  Mandated Organizational Change ............................................................................... 26  
  Distributed Leadership Perspective .......................................................................... 28  
  Professional Growth ..................................................................................................... 34  
  Human Capacity ........................................................................................................... 36  
  Teacher Leaders .......................................................................................................... 37  
  Train-The-Trainer Model ............................................................................................. 39  
  Summary ....................................................................................................................... 41  
Chapter III: Methodology ................................................................................................. 43  
  Research Design ........................................................................................................... 43  
  Research Questions ...................................................................................................... 44  
  Research Paradigm ...................................................................................................... 45
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Qualitative Research Approach and Justification</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empirical Inquiry</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role of the Researcher</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protection of Human Subjects</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recruitment Procedures</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ensuring the Protection of Human Subjects and Informed Consent</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants and Access</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Site and Participants</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study Procedures</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Collection</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Storage and Management</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Analysis</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trustworthiness</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Credibility</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Validity</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Objectivity</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter IV: Research Findings</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose of the Case Study</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History of Mandate and Implementation Plan</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steps to Implementation</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Context and Staff Profile</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explanation of Data</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Document Review and Supporting Evidence ...................................................... 87
Emergent Themes ................................................................................................. 88
Individual and Focus Group Interviews .............................................................. 88
Differences between Individual Interviews and Focus Group Findings ................. 106
Summary ............................................................................................................. 110

Chapter V: Discussion ....................................................................................... 113
Synthesis of Findings ......................................................................................... 114
Limitations of the Research ............................................................................... 125
Implications for Researchers ............................................................................. 127
Implications for Practitioners ........................................................................... 129
Implications for Policymakers ........................................................................... 133
Future Studies ..................................................................................................... 135
Conclusion ......................................................................................................... 135
References .......................................................................................................... 137
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Abstract

Educators are facing increasingly more demands in today’s public schools. One of the reasons is because of the state and federal mandates that resulted from Race to the Top, which are intended to improve professional growth and student learning. Distributive Leadership and Organizational Change Theory are the two theories that informed the design and analysis of the case study. The purpose of this study is to describe how informal and formal leaders work with teachers in one K-5 elementary school to support and guide staff to build capacity. The case study design was used to identify and describe the perceptions of teachers and administrators about the construct and use of distributed leadership to achieve organizational change through interactions. Taking a collaborative approach, the multiple leaders and followers were able to adopt, adapt, and implement the mandate of a new educator evaluation through reciprocity and interdependence. The findings of this study support and identify how distributed leadership leads to sensemaking of organizational change and how the approach of peer training led to shared resources, responsibility, and taking ownership of the new initiative. This study demonstrates how informal leaders take on the role of culture carriers to implement the mandated change into practice at one urban K-5 elementary school.

Keywords: Race to the Top (RTTT), organizational change, distributed leadership, formal and informal leaders, followers, educator evaluation, Train-the-Trainer (TTT) model, sensemaking, capacity building, interdependence
Chapter I: Introduction

Federal and state mandates related to the Race to the Top (RTTT) program are placing increasingly more demands on already burdened K-12 public school systems to implement change (Hallinger & Heck, 2009; Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2012; U.S. Department of Education, 2013). External demands require school systems, including administrators and teachers, to adopt and adapt to change initiatives (Weick & Quinn, 1995). This research study will explore and describe how administrators and teachers implemented the new educator evaluation model as mandated by the state, and how one urban elementary school in Massachusetts incorporated it into their internal practice.

The practice of distributed leadership is crucial to support today’s schools that are put in the position to comply with external mandates from the federal and state government (Elmore, 2003; Gronn, 2002a; Hulpia & Devos, 2010). Distributed leadership focuses on the interactions between leaders and followers in a situated activity (Harris, 2012; Mayrowetz, 2008; Spillane, 2005; Spillane, 2006). Limited prior research points to how a professional culture of collaborative practice enhances teacher development, and also how it positively contributes to student learning (Harris, 2012; Hollingworth, 2012; Spillane, 2006). This study will attempt to expand upon and contribute to the current literature by examining how one school implemented an external mandate into an internal practice within the context of a case study (Spillane, 2006; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2014).

Statement of the Problem

The federal government’s Race to the Top (RTTT) program mandates that each state implement an educator evaluation system, which includes focusing on educator professional growth and student learning to promote improvement in K-12 public schools (U.S. Department
Increasing demands on school systems place educators in the position to become informed and active participants in the organizational change process as the state and federal government mandates are implemented (Ben-Pertez, 2001; Darling-Hammond, 2010; Harris & Spillane, 2008; Heller & Firestone, 1995; Hollingworth, 2012; Hulpia & Devos, 2010; Spillane, 2006). This study will explore and describe how one school district uses formal and informal leaders to implement the mandated change to incorporate a new educator evaluation process through a distributed leadership practice model at an urban elementary school. The purpose of this study is to explore the perspectives of administrators and teachers who, through collaborative efforts, are implementing the external mandate for a new educator evaluation system into practice.

The goal of this study is to provide additional research that defines and explores the practice of distributed leadership in a K-5 public school to fill blind spots that are present in the literature (Harris, 2004; Spillane, 2006). Distributed leadership has only marginally been empirically linked to teacher’s professional growth and increased student learning outcomes according to multiple researchers in the field (Hallinger, & Heck, 2009; Harris & Spillane, 2008; Spillane, 2005; Spillane & Healey, 2010). A shared style of leadership is particularly important because teachers, who have historically been independent, are now required to work collectively through interdependent relationships to incorporate mandates and weave both professional development and student learning goals into practice across all grade levels (Feiman-Nemser, 1998; Hollingworth, 2012; Little, 1987; Spillane, 2006).

The findings of this study can therefore build upon the existing research base by documenting the work of one school that has implemented the mandate for a new educator evaluation through a progressive approach, which includes the train-the-trainer (TTT) model of
peer-to-peer instruction and support (Suhrhleinrick, 2011). This study, acknowledging how multiple leaders influence organizational change, may provide multiple stakeholders, including policy makers and administrators, with information about how leadership can be distributed and shared between leaders and followers in public schools while implementing a government mandated change. In turn, an increased understanding of the process of organizational change through distributed leadership may influence how future mandates may be instituted.

In K-12 public school settings, there is empirical research that identifies gaps within the distributed leadership model (Harris & Spillane 2008; Spillane, 2006). These deficiencies can be attributed to the newness of the theory, which views leadership as a process that is shaped through interconnections between leaders, followers, and a situation (Halverson, & Diamond, 2004; Spillane, 2005; Spillane, 2006). This point of view is in sharp contrast with the single “heroic” leader (Harris, 2012; Harris & Spillane, 2008; Spillane, 2005; Yukl, 2010). A post-heroic model is needed because it is argued that it is not feasible to expect one individual, such as the school principal, to possess the skills and knowledge needed to meet all of the demands placed upon today’s educational system (Elmore, 2003; Gronn, 2002a; Harris, 2012; Hulpia & Devos, 2010; Spillane, 2005).

There are limited research studies about school initiatives, particularly those instituting government mandates that utilize both the theoretical frameworks of organizational change and distributed leadership (Hallinger & Heck, 2009; Spillane, 2006). The overarching framework utilized for this study examines the need to incorporate forced change through the lens of organizational sensemaking (Weick, 1995). Weick and Quinn (1999) view incorporating change into an existing system as evolutionary or continuous. In this case, the proposed change builds on an existing educator evaluation system rather than drastically changing the inner workings of
the system. Therefore, it is the responsibility of the internal system of the school members to make sense of the new educator evaluation in order to develop structures that are responsive to the mandated change.

Within the context of this study, distributed leadership at an internal level is described as the benefits of developing the interdependence that accentuate the various strengths of the individuals in such a manner that is advantageous to the whole organization (Liethwood & Mascall, 2008; Thompson, 1967). Formal leaders, who possess legitimate power, share leadership with informal leaders who are knowledgeable. The two work in collaboration and include followers to accomplish the identified activity (Spillane, 2006). This study attempts to explore the collective formal and informal leadership efforts of many individuals to implement a government mandate in an elementary school. The proposed qualitative case study will provide a rich description of the perceptions of various leaders and followers in an attempt to understand the complex processes that occur within the school when the government mandate for a new educator evaluation was introduced and implemented (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 2009; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2014).

The significance of this study is related to the focus on the impact of external demands placed by federal and state government through a mandate on the internal interactions within and between leaders and followers at a school level. The purpose of the study is to examine the process of implementing a government mandate through an organizational change and distributed leadership lens. The goal is to expand upon research conducted in an educational setting and possibly lead to addressing gaps in understanding how the practice of distributed leadership may be utilized in an efficient and effective manner to implement mandated organization change.
Findings of this empirical qualitative study therefore contribute to the discussion of what distributed leadership looks like in schools and may provide implication for best practice. This projected outcome will be accomplished by analyzing the perceptions of administrators and teachers in an urban elementary school who participated in an innovative community educational model to implement a new system of teacher performance evaluation. Implementation efforts from a distributed leadership model of practice in the elementary school that implemented a state mandate may then further assist administrators and policy makers to generalize the findings when instituting initiatives in other schools and districts. The researcher is staff at the school and therefore has insider knowledge. She is in the position of experiencing the change, and through data collection and analysis will document an organizational change strategy that can be viewed as a distributed leadership practice.

**Significance of Research Problem**

Developing a collaborative school culture, with structures and routines, will help teachers and administrators meet the demands placed upon today’s educators and school systems (Spillane, 2006). Findings of studies from the distributive perspective can ultimately lead to better outcomes for professional growth and student learning (Heller & Firestone, 1995; Hulpa & Devos, 2010; Opfer & Pedder, 2011; Spillane, 2006). It is important to examine various components of leadership from a position that incorporates the activities of multiple leaders, the followers, and a situation that is temporal and bounded (Harris, 2004; Spillane, 2006; Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2004). The proposed study may lead to understanding how one school district incorporated distributed leadership into practice at an elementary school in response to an external government mandate for change. This is significant as administrators and teachers are continuously faced with more demands to incorporate government mandates (Hallinger & Heck,
2010). According to the literature, we can conclude that interactions between informal and formal leaders and followers can transform the school culture and therefore contribute to teacher efficiency, school commitment, and improved student learning outcomes (Bogler & Somech, 2004; Hallinger & Heck, 2010; Heller & Firestone, 1995; Hulpa & Devos, 2010; Spillane, 2006). Therefore, it is beneficial to arrive at a deeper understanding of the process to incorporate external mandated change on internal systems through distributed leadership to capitalize upon the expertise of multiple stakeholders and sources, which ultimately strengthens the school learning community.

**Positionality Statement**

It is crucial that I not overlay or impose my preconceived notions on to my research, but rather be aware of my subjectivity while conducting qualitative research. I work toward not biasing the results; all the while engaging in self-reflection and accountability to maintain the integrity of this study. I also have to be particularly cautious, as I am a social worker in an educational host setting, not to distance myself because of my discipline and practice from others, including teachers and administrators. Briscoe (2005) provides sound advice to be careful that “the other is treated as a "you" rather than an object” (p 34). In addition, she also encourages an examination of underlying motives related to one’s positionality and to look at how qualitative research is conducted to open the dialogue, which can ultimately lead to an accurate representation of the standpoint of the participants in the study (Briscoe, 2005).

It is my belief that the true spirit of the new educator evaluation mandate is an initiative to empower staff by identifying areas to improve professional growth and student learning. It is, therefore, my intention to examine how the practice of using informal and formal leaders influences the implementation of the new performance evaluation. My skills as a social worker
will enable me to hear what the teachers and administrators say about their understanding and description of how implementing the new educator evaluation has influenced their practice. I look forward to eliciting the perspectives of administrators, teachers who trained other teachers, and those who received training. These key components of distributed leadership were instituted in response to the external demand to implement new evaluation processes. I am hopeful that this research will provide teachers and administrators with the opportunity to reflect on the changes in structure and practice that resulted from learning about and implementing the new educator evaluation into the existing school culture.

I am fortunate to be one of those educators trained by consultants and, then, in turn train other support staff members in the Special Education Department. This opportunity not only affords me to teach adults, but to also later work with individuals and a small group of specialists as an informal leader who assisted in the development of individual and student assessments and goal formation. These interactions with colleagues provide personal meaning, as it is compatible with my teamwork orientation. My goal is for themes, both positive and negative, that may surface through my research to further define and lead to an expanded understanding of how distributed leadership can contribute to administrator and teacher practice and ultimately school culture as mandated change is implemented.

I believe that I have established a level of trust with colleagues through my various roles and past interactions as a peer and educator trainer that helped in my collection of reliable data from the administrators and teachers at the identified school study site. It is my opinion that teachers, who act in the capacity of teacher educator, are leaders within school settings and possess essential skills that are often overlooked and underutilized. Although I am an educator and not a classroom teacher, my observation has been that the train-the-trainer (TTT) program
utilized to implement the 5-Step Cycle Evaluation Model demonstrated an effort to incorporate distributed leadership practice throughout the school system. Therefore, I would like to identify and highlight features of the leadership model that the school district utilized to change practice in order to adhere to state mandates by examining the influence in one particular school. I am optimistic that this study will add to the existing research in moving toward better understanding how distributed leadership can function in school settings that are incorporating mandatory change.

I strive to remain mindful of my position while questing to both explore and better understand the role of distributed leadership in a system that is striving to maintain an intricate balance between adhering to external demands and internal practice. As a systems thinker, I believe it is necessary to examine the complexity of organizational change and how it influences relational interactions between and among informal and formal leaders and followers in order to posit how the theory of distributed leadership evidences through practical application.

**Purpose Statement**

An organizational change perspective and a distributed leadership lens will be used to understand and describe how administrators and teachers implemented the mandatory new educator evaluation or 5-Step Cycle Model of Performance Evaluation at one urban elementary school located in Massachusetts. The purpose of this case study is to examine how the urban K-5 school incorporated the change. The school, by training educators, which is representative of a distributed leadership model, expanded supports for staff through the train-the-trainer (TTT) model of professional development. This study will explore the practice and identify strengths and weaknesses of using the TTT model and other processes utilized through the perceptions of administrators and teachers who participated in implementing the mandated change.
This case study will identify opportunities and lessons learned by administrators and teachers who implemented the educator evaluation, a mandate by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, which is linked with Race to the Top (U.S. Department of Education, 2013). Therefore, this study will inquire into identifying contributions made by administrators and teacher educators in assisting teachers to learn about and incorporate the new educator evaluation into practice through sharing knowledge and power. The overarching question focuses on how distributed leadership ultimately affects the underlying beliefs, knowledge, and practice of staff as well as the school culture as a whole. This study may contribute to further understanding the complexities and benefits of the practice of distributed leadership in an elementary school to guide future mandated initiatives in a structured and orchestrated manner that elicits active participation from the interactions between formal and informal leaders and followers.

**Research Questions**

The central research question that guides the direction of this study is:

> How did the construct of distributed leadership help us to understand how one elementary school community implemented the mandated educator evaluation system?

Sub-questions:

1. What structures and strategies were included (or absent) in the processes that made it possible for administrators and teachers to implement the new educator evaluation system into practice?

2. What opportunities did the mandate provide for teachers to act as informal leaders who worked in conjunction with formal leaders and participants?
3. How has the implementation of the new educator evaluation contributed to administrator and teacher professional growth and student learning?

**Theoretical Framework**

Guiding this research study are the theoretical frameworks of organizational change and distributed leadership. Weick and Quinn (1999) describe the theory of organizational change and development as either episodic or continuous. Episodic change causes a deep shift that alters values and direction for the organization. The mandated new educator evaluation tool may be viewed as a continuous type of change since it builds on and alters the existing system (Weick & Quinn, 1999). According to organizational information theory, interactions with the environment promote change through scanning, interpretation, and implementing an activity (Daft & Weick, 1984).

Weick’s (1995) work speaks to loose versus tightly coupled systems. Basically, coupling refers to the amount of interdependence that is present within an organization. Where loosely coupled systems are more independent, tightly coupled are interdependent and likely to be characterized as having a strong hierarchy. While school systems are generally viewed as tightly coupled, it is proposed that this system must loosen in order to be open to and adjust to the parameters of incorporating the mandated system and develop a standardized practice before it tightens again.

Resulting continuous change adjustments, such as the new educator evaluation, are made to refine practice on the school level in response to stakeholder input and in conjunction with the state and federal government. The new educator evaluation provides additional accountability and prompts independent actions of informal leaders, which in turn facilitates interdependence between the individuals, departments, and at the school level between teachers and
administrators. The organization’s cultural environment then influences how proposed change is integrated into practice through a sensemaking process (Weick, 1995).

School systems operate similarly to what Daft and Weick (1984) identify as a discovering organization. The organization in this mode passively accepts proposed changes from the environment. It is assumed that information collected from the environment is analyzable through formal searches, questioning, surveys, and other forms of data collection that lead to active detection (Draft & Weick, 1984). This discovering mode scans the environment for data collection, gives meaning through interpretation, and then takes action. In this case, the school environment moves toward adopting, implementing and finally institutionalizing the new educator evaluation.

Daft and Weick (1984) posit organizations are systems that interact with the environment for survival. The new educator evaluation for teachers promotes a constant interpretation of the new system or what is termed sensemaking of the data for learning and decision-making to occur (Weick, 1995; Weick & Quinn, 1999). Decisions made by school administration, to introduce a refined practice of the performance evaluation, were instituted to prompt a change throughout the system. The teacher and administrators, as culture carriers, following the in-depth training provided by the outer environment brings the adaptations to the inner system through piloting the revisions in the existing setting. This research thesis assessed how the training altered the definition of teacher evaluation through both an individual and organization theoretical framework, which provides a dual understanding of the phenomena of educator evaluation for teachers and administrators in the K-5 setting in which they work.

The second theoretical lens utilized in this study is distributed leadership. This style of leadership is representative of a post-heroic model of leadership, and within this study focuses on
interactions between formal and informal leaders and followers, using various structures and routines to establish a standardized practice (Harris & Spillane, 2008; Spillane, 2005; Spillane, 2006). The three main benefits of distributed leadership as identified by Harris & Spillane (2008) are normative power, representational power, and empirical power. First, normative power demonstrates that distributed leadership is implemented due to the changing demands placed upon schools, resulting in a distribution of power amongst a wide array of individuals to capitalize on expertise and skill. Leadership is distributed amongst staff in accordance with need and condition as opposed to relying on one, individual leader (Harris, 2012; Leithwood & Mascall, 2008; Mayrowetz, 2008; Spillane, 2006). Second, representative power is indicative of the need for distributed leadership as a result of the demands from external governing bodies and various stakeholders. Distributed leadership, therefore, expands credible input from various sources by promoting sharing of ideas through collaboration, thus tapping into additional skills, knowledge, and level of expertise in decision-making processes and practice (Harris, 2012; Leithwood & Mascall, 2008). Third, previous study findings indicate that distributed leadership can be linked to increasing student learning and better outcomes in school settings (Hallinger & Heck, 2010; Mayrowetz, 2008; Spillane, 2006).

The beginning concepts of distributed leadership are informed by the work of organizational theorists and social psychologists (Gronn, 2002a; Spillane, 2006; Thompson, 1967). Thompson (1967) identified interdependencies, which include reciprocal, pooled, and sequential. These concepts are related to constructivist thinking. It is essential while facing new challenges such as implementing mandated change to recognize the varied skills and talent that can be pooled to collectively influence the effectiveness of the larger system. This approach can, in turn, promote professional growth and student improvement through practice and the
development of structures that endorse distributed leadership (Hallinger & Heck, 2009; Harris, 2013; Leithwood & Mascall, 2008). Supported by previous research findings, this research study focuses on how multiple leaders and followers contribute to implementing a government mandate in a public K-5 elementary school. Feedback elicited from administrators, teacher leaders, and teachers will focus on understanding practical applications and limitations using a distributed leadership model in one school within a district that implemented the mandated new educator evaluation system.

Change demands on schools resulting to the federal Race to the Top (RTTT) initiative provide impetus to adjust from a sole top down, autocratic approach, to include bottom up strategies, such as shared leadership (Weick & Quinn, 1999). Distributed leadership has multiple definitions, but various practices that focus on interactions is a central premise that can lead to school improvement and expand upon leadership development (Harris, 2004; Mayrowetz, 2008; Spillane, 2006). In this study, distributed leadership is defined in conceptualized accordance with Spillane (2006), Harris (2004), and Gronn (2002b) who operationalize distributed leadership as formal and informal leaders who through interdependent practice work with followers using structures and established routines in the context of a situation. Interactions between the leaders and followers are emphasized and focus is on the two-way, reciprocal exchange that occurs. Harris (2004) also emphasizes distributed leadership as a means for human capacity building. The components of the identified definition for this study are rooted in the argument that instituting the practice of distributed leadership may lead to widespread leadership development and collaboration between leaders and followers, which in turn better positions teachers toward school improvement, and thus student learning.
The primary goal in conducting this research study was to add to the understanding of how distributed leadership may contribute to and strengthen practice through developing expanded leadership in a K-5 elementary school. The theoretical frameworks that guide this proposed research thesis provides a boundary to describe how administrators and teachers experienced training and support strategies that assisted in the implementation of the mandated educator evaluation into practice. Components of the train-the-trainer model were explored specifically to examine how this method possibly added to meeting the identified needs of both administrators and teachers as they simultaneously incorporated the mandatory change of a new educator evaluation system through distributed leadership.

**Summary**

The nature of and complexity of the K-5 school setting within a larger system warrants a dual perspective to inquire into how the mandate for a new educator evaluation was implemented. Implementing the new practice necessitates the school system, which is tightly regulated, to loosen in order to open to change while incorporating necessary adjustments into action (Burke, 2011). The implementation of the new practice builds connections that promote interdependence between levels of independent activities to loosen in an attempt to strengthen the system, and therefore, theoretically increase the level of efficiency and job satisfaction. The training, which is the foundation of change, completes the cycle of scanning, interpreting, and implementing (Daft & Weick, 1984). The goal of this study is to understand how training teachers and administrators define their roles in the context of the school and larger system. The teachers and administrators are, therefore, key participants in producing results of the mandated change for themselves, and the holistic environment.
Chapter II: Literature Review

The underlying premise in the literature reviewed points to how increased demands on public school system is prompting an examination of what leadership is and how it is practiced (Gronn, 2002b; Spillane, 2006). Historically, postindustrial era school systems are hierarchical with a top-down style of management (Gronn, 2002a; Harris, 2004). The demands of today are, however, too great for one identified leader to meet (Gronn, 2002b; Harris & Spillane, 2008; Spillane & Healey, 2010). Therefore, the main argument of this thesis is that multiple leaders, working in collaboration, are better equipped to address the needs of school systems. Aligned with this thinking, today’s schools, with external and internal demands for increased performance, are incorporating models of leadership that distribute responsibilities among formal and informal leaders in order to efficiently and effectively institute required changes into practice (Gronn, 2002a; Heller & Firestone, 1995; Spillane, 2006).

First, this literature review will review the government mandate that requires schools to institute a new educator evaluation. The new evaluation system now includes multiple measures of professional growth and student learning. This mandate with its origins in the Race to the Top is the driving force behind the identified system-wide change explored in this thesis. Next, this review will examine how distributed leadership contributes to the development of a culture that is collaborative through the use of informal and formal leaders in conjunction with followers. Finally, a review of how teacher leaders influence practice as formal and informal leaders in school systems to accomplish directives as well as contribute to the ongoing practice of distributed leadership will be explored through the literature. The argument of this paper is that the expansion to include multiple formal and informal leaders in the change process empowers teachers from the bottom up within a hierarchic structure. These leaders, therefore, act as
school-based educators who work within a learning community that fosters collaboration to achieve professional growth and student learning through interdependence.

The purpose of this literature review is to examine how school systems are incorporating change. The school district identified in this study is listed under the category of Race to the Top (RTTT) program, therefore, was required to have the new system for educator evaluations in place by July 2012. Educators employed in all Massachusetts public schools are now required to have their performance evaluated on a prescribed basis using either the same or a similar tool to the new format recommended by the state. One of the major differences with the new system is the required inclusion of physical documentation. The educator now provides evidence to demonstrate progress toward the goals the teacher and the supervisor mutually identify, which align with district-determined measures (MDESE, 2012). This paper will explore the evolution of the change process to incorporate the new practice from a distributed leadership perspective. The school’s implementation practices will be the unit of analysis through data provided by teachers and administrators who have opted to participate in this study (Gronn, 2002b; Spillane & Healey, 2010).

The new educator evaluation system contains five key components (MDESE, 2012). The school district in this study chose to train teachers as trainers to disseminate the knowledge, skills, and information needed to accomplish implementing the new system. All educators are active participants in the process of utilizing the new system, which is as follows. First, an initial self-assessment is created as the foundation for the evaluation. Next, the administrator and the educator identify a professional practice goal and a student-learning goal. The plan developed from the goals is then implemented as step three of the cycle. There is a mid-cycle formative review and final summative evaluation that rates professional practice and student learning goals.
The model as shown below is therefore a continuous cycle that measures identified professional performance and student learning goals. One on the main concerns is how this model will remain current and sustainable throughout the system. The focus of the study will explore teacher and administrator’s perception of the extent staff were empowered to implement the mandated change through the construct of distributed leadership.

Figure 1. The 5-Step Cycle of the Educator Performance Evaluation Model (MDESE, 2012)
Mandated Organizational Change

The federal Race to the Top (RTTT) program provided approximately $4 billion to the United States Department of Education through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (U.S. Department of Education, 2013). The United States Department of Education, in turn, funded states to institute specific education reforms. The areas identified include training and retaining proficient educators and leaders, providing educational opportunities that lead to students’ transition into young adulthood, building systems to measure staff and student success, and closing gaps for underperforming schools. RTTT, therefore, resulted in a four-year grant that provided financial and technical support, guidance, and oversight by states to school districts.

One of the requirements for states that opted to receive financial and technical support under the RTTT was to establish a standards-based approach to teacher evaluation, which is the focus of this thesis. The Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (MDESE) has instituted a new statewide performance evaluation tool for educators. Each school district is now required to comply with instituting a standardized performance evaluation tool as well as adheres to either the template provided or an approved model (U.S. Department of Education, 2013). The model provided by the state of Massachusetts is a 5-step evaluation cycle for educator evaluation. Adopting this model signifies a commitment to continuous quality improvement for teacher professional growth and student learning.

Schools that committed to the RTTT program were expected to implement phase one of two of the planned change by 2012 (U.S. Department of Education, 2013). This research study examines this organizational change from the lens of distributed leadership. Investigating this planned evolutionary change includes speaking to individuals who were involved with the planning and implementation of the new performance evaluation into practice (Burke, 2008).
Although this proposed change has been in motion for a number of years, the complexity of forces including the state, school district, union representation, administrators and teachers, the process has been slow and cumbersome. The benefits, however, include a standardized model throughout the state of Massachusetts that reflects a living document of goals, and documented formative and summative outcomes for teachers, students, and administrators (MDESE, 2012).

The new educator evaluation is seen as evolutionary and continuous change as it builds on an existing performance evaluation system rather than drastically changing the inner workings of the system (Burke, 2008; Weick & Quinn, 1999). The continuous change is incremental, as phases of the planned change are being instituted over an identified extended period of time.

MDESE has utilized the top-down power-coercive strategy by mandating the change. Like many school districts, the one in this study received $1.25 million for signed on to the federal RTTT program. Each district was then in the position to decide how to implement the changes within the identified timeline. This school district opted to utilize an empirical-rational strategy to initiate the desired change. Chin and Benne (1989) propose that both the power-coercive and the empirical-rational are effective strategies to produce continuous change.

Information about the performance evaluation model is available online in both report and PowerPoint formats through MDESE (MDESE, 2012). The knowledge-based information is representative of the state and district-wide attempts to engage individuals through the rational-empirical change strategy by providing education and training. This is just one step in helping to develop a group culture as individuals adopt and adapt to the change process. Weick and Quinn (1999) and Schein (1987), building upon Lewin's work by identifying stages to create a safe environment to promote motivation for continuous change. These measures include educators first acknowledging to the proposed change or freezing because of the demonstrated need to
accomplish the mandate, changing and rebalancing to the new evaluation model, which continues the process, and later unfreezing, making the 5-step educator evaluation process an integral part of the individual and organizational system practice. Teachers were provided access to training sessions, union representation, and assistance to implement the new educator system from administrators with formal authority along with informal peer leadership support. The expectation was for teachers to integrate the mandated change into practice to then regain stability throughout the system.

It is imperative that school leaders take an interest in forming positive relations between and within groups through the use of strategies that provide teachers with a safe school environment to ease tensions (Spillane, 2006). Teachers need to begin to formulate positive cognitions and feelings in order to move towards the change (Gronn, 2002a). Change is an involved process that consists of four stages: pre-contemplation, contemplation, action, and maintenance (Prochaska, DiClemente, & Norcross, 1992). This model of change fits well in comparison to the pattern of freeze, rebalance, unfreeze design of continuous change established by Lewin (Schein, 1987; Weick & Quinn, 1999). Therefore, support and assistance is required from not only the external political systems, but from internal available supports including administrators, union representation, and colleagues to accomplish mandated changes in practice. Formal and informal leaders are, therefore, in a position to work with and guide followers through the transactions and transformations that are inherent in forced change (Servage, 2008; Spillane, 2006).

**Distributed Leadership Perspective**

School settings pose additional challenges to the teacher than simply teaching given the prevalence of societal problems and diversity of student needs (Ben-Peretz, 2001; Harris &
Spillane, 2008; Little, 1990). Spillane (2006) argues that it is necessary to promote the use of informal leaders who will work conjointly with administration and/or other formal leaders to implement new initiatives to utilize the talents of multiple individuals who each bring unique skill sets. This recent state mandate in Massachusetts incorporates the use of a standardized professional performance evaluation for staff that sets professional and student goals through the use of data (MDESE, 2012). Including teacher leaders in the implementation of the instrument is critical in this process to further solidify the ownership and accountability among the teachers and administrators to not only train, but to implement and adhere to the state mandate using standards of best practice.

Research findings indicate that teachers and administrators must engage in two-way communications in order for a safe environment to be created and reciprocal partnerships to form (Gronn, 2002a; Heller & Firestone, 1995; Hensley & Burmeister, 2008). Hollingworth (2012) provides a case study that highlighted how the role of the administrator is instrumental in leading change in conjunction with a teacher leader who championed the initiative. The relationship between the principal and the teacher leader resulted in the teacher sharing the leadership responsibility as a trainer, thereby supporting the learning need and providing instruction to peers. Likewise, Schrum and Levin (2013) provide another research study that evidenced when the principal shared leadership responsibilities with teacher leaders, who were viewed as coaches and mentors, staff demonstrated increased motivation to implement the proposed change into the existing school culture. Teacher leaders will often self-identify and volunteer to act in the capacity of mentor to guide the professional growth and development of colleagues (Hollingworth, 2012; Raffanti, 2008).
The studies by Hollingworth (2012) and Schrum and Levin (2013) are examples of the “leader plus one” approach (Spillane, 2005; Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2004; Spillane & Healey, 2010). This practice is a form of distributed leadership, however, an expanded model focuses on the interactions of multiple formal and informal leaders with followers in a specific situation (Harris & Spillane, 2008; Spillane, 2005; Spillane, 2006; Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2004). Focus on the use of a distributed leadership model in K-12 schools contributes to a collective and collaborative process of change (Harris, 2004; Spillane, 2006). Similar to the post-heroic models, Elmore (2003) emphasizes that leadership is a cultural practice that cannot be accomplished by one person. Supporting the findings of Spillane, Halverson and Diamond (2004), Elmore (2003) recognizes that multiple individuals working collectively results in the practice of distributed leadership. It is with this sentiment that school improvement can be achieved through collaboration of leaders and followers while using a variety of tools and structures to accomplish identified activities (Spillane, 2005).

Leadership practice, rather than specific roles is “viewed as a product of the interactions of school leaders, followers, and their situation” (Spillane, 2005, p. 144). Leadership positions can be formal or informal. The goal is for leaders to interface with followers in a particular context to produce change (Spillane, 2006). The study by Heller and Firestone (1995) illustrates how multiple leaders, including those without formal designation, may work both in concert with one another as well as parallel to others to implement change. This is similar to how the new educator evaluation mandate was implemented in the district in this research study. There were many formal and informal leaders, district-wide, who worked in collaboration to disseminate the information and structures needed for all staff to use the new model effectively. As mentioned, this research study examines the implementation of an organization change through a distributed
leadership lens at a broader level compared to many of the studies that identify how new curricula or change is implemented in specific content areas or departments.

Distributed leadership is a complex process that is circular rather than linear (Gronn, 2002b; Harris, 2004; Spillane, 2006). Hence, Harris and Spillane (2008) state, “A distributed leadership perspective recognizes that there are multiple leaders, both formally and informally recognized, and that leadership activities are widely shared within and between organizations. The distributed leadership model of leadership focuses on interactions, rather than actions, of those in formal and informal roles” (p. 31). The interactions of leaders and followers define the practice as interdependent, which can influence organizational improvement (Gronn, 2002a; Spillane, 2005; Spillane, 2006). This concept is rooted in an earlier theory of interdependencies identified by Thompson (1967). The three types of interdependency are pooled, sequential, and reciprocal (Thompson, 1967). Internal interdependency moves through levels of complexity. First, each part contributes to and is supported by the whole and therefore viewed as pooled. Next, the order of the interdependencies can be specified. And finally, the output of each is the input for the other, thus reciprocal in nature. Coordination may then be achieved through standardization of routines or rules that are consistent and mutual adjustment.

Spillane’s (2006) account of collaboration at Adams School demonstrates the concept of distributed leadership in practice. The group of formal and informal leaders along with followers works through collaborative interactions to co-create and evaluate literacy strategies. The site, which was initially a low performing school, was transformed into a professional learning community. The interactions between the leaders and followers were reciprocal with the leaders and followers mutually influencing one another’s work. Each person shared knowledge and resources that were pooled to ultimately alter behaviors through identified steps, which included
new structures and tools that resulted in student improved performance. The interdependencies between participants were evidenced through examples of open communications, clearly articulated expectations, demonstrated trust in the process, and a practice that shaped from the inside (Spillane, 2006). The study at Adams School exhibited how a school community was created through teacher development and how shared input was designed through an existing division of labor resulted in co-performance that reinforced the vision for all participants.

The prospect of change is a challenge for even the most motivated groups. There are, however, times when change is met with resistance to maintain the status quo (Harris & Muijs, 2007; Spillane, 2006). To demonstrate this point, Spillane (2006) also shares the experience at the Kosten School where leaders and followers were at odds. It is important in this instance to examine how the practice is shaped by interaction between the leaders and followers. Members must have a sense of themselves as part of the collective. When leaders and followers are able to extend each other’s actions heedful practice occurs (Spillane, 2006, Weick & Roberts, 1993). Heedful practice then helps participants to reflect on individual and group practice to rethink and make revisions as necessary (Spillane, 2006). The introduction of new tools and routines into practice can alter structures within situations, which can then mediate tensions between leaders and followers (Spillane, 2006). This action can result in a reciprocal pattern where the leaders and followers define the practice (Heller & Firestone, 1995).

Harris and Muijs (2007) conducted a case study of three schools in the United Kingdom to explore what contributes to the development of teacher leaders and how leadership is distributed. This as well as other studies identified the importance of the development of collegiality and self-confidence for teachers to take on an additional function of leading colleagues (Feiman-Nemser, 1998; Little, 1990). The results of Harris & Muijs’s (2007) study
of three contrasting schools showed that the identified formal leader in schools with distributed leadership instilled a culture of teaming. Teachers were involved in suggesting and leading initiatives and were also included in certain decision-making (Harris & Muijs, 2007; Heller & Firestone, 1995; Spillane, 2006). An established system was created where interactions were encouraged. The study also demonstrated that the school where the power was maintained by a smaller group of formal leaders provided fewer opportunities for teachers to actively participate in leadership. The school with the least cohesion evidenced a negative pattern of the identified single leader blaming staff for lack of success, and likewise, the staff blamed the principal, reporting a lack of formal leadership (Harris & Muijs, 2007). This study evidences a possible connection between distributed leadership and a positive school climate based upon participant reports.

Distributed leadership is more than the sum of parts (Gronn, 2002a; Spillane, 2006). Schools are complex systems that are expected to incorporate multi-facets of data and input from multiple sources to accomplish the goal of student learning. Therefore, distributed leadership is designed to capitalize on the strengths of all school staff (Gronn, 2002a, Heller & Firestone, 1995; Spillane, 2006). Gronn (2002a, 2002b) discusses three concertive forms of leadership including spontaneous collaboration, intuitive working relationships, and institutionalized practices, or planned activities. These activities and arrangements are developed to promote co-performing results in an emergent process that then becomes a new routine. Staff involvement and learning is crucial to change. Therefore, the amount of interdependence influences how well the organization functions (Gronn, 2002a).
**Professional Growth**

Distributed leadership must be implemented deliberately in order to be successful. The “heroic leader” is being replaced by leadership that is actively distributed so that emphasis can be placed in accordance to need (Spillane, 2006). Distributed leadership, however, has only been minimally linked by empirical studies to teacher development and student improvement (Mayrowetz, 2008; Spillane, 2006). Mayrowetz (2008) and Spillane and Healey (2010) argue that distributed leadership, as a conceptual framework, has the potential to understand leadership and management, although lacks a standardized definition. Theoretically, distributed leadership implies the function of leadership is layered over the activity of many individuals, which is completed through the interaction and interdependency of these individuals (Gronn, 2002a, 2002b; Harris & Muijs, 2007; Halverson, Spillane, and Diamond, 2004; Spillane, 2006; Spillane, 2005).

Mayrowetz’s (2008) work examines common uses for the concept of distributed leadership. One argument that resonated with most other theorists’ work is that the activity is dispersed over multiple people. Therefore, it is important to examine the interactions, including administrators in concert with other formal and informal leaders and followers that are interdependent and often redundant (Gronn, 2002a; Heller & Firestone, 1995). Mayrowetz (2008) posits, “The researcher must identify that activity that constitute leadership” (p. 426). The situated activity is based in the social context and is accompanied with artifacts and tools that enhance the performance of the activity with the goal to improve practice (Spillane, 2006). The redundancy of effort evidences mutual reinforcement to better accomplish the identified activity (Gronn, 2002a; Heller & Firestone, 1995).
The concept of distributed leadership according to Harris (2004) is not simply flattening a hierarchy or participative leadership. Likewise, Mayrowetz (2008) states that the goal of distributed leadership is often not democracy, but a practice that is inclusive of many participants. The inclusion of others in activity and decision-making does, however, require additional teacher development and a shift in culture; otherwise teachers may feel overwhelmed by the perceived increase in demand (Harris & Muijs, 2007; Little, 1990). Elmore (2003), Harris (2004), and Hulpia and Devos (2010) have identified the need for capacity building to develop professional norms within a supportive organizational environment. Professional development, input into decision-making, and active participation in implementing change promote interaction between leaders and followers, which produces distributed leadership through an existing division of labor (Gronn, 2002a; Harris, 2004; Spillane, 2005; Spillane, 2006).

Spillane and Healey (2010) identify three main problems with existing distributed leadership research. First, like other researchers, they share the concern that distributed leadership is not clearly defined by researchers (Mayrowetz, 2008). Second, a study of operations needs to be developed to measure distributed leadership practices. And, third, there is a need for new or redesigned research instruments to test distributed leadership in school settings. Leadership comes from leaders and followers. Therefore, additional findings from studying distributed leadership as a unit of analysis may contribute to the understanding of influence on professional development and student improvement (Gronn, 2002b; Spillane & Healey, 2010). Spillane and Healey (2010) concluded that utilizing a multidimensional examination of leadership distribution could provide a more complete understanding of the contributions and limitations of when leadership is stretched over multiple leaders.
Human Capacity

Teachers and administrators who are working in concert with one another not only report an increased commitment to their work, but it is postulated that activities are completed in an efficient and effective manner (Heller & Firestone, 1995; Hulpia & Devos, 2010; Mayrowetz, 2008). Harris (2004) and Mayrowetz (2008) both identify that additional research is needed before a connection between forms of distributed leadership and improved student learning can be made. Capacity building is, however, an important step to sustain collaborative work. Collective capacity and action can lead to mutually agreed upon goals, shared decision making, and increased commitment to the organization (Harris, 2004; Hulpia & Devos, 2010). However, the notion of distributed leadership, as a mechanism that strengthens human capacity, linked to school improvement still needs further investigation (Spillane & Healey, 2010).

Support for leadership development is rooted in a positive school climate (Harris & Muijs, 2007). The lens of distributed leadership opens opportunities to change practice in order to accomplish the multiple demands from various sources (Spillane, 2006). Teachers reported being empowered to participate in leadership functions when there is a structure that promotes social interactions, input into decision-making and shared responsibility (Harris & Muijs, 2007; Hulpia & Devos, 2010). Studies that identify these variables clearly speak to the contributions made by the formal leader to support and encourage teachers’ involvement through functions of distributed leadership. Therefore, distributed leadership is an emergent process when members pool their expertise to work toward organization improvement (Gronn, 2002b; Hulpia & Devos, 2010). Groups that work in concert with the identified formal leaders create a whole team approach (Gronn, 2002b; Spillane, 2006). Activities then shift from an individual to a collective mindset. It is at this time when the concertive action leads the interaction among leaders,
followers, and their situation (Gronn, 2002b; Hulpia & Devos, 2010; Spillane, 2006). Hulpia and Devos’s (2010) research findings conclude that leadership should not be limited to formal leaders, but that teachers as informal leaders, too, have meaningful input into the process.

**Teacher Leaders**

Teachers often do not view themselves as teacher educators (Feiman-Nemser, 1998; Little, 1990). This phenomenon can be attributed to the structure of school organization and is reflective of the broader Western culture. Western society promotes individualization and autonomy, which is reflected in school systems. According to Feiman-Nemser (1998), “Teachers consider teaching to be a highly personal practice” (p. 65), therefore, often work in isolation (Little, 1990). As a result, it is necessary to create collegial practice that empowers teachers to become teacher leaders. The train-the-trainer (TTT) model invites teachers to work collaboratively. Working collectively with one another, teachers can ultimately produce meaningful outcomes as the TTT model disseminates like information to groups in the learning community (Suhrheinrick, 2011).

Teacher educators who are informal leaders positively contribute to performance and culture building, as their work is reciprocal in nature (Gronn, 2002b; Hollingworth, 2013; Gronn, 2002b; Little, 1990). The relationship that is established between teachers provides a level of trust that is necessary to feel safe to examine practice and institute change (Servage, 2008). The reciprocal process of peer-to-peer learning is a nonhierarchical structure that creates an interactive style built on rapport and trusts, thus providing an environment for personal and professional growth (Kram & Isabelle, 1985). Although dated, the Kram and Isabella’s (1985) study connects well with today's use of a type of nontraditional mentoring through the use of informal leaders. Informal leaders as teacher educators foster peer relationships in groups, such
as professional learning communities in the school setting. These learning communities can then lead to the improvement of school systems through bottom up strategies.

Teacher educators that act in the capacity of informal leaders contribute to the development of collaboration and networking, which in turn contributes to professional development (Little, 1990; Raffanti, 2008; Spillane, 2006). Group interactions, such as the TTT model of sharing knowledge and leadership, may also be more efficient and contribute to organization cohesiveness, joining individuals to shared values and culture, thus produce an increased commitment (Gronn, 2002b; Hulpia & Devos, 2010). School settings that have high levels of accountability are more likely to entrust teachers as leaders through their involvement in implementing innovative initiatives (Culbertson, 2012; Darling-Hammond, 2013; Harris & Muijs, 2007). These schools appreciate the value and contribution that teacher leaders make to the school culture through the use of collaboration and a shared interactive style of learning while changing tradition (Little, 1990; Spillane, 2006).

According the qualitative research study conducted by Raffanti (2008), teacher leaders identified themes regarding the phenomenon of teacher leadership as “fostering relationships, self-reflection, managing perceptions, and engaging visions” (p. 61). These themes capture the depth of experiences by the teacher leader, which are both intrapersonal and interpersonal (Servage, 2008). Teacher leaders ultimately take on the additional responsibility to improve educational systems through their tendency toward collaboration and engaging others in their vision of a community where students thrive (Heller & Firestone, 1995; Spillane, 2006). Similar are the findings from interviews conducted with high school teachers by Wilson (1993) about teachers’ perception of leaders amongst the group. Teachers viewed peer leaders as “hard working”, “available to other teachers as a resource or an advocate”, “seek(ing) challenge,
change, and growth” (p. 24). Both Raffanti (2008) and Wilson (1993) noted that there could, however, be tension between teacher leaders, who are forward thinkers and work collaboratively and administrators, who often prefer the status quo and work from a position of authority. Therefore, in order for the system to achieve optimal gain, administrators are key contributors to the process of defining and engaging teacher leaders through distributed leadership (Harris & Muijs, 2007; Hensley, & Burmeister, 2008; Hollingworth, 2012).

School systems and educators, are being held to a quality standard of service delivery (Ben-Peretz, 2001; Spillane, 2006). Every level within a school district from the superintendent to the educators needs to be held accountable to educate each child. The new regulations, including the 5-Step Cycle Performance Evaluation Model, as outlined by MDESE (2012) represent the need for accountability on all levels of the system to provide clarity of vision and goal setting. The use of formal and informal leaders through a distributed leadership model and through the use of teacher leaders in K-12 settings empowers all stakeholders (Elmore, 2003; Harris & Muijs, 2007; Servage, 2008; Spillane, 2006). The dissemination of power promotes best practice to direct leadership and teaching rather than maintain the status quo (Wilson, 1993). Teacher leaders, who work collaboratively, assist teachers to improve practice while contributing to a positive school culture.

Train-the-Trainer Model

The union at the identified school district negotiated trainings for educators as "seed people" to assist teachers in making the transition to the new educator evaluation system. The new system changed teachers’ level of participation in the evaluation process by requiring each teacher to identify professional and student learning goals as well as maintain portfolios to demonstrate competencies (MDESE, 2012). Consultants were contracted to train staff as peer
trainers. This model of train-the-trainers (TTT), also known as pyramidal training, prepares a staff person who then trains and provides support to others as they institute a new or revised practice (Pearce, et al., 2012; Suhrheinrick, 2011). The union added this normative-re-educative strategy to bring in the human element to elicit participation. This approach can also provide a sense of control and directive to navigate the change with colleagues who are facing similar challenges (Heller & Firestone, 1995).

Adult learning is related to life changes and is often autonomous and reflective (Brown, 2006). Therefore, adults need to have active participation in order to integrate new learning into their repertoire to accomplish transformational change. Suheinrick (2011), through a literature review of the use of the TTT model with a health and social care professional populations, concluded that a “blended” approach can help increase knowledge, improve practice, and improve patient outcomes. Although the exact blend is not known, the school district in this study utilized peer-to-peer didactic presentations, group discussion, and work sessions, which proved effective as delivery methods by various studies (Pearce, et al., 2012; Suheinrick, 2011).

Hargreaves (2009) speaks to the importance of open system theory and bottom up guidance to reform the current educational system. Educators, who have been trained, are now in a position to assess their professional developmental needs and set direction for student learning can, in essence, positively impact the system as a whole (Elmore, 2003). This direction can only continue to be accomplished with motivated educators who share a collective mindset that includes team input, shared decision-making, and distributed leadership between teachers and administrators (Harris & Muijs, 2007; Hollingworth, 2012; Hulpia, & Devos, 2010; Spillane, 2006). The efforts expended by the union, in conjunction with administration, represent an
attempt to not only smooth the adjustment for teachers to the new educator evaluation model mandate, but also empower them to take an active role in the practice of distributed leadership.

**Summary**

Shared leadership, trust, and professional development are the cornerstones to successful organizational change. Knowledge, support, and guidance are needed from multiple levels of the system to contribute to the development of a professional culture for all stakeholders. The interactive nature of distributed leadership promotes reflection, teacher leadership, and collaboration, which in turn positively contributes to and strengthens the educational culture within schools. There is a growing recognition that past hieratical structures alone cannot meet the demands faced by today’s schools. This change in thinking is leading to the exploration of other types of leadership, including the distributed leadership model. Distributive leadership ultimately empowers teachers to actively participate as leaders and followers that work in conjunction with administrators toward school improvement. Therefore, more research is indicated to understand how interactions through multiple formal and informal leaders and followers are stretched over situations to enable and sustain practice that results in professional growth and student learning in public school settings.

The mandate for the new educator evaluation by the federal and state government poses a challenge to local school districts. It is, therefore, imperative that the planned change is approached in such a way those formal and informal leaders and followers can collectively shape practice. This is somewhat of a dialect as it is important that both distributive perspective and practice need to be understood for the model to be effective. Challenges continue as the shift is made from heroic thinking to a distributed perspective of leadership. Distributed leadership is a mindset that leads to interdependency in practice. Distributive perspective entails the defining of
practice through the interactions of leaders, followers, and situational factors as an inclusive approach to meeting the needs of government mandates in today’s school to build and sustain professional learning communities.
Chapter III: Methodology

Research Design

The purpose of this qualitative research study is to explore the experiences of teachers and administrators who have implemented the new educator evaluation as mandated by the state and federal government. This qualitative study seeks to examine the experiences of teachers and administrators as informal and formal leaders who worked in conjunction with followers to institute organizational change in an urban K-5 elementary school setting. This study demonstrates how the staff, working in collaboration, participated in the practice of distributed leadership to accomplish the requirement to fulfill a top-down directive, which originated from the Race to the Top (RTTT) program. The qualitative approach seeks to provide an understanding of the lived experiences of teachers and administrators working collectively through a distributive leadership lens as described by their own experiences through asking “how” and “why” questions to gather descriptions of the phenomenon through the participant’s perspective in its natural setting (King, 1994; Yin, 2014).

The constructivism-interpretivism paradigm is compatible with the methodological approach of the study as individual interviews, a focus group, and field notes were used for data collection. Semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions allowed the teachers and administrators to socially construct the reality of their experience, which will “be described and represented through diverse perspectives” (Butin, 2010, p. 59). This study focuses on the experiences of a small sample rather than strive to seek a generalizable model. The researcher will then identify patterns to tell the story of the participants’ socially constructed realities (Butin, 2010).
The following are the research questions used to guide and explore the phenomena under study. The intention of the question design was to allow participants to describe how they were able to make sense of the elements of the new educator evaluation system. The chosen constructivism-interpretivism paradigm provides a mindset and overarches the case study approach, data collection, and final analysis.

**Research Questions**

Creswell (2013) states that the central question directs the overarching question explored in the research. The seminal work by Spillane (2006, 2005) was used to provide the lens to establish the context through which participants referenced. The study focuses on the influence of distributed leadership on the process through the perceptions of teachers and administrators who implemented the new educator evaluation. The central research question that guides the direction of this study was:

How did the construct of distributed leadership help us to understand how one elementary school community implemented the mandated educator evaluation system?

Sub-questions expounded upon the central question to include examples and stories of each individual’s experience:

1. What structures and strategies were included (or absent) in the processes that made it possible for administrators and teachers to implement the new educator evaluation system into practice?
2. What opportunities did the mandate provide for teachers to act as informal leaders who worked in conjunction with formal leaders and participants?
3. How did the implementation of the new educator evaluation contribute to administrator and teacher professional growth and student learning?
Research Paradigm

The qualitative research questions are aligned with the paradigm of constructivism-interpretivism to collect rich and meaningful data (Creswell, 2013; Ponterotto, 2005). The constructivist-interpretivist frame of reference is applied to the identified problem of practice because it fosters exploring participants’ subjective perceptions through their lived experiences within the context of the school, the practice as both informal and formal leaders, dependent upon the situation, and collaboration throughout the process of implementing the new educator evaluation system in an urban K-5 elementary school (Creswell, 2013, 2012; Ponterotto, 2005). The constructivist-interpretivist paradigm seeks interpretive findings that are hidden in the context rather than a result of it. Therefore, the theoretical lens of distributed leadership resonates through this paradigm. The paradigm holds the belief that the perception of the participants is reality, which is closely tied to the research purpose and questions.

This researcher is also positioned in relation to the participants in adherence to the philosophical underpinnings of the constructivism-interpretivism paradigm (Ponterotto, 2005). The researcher and the participants interacted in close proximity in order for valid information to be collected. The position of the researcher is therefore subjective. Ponterotto (2005) states, “Only through this interaction can deeper meaning be uncovered” (p. 129). Likewise, King (1994) views the relationship between the interviewer and interviewee as necessary and that the interviewee is a participant who, in conjunction with the interviewer, shapes the interview.

It is through the constructivism-interpretivism paradigm and the lens of distributed leadership that participants’ description and experiences were explored, uncovered, and interpreted. The interpretive paradigm is compatible with the Radical Humanistic paradigm as identified by Burrell & Morgan (1979). Both paradigms subscribe to nominalist, anti-positivist,
voluntarist, and ideographic subsets that represent a subjective standpoint and radical change (Burrell & Morgan, 1979). In essence, the study sought the perspective of the participants to answer the research questions through their lives experience and interpretation of their own truth.

**Qualitative Research Approach and Justification**

The nature of this qualitative research is to explore and look for the understanding of how distributive leadership influenced the implementation of the new educator evaluation (Creswell, 2012). The purpose is broad and the questions are open-ended to collect data from the small purposeful sample of teachers and administrators who volunteered to participate in this study at an urban, K-5 elementary school. The central phenomenon of distributed leadership will be explored to acquire an in-depth understanding of the construct as well as how internal forces shape and are shaped by the phenomenon. The purpose of this qualitative study is to provide a rich description of the perceptions of informal and formal leaders and followers in an attempt to understand the complex processes that occurred in this urban school that responded to the government mandate to implement a new educator evaluation system (Creswell, 2013; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Yin, 2014).

Qualitative research was chosen for this study to gauge the nature of the reality of the phenomena of distributed leadership in practice. The case study approach was then selected because it is an established research approach that investigates a phenomenon that is a bounded system, is focused on a concrete unit of analysis of the school and is connected with the overarching theoretical frameworks of distributed leadership and organizational change that guided the direction of this study (Creswell, 2013, Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 2009, Spillane, 2006; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2014).
This case study focused on collecting data from individuals who participated in training and then implemented the new educator evaluation in an urban K-5 school located in Western Massachusetts (Creswell, 2013; Yin, 2014). Semi-structured, open-ended interviews along with a focus group were conducted with teachers, informal teacher leaders, and administrators who were viewed as pioneers in adopting and implementing this district and statewide change. The insights of the teachers and administrators may ultimately lead to defining and therefore strengthen the understanding of the use of informal and formal leaders. These leaders working collaboratively with followers were then able to collaboratively implement a mandated change. This study, through an in-depth analysis of the process using a case study approach, sought insight into the phenomena through the identified research questions.

The case study approach has evolved from the disciplines of anthropology, sociology, and psychology (Merriam, 2009). Hamel, Dufour, and Fortin (1993) traced case studies at the University of Chicago, Department of Sociology from the 1920’s through the 1950’s (Creswell, 2013). Case study has since gained the acceptance as an established approach to research with its own design, data collection, and analysis techniques (Creswell, 2013; Yin, 2014). The primary purposes of case study are for exploration, description, and explanation of the social phenomenon under inquiry (Creswell, 2013; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 2009; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2014). The case study approach provided personalized information to address the research questions from those teachers and administrators who have the direct experience to identify what aspects of implementation were deemed effective and what elements they believe would benefit from modification.

Robert Yin (2014) has been one of the seminal authors in the forefront of promoting and legitimizing the case study approach in the field of education for the past 30 years. During this
extended period of time there has been the belief that case study, like other qualitative traditions are soft scientific approaches, with quantitative designs being related to pure or positivist scientific research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Case study originated out of the quest to examine and understand social phenomenon that is not measured with statistical calculations, but rather rich, in-depth narrative writing. Yin (2014) similar to other theorists including Merriam (1998) and Stake (1995) agree that the case study is a constructivist paradigm approach to understand the lived experiences of the participants.

Stake (1995) interprets case study as linked with what is studied rather than a specific methodology. Merriam (2009), however, describes case study as a unique approach of qualitative research that is inductive and therefore contrasts the positivist paradigm (Burrell & Morgan, 1979). Merriam (2009) states, “Basically, qualitative researchers are interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed, that is how people make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world” (p. 13). Creswell (2013), Lincoln and Guba (1995), Merriam (2009), Stake (1995), Miles and Huberman (1994), and Yin (2014) all describe case study as a bounded system, often by time and context. Miles and Huberman (1994) provide an image of a heart, which is the focus of the study, enclosed in a circle that establishes the parameters of the area that is to be studied. The heart of this study is the group of individuals who implemented the new educator system in the context of a K-5 elementary school, which is nested in a public urban school district.

Empirical Inquiry

Case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real life context, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and the context are not clearly evident (Yin, 2014). The case study approach is appropriate for this study because
the context of the school is explored through the examination of teacher training and the implementation of the new educator evaluation system from a distributed leadership lens within the theoretical framework of organizational change. Similar to Yin (2014), Creswell (2013), Merriam (2009), and Stake (1995) define case study as an in-depth exploration of a bounded system that results in a “thick” description of the phenomenon being investigated by using multiple data sources that are bound by time and place. Data sources of evidence for this study include document review, semi-structured individual interviews, a focus group, union meetings, field notes, and memos.

The case study approach of qualitative research permitted the researcher to interview teachers and administrators who participated in the specific training or participated in implementing the changes into the existing system (Rubin & Rubin, 2012; Yin, 2014). Therefore, those who were key in the implementation of the new 5-Step Cycle Model of Performance Evaluation in one school were interviewed using a semi-structured format with open-ended questions (Creswell, 2013; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). The goal of this research study was to capture and explore the topic of distributed leadership in one public K-5 elementary school through the perspectives of administrators and teachers who participated in the process. These participants were selected because of their involvement in a creative and innovative approach to program implementation, which may conceivably identify a model that policy makers may consider utilizing to institute future mandatory change initiatives.

The study focus included interviews with teachers and administrators to inquire into their perceptions, their experience with the training or being trained, and their thought about how implementing the new educator evaluation changes practice (King, 1994; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Changes that ultimately altered their level of participation in the evaluation process to becoming
active and self-goal directed participants who set their own professional growth and student learning goals. Other forms of data collection including a focus group, meetings, document review, and taking field notes were used to triangulate the data received from individual interviews, thus enriched the outcome of this study (Barbour, 2007; Creswell, 2013; Yin, 2014). The overarching goal was therefore to provide an in-depth understanding of the phenomena of formal and informal leaders working collaboratively with followers. Therefore, by identifying patterns, themes, and categories to interpret the findings there is a possibility to identify future recommendations for the use of distributed leadership in like settings to capitalize on resources and share responsibility and accountability while implementing mandates by the state and federal government to the local school district level (Merriam, 2009; Saldana, 2013; Yin, 2014).

This is an intrinsic case study, which has two embedded units of analysis, as it focuses specifically on aspects of distributed leadership from the teacher and administrators’ perspectives in a school setting (Creswell, 2013; Stake, 1995). This perspective was identified as the participants in this study were in the position to contribute to a comprehensive understanding of how continuous change alters the practice of teaching, and therefore how it can possibly contribute to both professional growth and student learning (Spillane, 2006). Administrators and teachers, who through their own experiences as leaders and followers, are in the best position to articulate their need for support and training in order to define and fulfill their new role and responsibilities with confidence and competence. Teachers and administrators alike are valuable contributors to identifying the obstacles and barriers when shifting practice from a primary hieratical bureaucratic system to including elements of distributed leadership, which were incorporated in the change process.
Inherent in the design of the case study approach is the desire to understand the phenomenon of teachers’ development through contacts with formal and informal leaders in the context of their specific school setting (Creswell, 2013; Yin, 2014). The plan was for the data sources, including documents and interviewees, to provide a rich and in-depth analysis of a contemporary issue of the construct of distributed leadership in real time within its real life context. The rationale for the focus reinforces the need for leadership to be distributed as demands increase on teachers and school systems alike from outside sources to comply with various initiatives. A greater understanding of the expanded role of teacher as informal leader or teacher educator may also lead to an advanced comprehension of the connection between informal and formal leaders as they engage followers in change. This study also examined how system-wide supports may be enhanced through utilizing the train-the-trainer model for staff training, which may possibly contribute to the overarching general knowledge and theoretical base in the field of leadership studies.

**Role of the Researcher**

Case study, as the identified approach for this study, not only fits the identified problem of practice under investigation and the questions asked, but also feels like a match with the style of this researcher. Case study not only allows for the subjectivity of the researcher to be identified through the positionality statement, but also encourages interpretation of findings through intuition and past experiences. Although, this researcher works part-time in the identified educational setting and has been trained as a trainer, I am an educator, but not a direct classroom teacher. Therefore, in the role of student researcher, I needed to establish a rapport to build trusting relationships with the teachers and administrators who have embraced and continue to implement the new education evaluation to engage in the this research process as well as work
toward potentially increase validity of their responses. This researcher, who is somewhat new in the setting, has achieved the status of “insider”, as a performance evaluator peer trainer and trusted colleague (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

Finally, the researcher approached this study to provide an opportunity for participations to reflect upon their experience and evaluate the process of implementing the 5-Step Cycle Performance Educator Evaluation Model into practice while exploring the larger phenomena of distributed leadership through the context of training teacher educators as culture carriers who are in essence informal leaders and change agents in the context of a challenging school climate. It is also the intent that this report, too, be heuristic as it allows and promotes expansive thinking on the part of the reader who, through his or her prior experiences with the phenomena, is able to make sense of and then encouraged to make additional interpretations and assign personal meaning (Merriam, 2009; Stake, 1995).

**Protection of Human Subjects**

Participation was voluntary in this qualitative research study, as required through practice ethics (Creswell, 2012). There were no known or obvious risks to the personal or professional well-being of the participants identified for this study. Ethical standards were strictly adhered to in order to ensure that the individual rights of each participant were fully protected. To achieve this aim, each participant was informed of the purpose and scope of the study, assured that the results will be used solely for the purpose of this thesis, and that there are no known professional or personal consequences associated with participation (Creswell, 2012). The purpose and scope of this study was to explore and describe how teachers actively incorporated system-wide change, which resulted with the introduction and implementation of a new educator performance evaluation system into practice.
Recruitment Procedures

A letter that outlined the purpose and scope of this study was submitted to the superintendent of the district identified in the study for permission to conduct the proposed research inquiry. The identified form titled *Application for Approval for Use of Human Participants in Research* from the Northeastern University Institutional Review Board (IRB) thoroughly completed, with as accurate information as possible, and submitted for approval along with required attachments prior to any recruitment or data collection. This researcher coordinated with the school principal once permission was secured from the superintendent to discuss the parameters of the study to receive her permission to access the study site and faculty (Creswell, 2012). Teachers and administrators were selected to participate because they were able to provide the best information on the problem under examination (Creswell, 2013). Rapport was then established between the researcher and the teachers and other administrators with the assistance of the school principal (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

This researcher successfully completed the National Institutes of Health (NIH) Office of Extramural Research training course titled *Protecting Human Research Participants* (2014) to ensure adherence to protecting the rights and well-being of all human subjects as required by Northeastern University to be an informed and responsible researcher. All necessary precautions to protect the participants were taken to do no harm, secure informed consent, and ensure that participation was solely on a voluntary basis.

Ensuring the Protection of Human Subjects and Informed Consent

Participants were invited to participate in this study through the recruitment letter that was placed in their work mailboxes following the approval from Internal Review Board (IRB) at the Northeastern University (NEU) to conduct the study. The purpose of the letter was to
introduce the study and provide a brief overview of the problem and scope of the research study. Potential participants contacted the researcher and a meeting was scheduled to either interview individually or a focus group. An official informed consent was reviewed with each participant prior to the beginning of all interviews (Creswell, 2012). The purpose of the study was again be reviewed verbally and in writing for participants and any questions posed were thoroughly addressed prior to asking the participants to the sign the official informed consent form. The understanding that there are no known risks or concerns was reviewed with the participants by the researcher (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Participants were advised that their confidentiality would be protected and that all aspects of the study were voluntary. Participants were also informed that you were under no obligation and could therefore discontinue their participation at any time without negative recourse.

Participants were informed that they could withdraw consent at any time without penalty. There are therefore no overt or covert consequences to those individuals who opted not to participate. This researcher does not have supervisory oversight of any of the participants. This proposed research study was in no way linked with any part of the participants’ performance or evaluation rating. Options were provided to the participants to choose where interviews were conducted to respect space and preference. All participants opted to hold the interviews at the school either in an office or classroom. Participants were also informed that they also had the option to decline to answer any question asked during the interview that made her uncomfortable without penalty (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). No questions were declined.

Participants and Access

This researcher worked cooperatively with identified personnel in the district and the identified elementary school in order to secure permission to elicit volunteers for this research
project. As noted, the first step was to contact the District Superintendent of Schools. Contact was then initiated with the identified school principal to secure school level permission under the auspice of the school district. With permission from both the superintendent of schools and the elementary school principal the application for the research study was submitted to the Internal Review Board (IRB) at Northeastern University for review and approval.

A recruitment letter was distributed to teachers and administrators in the public urban K-5 elementary school following the receipt of approval by the IRB. This recruitment letter followed the case study protocol as identified by Yin (2014), which included the overview of the study and how the data was going to be collected. An informed consent was reviewed with each participant prior to data collection. It clearly outlined the parameters of the study to insure confidentiality. Each participant was also informed of the ability to withdraw with penalty from the study at any point during the interview process. As previously noted, I am a colleague who does not supervisor any of the participants and therefore, there is no known conflict of interest or negative recourse for any of the participants who volunteered to participate in this study.

Site and Participants

This study is situated in an urban school district in Massachusetts. The identified school district has 7800 students, grades PreK-12, with 750 staff members. The purpose of this study was to understand and describe how implementing the new educator evaluation and in particular how the train-the-trainer model promoted leadership opportunities for teachers. Trainer and staff trainings were incorporated as a beginning step in implementing the new educator evaluation. The identified participants for this study include a pool of seven teachers and two administrators for a total of six individual interviews and one focus group in the K-5 public elementary school. The individuals were selected as Creswell (2013) defines a purposeful and criterion sample
because the teachers and administrators share the similarity of working in the same urban school district and collectively experienced the implementation of a new evaluation within the context of the same school.

A preliminary argument made was that the train-the-trainer model expanded the role of teacher-to-teacher educator, which contributed to both a detailed understanding of the mandated change and incorporated informal leaders as experts who assisted in the implementation of the new educator evaluation in the identified school as well as system wide. The elementary school with 400 students and a faculty of approximately 40 teaching staff members was chosen for this case study as implementation of the new educator evaluation in this school is a similar representation of what occurred in schools within the district system wide.

The teachers and administrators selected were a homogenous group as they are all educators that are either teachers or administrators who have extensive experience and were all female (Creswell, 2013; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Each of the teachers and administrators has worked within the identified district for several years. The participants were asked for demographic information including age, race, highest level of education obtained, job title, and about how long they worked in the current position as an introduction to the initial interview. Collecting this information was considered necessary for future study replication purposes. Each participant was thanked following the interview, although there was no tangible incentive linked to participation in this study group. Their participation may, however, ultimately lead to better understand how implementing the new system using distributed leadership expanded teacher roles and responsibilities as teachers and administrators worked collaboratively to accomplish the requirements of instituting a government mandate.

The teachers and the administrators were invited to participate and selected as a sample
set because they have the experience and knowledge associated with the components of the new educator evaluation training and were instrumental in either training peers or being trained to implement the new performance evaluation system. The identified school is a subset of the district. Therefore, the steps involved with staff training were the same as those used by the larger system to introduce and fold the new system into practice. In essence, the school selected for this study is comparable to other schools in the district and throughout the state in having to incorporate change that is anchored in a new educator evaluation system.

One school within the district was ultimately selected for this study and a small sample of participants identified as indicated for a qualitative case study in order to access an in-depth and rich description of the phenomenon of how distributed leadership was incorporated (Creswell, 2013; Spillane, 2006). This researcher also reviewed the specific training materials of the 5-Step Cycle Performance Evaluation as offered by the state of Massachusetts as a possible model, and also has a working knowledge of the cycle and related modules as a fellow trainer. Field and reflective notes as well as analytic memos were maintained throughout the entire period of this study and utilized in findings.

Participants were recruited as knowledgeable teachers and administrators who are looked at as experts within the school system. This case study allowed the researcher and the participants to examine and describe how the implementation of the new performance evaluation impacts the role and activities of teachers and the school wide changes it produced. The process as identified in the Protection of Human Subjects section of this paper was followed to adhere to established NEU research protocols to protect human subjects. Teachers and administrators identified as participants in this study were contacted personally via a recruitment letter in the school mailbox to request their participation in this study. Each person was informed that the
purpose of the study was to explore her experience while implementing the new educator evaluation through a distributed leadership lens. The parameters of the time commitment and the fact that their participation was voluntary were reviewed.

The sample group consisted of teacher and administrators to the elimination of other support staff only to further narrow the scope of the study and therefore made for easier interpretation and replication. Those selected to examine the problem of practice included teachers, teacher trainers, and administrators in order to gather data from various perspectives with the plan to cross check the findings. The plan was for findings to speak to how each participant was influenced and therefore final conclusions may lead to a greater understanding from the perspective of teachers and the administrators about how they worked collaboratively under the district plan to implement the new mandate. The aim was to determine how the construct of distributed leadership was incorporated and how it contributed to the process of organizational change.

Study Procedures

This researcher developed the interview protocols by including data collection questions that reflect content as identified in the central and sub-questions for this study (Rubin & Rubin, 2012; Yin, 2014). Consideration was given to the confidential nature of the responses and safeguards were made to generalize findings in subsequent sections. There are no individuals identified in this study that belong to a vulnerable population as defined by the IRB. However, cautions were taken to protect the confidentiality of information and the anonymity of each participant and the study site in the final report (Creswell, 2012). Pseudonyms were used to protect confidentiality and participant quotes were used with permission from the interviewees who were encouraged to complete Appendix E, a member check form (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).
Data collected from the semi structured open-ended interviews were double audio taped and handwritten notes were taken with participant awareness and permission (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). The interviews were transcribed as accurately as possible and themes coded using pseudonyms and de-identifying labels. The data was stored on the researcher’s personal computer with password protection and hard copies were stored in a locked cabinet in the researcher’s home to protect confidentiality of the participants as well as the data from loss or damage (Creswell, 2013). The researcher alone had access to the taped and transcribed interviews, coding, and analysis. Audiotapes were destroyed once the interviews were transcribed. Transcribed interviews were stored on a flash drive for safe keeping as a reference, which will be destroyed within the guidelines of the IRB. Relevant content in the thesis were reviewed with each participant through member checking prior to publication. Member checking was also utilized as a procedure to further ensures that no harm results to the participants from their involvement in this research study and to protect against researcher interpretive bias (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

Data Collection

Semi-structured, open-ended interviews with teachers, teacher trainers, and administrators, who were the pioneers in the district-wide change, were the primary source of data collection (King, 1994; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Interviews were utilized to capture and later construct meaning from their reported experiences. A focus group was conducted in addition to individual interviews to cross check perceptions between the selected participants and other teachers in the identified school (Barbour, 2007). In addition, document reviews of training manuals, and field notes were used to triangulate the data collected from the participants to
investigate patterns within their experiences as well as yield credible and valid findings (Rubin & Rubin, 2012; Saldana, 2013).

Following the receipt of IRB approval, those individuals who responded to the recruitment letter and identified interest in participating in this study were approached to schedule a meeting time. Appointments were scheduled during a convenient time and at a meeting place that was mutually agreed upon between the researcher and participants. The researcher reviewed during the meeting the purpose and scope of the study and specifics outlined in the informed consent with each individual participant. The review highlighted that the information collected would be held confidential. The participant did not have to answer each question and the participant could withdraw from the study at any time. The intent of the study and the fact that the associated risks are minimal was reinforced. Each participant signed the designated informed consent form as approved by the NEU IRB prior to the beginning of individual interviews and the focus group.

Primary sources of evidence included document review of training manuals, transcribed open-ended individual and a focus group interview, field notes, and analytic memos. A thorough document review was done of the 5-Step Cycle of Performance Evaluation training materials and a chronological record was created to outline the timeline of the implementation with notation of significant changes in the process. Therefore, there was an accurate understanding of the specific information to target within the topic to attempt to understand how facets of distributed leadership were incorporated into implementing the mandated change. An interview protocol was created in line with the overarching research questions about the process utilized by the district to move toward system-wide change. This list of questions created as a guide for the interviews. Questions covered the topics covered under the research questions including “What
is distributed leadership?” and “How is it evidenced in the implementation of the new educator evaluation?” Participants were encouraged to speak from their personal perspective, which included the opportunity to tell the story of how their role was influenced by the mandated change in practice.

Data collected focuses on various perspectives of the use of formal and informal leaders to implement the mandated change. Data were primarily collected through individual semi-structured open-ended individual interviews and one focus group with the identified and willing participants (King, 1994; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Each participant was asked to agree to the interviews double recorded using a compact MP3 audio recorder and a computer recorder as a backup, secondary recorder, as well as the researcher taking handwritten notes prior to the beginning of each interview. Interviews lasted from 30 to 60 minutes each. Interviews recorded were digitally emailed to a reputable service for transcription.

The initial plan was for one individual interview per person, although each person was informed of the possibility of a brief follow up contact for clarification if needed (Creswell, 2012). This was, however, not possible with the focus group due to time and resource constraints. Therefore, an effort was made to clarify and member check during the interview in real time (Kidd & Parshall, 2000). A list of lead questions was formulated from the codes and themes that surfaced from use the individual interview protocol. Follow up content related questions were also formulated at the time of the interview to fully understand the narratives provided by the participants. The participants of both the individual interviews and focus group were later invited to participate in member checking to review transcripts for accuracy, suggest adjustments, and to ensure that the interpretations made by the researcher were a fair

The focus group was comprised of three teachers who volunteered to participate in this study through the initial recruitment. Themes identified during individual interviews that were relevant and related to the topic were used as the base for the few questions used to stimulate and maintain the group interaction during the discussion (Barbour, 2007; Kidd & Parshall, 2000). The discussion focused on how participants viewed their role and experience in implementing the new educator evaluation and its contributions to professional growth, student learning, and school culture. The researcher was interested in the point of reference from the group of teachers (Kidd & Parshall, 2000). The focus group findings were then utilized to triangulate data from individual interviews and other data sources to develop an understanding of how change from instituting the new educator evaluation system has influenced role and practice in relation to distributed leadership.

My ideological belief is to include participants as co-researchers who, from their perspective, offered insight into their practice and could reliably report how collaboration was designed and utilized by all staff in the elementary school to implement the new educator performance evaluation. One of the underlying aims of this research is to as Machi and McEvoy (2009) advise, identify and confront personal bias in order to think clearly about and control the possible influence to maintain integrity of the research data and findings. The transcriptions, initial interpretations, and analysis used in this study to identify the use of distributed leadership practices in the K-5 setting were also reviewed by the all participants to ensure that what was recorded and coded following initial data collection was in fact reflective of what each participant intended.
Data Storage and Management

This researcher took all of the necessary steps and precautions to protect the confidentiality of the information gathered, the anonymity of the participants, and respect the study site. Data collected was viewed only by the primary researcher and was stored under password protection on a personal computer with hard copies in a locked file cabinet in the researcher’s home. Pseudonyms were used to protect the anonymity of the participants and for the most part generalities were used when quoting responses to further protect individual confidentiality (Creswell, 2013; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). A file system was created to organize and keep safe various forms of literature, researcher notes, and data collected from document review, training manuals, and transcribed open-ended interviews for this study (Yin, 2014).

Computer files, binders, and bins with related articles and books were used to sort materials used as reference materials for easy access. Raw data gathered through interviews were transcribed by www.Rev.com, a reputable transcription service that is aware of and adheres to the requirements of protecting human subjects to maintain confidentiality of the materials. Individual and focus group interviews were transcribed as accurately as possible with minor revisions made to correct errors upon electronic receipt of each file. Recorded interviews were destroyed following transcription and correction. Backs up electronic files of the original interviews are maintained on a flash drive for audio review of responses to capture “paralinguistic” information such as voice tone and pauses (King, 1994; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Data was coded with In Vivo codes, categories, and themes for each case with cross analysis between all, thus taking an inductive approach to this qualitative study (Saldana, 2012; Thomas, 2006). Resulting themes and categories were then be carefully managed and utilized for the purpose of this thesis. The researcher will later destroy the data collected, coding, and analysis
upon the acceptance of the defense proposal by the thesis committee and the final document is complete or in adherence to common practice.

Data Analysis

Yin (2014) emphasizes the complexity of analysis as well as the necessity to identify analytic approaches as a step that should take place early on while designing the research project. Although there are recommended choices, decisions often corresponded with this researcher’s style, specifics about the design, and individual preference. Like other research approaches, the analysis of case study is strongly connected to the identified study research questions. Data collection and analysis are interwoven. The researcher, along with actively collecting various forms of data, constantly recorded field notes and memos as supporting documentation as well as to protect against researcher bias (Saldana, 2013; Yin, 2014).

Data was collected from multiple sources for this typical case study in the real-world setting (Miles & Huberman, 1994). There are numerous documents that were reviewed including transcriptions of interviews, training materials, written field notes, reflections, and other related analytic memos (Saldana, 2013; Yin, 2014). Each datum was neatly organized for easy access, audit, and study replication (Creswell, 2013; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 2009; Thomas, 2006). Electronic and journal files and templates were prepared prior to data collection (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Along with this storage system was the beginning of the planning for data collection, which was ultimately paired with the chosen topic of how distributed leadership was infused into a public K-5 school to implement the new educator evaluation mandate. This topic was also anchored in the selected theoretical framework of organizational change and connected with the research questions through tailored interviews and other data collection protocols as previously noted. Data collected through various methods was organized
as suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994) on contact or document summary forms to easily track information about the data collected, themes paired with data and a summation of the information. The summary forms connected highlights and quotations back to research questions as well as included field notes and memos (Thomas, 2006).

**Coding and Analyzing**

The researcher used an inductive “ground up” strategy for analyzing data collected as reviewed by Yin (2014, p. 136). In accordance to Thomas (2006) a detailed readings of the raw data was completed to seek common themes within the data. The analytic technique of explanation building was incorporated to explain how the new educator evaluation was implemented (Yin, 2014). This strategy is similar to first and second cycle coding as reviewed by Saldana (2013), Miles and Huberman (1994), and general inductive analysis described by Thomas (2006). Codes were identified through patterns, which unfold into useful concepts for analysis of the raw data including line-by-line and narrative units. Codes were reviewed for themes and then categorized for analysis and interpretation of the realities found in the data (Boeije, 2002; Creswell, 2013, Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 2009; Saldana, 2013). Other techniques such as pattern matching that compares a finding with a prediction and explanation of a chain analysis of links was also used in this case study (Yin, 2014).

Due to the complexity of the interactions between teachers and administrators with other components within the system the use of logic models appeared to be most applicable. The logic model as developed by Joseph Wholey (1979) appears similar to pattern matching and explanation, although is unique in the study of change through analyzing a complex chain of events that take place over a period of time (Yin, 2014). This technique appears to be the best match for a review of how trained teachers and administrators contributed to shaping the
transitions to a new system and indications of organizational change. Findings from interviews from teachers were also compared to those from administrators for an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon from two different perspectives. This technique is similar to constant comparative analysis with initial open coding of single interviews, later axial coding of the interviews of those within one group, and finally comparison of interviews from the different perspectives (Boeije, 2002). Similarities and differences between the two groups within the school were then compared to create a picture that represents the complexity of the phenomenon under investigation, which can be representative of distributed leadership in practice during organization change.

The data was viewed from a distributed leadership lens and organizational change theory. Data collected from individual and the focus group interviews was constantly reviewed as a first cycle while collecting and organizing the raw data. A code manual was developed as transcribed interviews were reviewed and the development of emerging themes was then paired back to the identified areas of focus. The general inductive approach used for this study included reviewing the raw data that then allowed for a summation of data, which resulted in establishing clear links within the multiple data sources (Thomas, 2006).

The primary coding techniques that were used for this study are In Vivo and process strategies as defined by Saldana (2013). Transcripts were coded manually with the use of highlighted participants’ quotes, which were reduced to a word or short phrase, and memos were noted in the column to add depth to content during second cycle coding in order to record the emerging patterns (Merriam, 2009; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Saldana, 2013). Code weaving as described by Saldana (2013) was then used to interpret how individual pieces of the study fit together. Finally, multiple readings of the data resulted in labeling and categorizing key areas of
interest that later led to the review of the categories to link back to the research questions and theoretical frameworks to interpret the meaning into findings.

Trustworthiness

One of the hallmark characteristics of qualitative research, which was adhered to through this study was the intent to capture a thick and rich description of the topic of distributed leadership provided through the stories of participants. In-depth interviews were used as a primary method of data collection to identify perceptions of the participants through the use of a semi-structured interview protocol (Creswell, 2013; King, 1994).

The qualitative design is enriched and therefore trustworthiness is strengthened through the use of triangulation by collecting data from multiple sources to cross check findings (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 1988; Yin, 2014). This process is an example of an internal validity check. Data sources for this research thesis in addition to individual interviews included training document review, field notes and analytic memos (Yin, 2014). Extra consideration to ensure validity and avoid bias was also taken, as the study site is also the researcher’s workplace. These included emphasizing that participation was voluntary and no mention of the interviews took place outside of the interviews.

Credibility

Each participant in this study was invited to work collaboratively with the researcher through member checking of transcribed interviews, data analysis, and identified themes to ensure that the interpretations were a fair and accurately represent trustworthiness of the content, thus further contribute to the validity of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Rubin & Rubin, 2012; Thomas, 2006). The researcher utilized reflexivity throughout the data collection process through the use of field journaling, and memoing to increase the level of
objectivity and credibility of the findings (Creswell, 2013; Saldana, 2013). Information about the sample population, data collection, first and second cycle coding, and steps taken in the analysis process were carefully documented in order for the possibility that this research study may be duplicated in the future (Saldana, 2013). These measures increase study reproduction and therefore credibility. This research study is also credible in part because the researcher followed the case study procedures (Yin, 2014). Confirmation of the results with a similar sample and methods through a replicated study can evidence a pattern and may then possibly be generalized to other like groups (Creswell, 2013).

**Validity**

The case study approach was chosen because it provided an in-depth examination within the “real life” context of the identified school within a larger urban school district (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 1988; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2014). The setting and participants are appropriate for this study as they are the key individuals who can describe how the addition of specific trainings and supports influenced teacher performance and contributed to the system’s adjustment to change. The subjects are knowledgeable, experienced professional educators who were able and willing to provide their perspective on how the training and implementation of the new performance evaluation has impacted their practice (Merriam, 1988). It was also important to safeguard against participant bias as components of the new evaluation system continue to be ratified as it is institutionalized. This was accomplished through the use of semi-structured interviews that gave the participant the opportunity to tell their stories with detailed examples that were triangulated with multiple sources to paint an accurate representation of their impressions of the effectiveness of the trainings and their thoughts about how the new 5-Step
Cycle of Performance Evaluation was implemented (Rubin & Rubin, 2012; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2014).

**Objectivity**

The researcher’s sole investment is to expand the understanding of the role of the teacher and administrators and how training and collaboration contributed to distributed leadership while implementing the change under examination. However, researcher’s biases have been explored through a positionality statement that identified interest in and thoughts about teacher training and shared leadership to protect the integrity of the findings (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 1988). The fact that the researcher is a member of the professional community may have added to the increased ability to engage colleagues in dialogues through this research study about the new educator performance evaluation due to a relationship based in trust. It was, however, the researcher who was charged with interpreting the findings and drawing conclusions in an attempt to accurately portray the perceptions of the participants from data in their reports that are comprehensive and comprehensible to outside readers (Stake, 1995).

**Summary**

This researcher was open and honest with the participants to respect and recognize participants as collaborative members of the research process. Steps were taken to ensure that participants were fully informed of the focus and scope of the research study so that each participant was fully protected from harm. IRB approval was secured, with appendixes stamped as approved prior to conducting any of the research outlined in this section in order to adhere to the highest ethical standard throughout the research process. Finally, each participant signed the identified informed consent only after given the opportunity to ask questions prior to voluntarily participating in this study.
Chapter IV: Research Findings

The purpose of this chapter is to present findings from the data gathered throughout this qualitative study. The informal and formal leaders and followers who worked to implement the new educator evaluation system provided a rich description through their reported experiences. This study is, therefore, an attempt to understand how the government mandate for a new educator evaluation system was implemented at one public elementary school. The goal of this research was to describe and explain how the construct of distributed leadership shaped the interactions between leaders and followers in the identified situated activity.

This chapter identifies how the data collected from multiple sources including interviews, meetings, document review, and field notes is triangulated to present findings. The first section of this chapter reviews the purpose of this case study. The second section focuses on the history of the new education evaluation mandate and how the plan for implementation was formulated by one public urban school district. The subsequent sections describe the school, which is the study site and the participant’s demographic profile, emergent themes from the individual interviews, a focus group, and other data sources. The findings are reviewed in an attempt to better understand how participants’ experiences help in identifying possible insight into the identified research questions. The final section summarizes the research findings reviewed throughout this chapter.

Purpose of the Case Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the perspectives of teachers and administrators, who through collaborative efforts learned about and then implemented the new educator evaluation, a federal and state mandate into practice at one public urban elementary school in the northeast region of the United States. Areas under investigation include how the district elicited
the involvement of multiple leaders and followers who, as active participants, influenced the change. This study examined what interdependent and reciprocal interactions occurred while teachers and administrators attempted to make sense of the process and implement the new system into daily practice. The focus in the data analysis explored the process on how staff developed a common vision, how the existing system was flexible to include various skills and talents from multiple leaders, and how the process created and used new structures and routines on multiple levels including individual, group, and the school site. The examination and analysis of the data sought to identify how changes were incorporated through teacher supports and teamwork, which was reinforced by the formal school leaders. Areas of inquiry for this study included input from informal and formal leaders who working in collaboration with teaching staff implementing the new educator evaluation, providing opportunities for increased staff capacity, and understanding lessons learned by those interviewed in this study about the logistics of implementing the government mandate for a new educator evaluation.

Reports of interactions between informal and formal leaders and followers were analyzed to determine what, if any, influence implementing the new educator evaluation had on professional growth, student learning, and the school culture. Feedback elicited from administrators, teacher leaders, and teachers focused on understanding practical applications and limitations using a distributed leadership model in one school that implemented the 5 Step-Cycle of Educator Performance Evaluation Model. The case study approach allowed for an in-depth exploration using a distributed leadership model in a real life setting that is bound by context and time, and what that might look like. Data sources of evidence for this study included document review, semi-structured individual interviews, a focus group, union meetings, field notes, and
analytic memos. The following are the research questions that were used to guide and explore the phenomena under study.

The central research question that guides the direction of this study was:

How did the construct of distributed leadership help us to understand how one elementary school community implemented the mandated educator evaluation system?

Sub-questions:
1. What structures and strategies were included (or absent) in the processes that made it possible for administrators and teachers to implement the new educator evaluation system into practice?
2. What opportunities did the mandate provide for teachers to act as informal leaders who worked in conjunction with formal leaders and participants?
3. How has the implementation of the new educator evaluation contribute to administrator and teacher professional growth and student learning?

History of Mandate and Implementation Plan

Public schools within Massachusetts are mandated to adopt, adapt, or revise the new educator evaluation format provided by the state in response to the federal government Race to the Top (RTTT) program. The school identified in this study was required to comply with the mandate by July 2012 because the identified district applied for $1.25 million dollars in funding under the RTTT program. In relation to the federal mandate, the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) required that school districts comply with the new evaluation standards as of March 2011. The school district and the teacher union within this particular district choose to adopt the state recommended 5 Step-Cycle of the Educator
Evaluation model in order to be able to later access support and assistance throughout the implementation process.

The change process was a major undertaking nonetheless. To ease this transition, the district and the union, acknowledging how the change would impact staff, selected to involve staff as catalysts for system change. The district selected to utilize the train-the-trainer model, whereas creating a layer of informal leaders with these staff members learning the system and then providing training to fellow educators. Figure 2 is a visual representation of the system connectedness and open approach to integrating the new educator evaluation system. The open system speaks to the interactions between the outer system and the internal workings at the individual, group, and school level. Open systems create interdependence between the inner and outer environments for survival and expansion. Interactions between the levels reinforce a series of relationships that encourage an evolution of constant change due to shifting demands and available resources.
Figure 2. Interactions that Occur Between and Within Systems to Implement New Model – Leadership is Distributed and Hierarchical to Achieve Desired Outcome

Both administrators and direct staff met the directive for a new educator evaluation at both the district and school levels with mixed emotion. The district elicited participation through an application process by which staff members were then selected to train as trainers. This method of recruiting demonstrated a desire to best engage staff for the anticipated change and resulting new system, which would later be accepted by others across the system to fully implement with fidelity. One staff member described her role as “one of the chosen in the district to attend trainings that were offered by DESE through a contractor to learn about the modules that DESE had prepared, and my job was then to present to a select group of my peers to train them on those modules.” Trainers, demonstrated awareness of their key role, were selected in a Noah’s Ark like fashion, two by two. Trainers were selected in pairs by building and specialty. One trainer remarked, “One thing I'll say that I think was very positive that the district did. I saw, as I met my colleagues, colleague trainers, that the district had made a
concerted effort to have good representation from all the populations that would have to learn this tool.” Educators were in essence able to contribute to the training of their peers through this design. The resulting team model of interdependence supported the notion that multiple leaders bring skills and resources that expand upon what only one leader can provide.

**Steps to Implementation**

In compliance with the 2012 federal mandate, the school system included in this study introduced the new educator evaluation to all staff during a professional development held on the last day of school June 2012. As a result, there was little time allotted for staff to learn the new system, given the closeness between the date of the mandate and timeline to implement. The plan was to implement the new system in the fall of the 2012-2013 academic school year. Staff selected to participate in the train-the-trainer program began their training during the summer in August 2012. One teacher’s report of her perception of her level of involvement was as follows:

Well, it first started with the evaluation system. They offered Train-the-Trainer and we were given the opportunity to sit with, I believe it was an individual from the DESE, and they trained us on what was going to be done so that this way I think it could distribute some of the leadership roles from all of the administrators. They could then have us at the school to send people to. To ask us questions about it, and they didn't have to become inundated with, "Well, how do I do this," and "What do I need to do for that?" They distributed the leadership to us that way.

Trainings continued over the course of the next year for both trainers and educators. The anticipation of learning about the new process and implementing the educator evaluation created tension and anxiety for staff. The trainers, on some level, in addition to their role of teacher leader, were able to hold the anxiety for the group as they acted in the capacity of intermediary
for the state, school district, and for peers who worked feverishly to learn about the new system. One trainer describes her experience as follows:

Often our group would come back, and I liken it again to the parking lot, where we knew that there were differences. We knew some decisions had to be made, but I don't think we ever felt truly empowered that we should make decisions and move forward with some of those. I felt that we as a group were comfortable by pointing out that this could cause some problems if one group is interpreting it this way and another group is interpreting it that way, but we never really ... We weren't charged with making those decisions. We were charged with, we felt, communicating those back to the district, and I'm here to say we never got answers.

Trainers, as informal leaders, took their role seriously and although worked cooperatively with the trainees continued to benefit from the support of the consultants and formal school leaders for further direction. As another teacher leaders described the role of the teacher leader through the training meetings and the level of frustration experienced by the trainings:

It was definitely nerve-wracking, though, because when you were presenting it to the other staff who were really stressed about it, you were sort of the bearer of bad news. That was the only piece of it that I found challenging was, everybody's looking at you going, ‘Oh, come on.’ Like you're the one saying, ‘Here, you have to do all of this’. We would be like, ‘Don't shoot the messenger. I'm just trying to help you. I'm just trying to explain this.’

The implementation of the new system, however, was not simply a cut and paste model, but crafted to the specifics of the particular district. This trainer who described the process as “an evolution” goes on to say:
When you have to pick something up and move it, get through a process or whatever, it's inherent that there's some ownership. You are going to take it farther. You are going to take it faster. You are going to go a different route, but when you keep getting it punted back, you, by necessity, have some ownership of the outcome.

The trainers, as representatives of the group, not only modeled how to interpret the new system, but also demonstrated how to use the format of shared leadership while simultaneously taking ownership. Their dedication and willingness to shape practice in turn contributed to easing the process for other staff to both adopt and adapt to the mandated change. In sum, one teacher eloquently noted, “I think that even if it's sporadic, I think that it (the new system) has changed either the way we think about it (practice) or the quest for evidence makes you reflective.” The new system is a challenge of all levels to implement into practice.

Incorporating the TTT model provided experts who guided teachers along to implement the new educator evaluation. The trainings helped guide and teach skills through a partnership with teachers and administrators. Trainers validated and mitigated staff anxiety through their availability as a resource and colleague. One teacher’s response identified how their peer is similar to an on-site consultant and said, “Those trainers are there in the background, but we know that they're there and if we have any problems, we know we can go to them anytime.” Administrators, too, value the presence of the trainers as informal leaders who are beneficial to the school staff and culture. This is evident through an administration’s perception of how peer-to-peer interactions smooth the implementation of and assisted her colleagues in building a skill set to better utilize the new system. She remarked about how trainers bridged gaps created by the system:
It helps me with difficult conversations if someone is truly struggling with a portion of the evaluation, where I’ll say, ‘Why don’t you go ask this person and see their interpretation.’ I’ve done that a few times, and what I have later is the teacher comes back to me, ‘I understand now. I know what you were saying, or I understand. I was missing this piece.’ It helps.

Teachers, teacher trainers, and administrators all emphasized the importance of the input from the initial consultants in training as well as the perceived benefits of continued training to provide support in order to maintain gains made, and remain current with incremental changes, as they presented and helped to sustain the application of the model into day-to-day practice. Table 1 below represents the time matrix, which summarizes the major events that significantly contributed to the implementation of the new education evaluation in the district and school that is the focus of this study.
Table 1

Time Matrix for the Implementation of the New Educator Evaluation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Train-The-Training Program</td>
<td>-Teachers trained as trainers (TTT) by a hired consultant from Summer 2012-Summer 2013. -Teachers provided 3 trainings to subgroups this year.</td>
<td>-Teachers acted as informal leaders assisting teachers and administrators. -Official capacity of trainer ended.</td>
<td>-Teachers continue as consultations to peers, although no additional trainings or compensation occurred.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher and Support Staff Trainings</td>
<td>-Teachers trained during designated professional development days. -Teachers crafted Self-Assessment, SMART Goals, and Professional Growth and Student Learning Goals. -New teachers evaluated with model.</td>
<td>-Teach Point, an electronic data collection system, implemented and teachers were offered training. -Teachers uploaded evidence electronically. -Evaluation with new model year one or two dependent upon group assignment. -No refresher.</td>
<td>-Teachers met with peers in professional learning communities, department meetings, staff meetings, and 1:1 with trainers. -Evaluation with new model either year two or cycle restarted with new Professional Practice and Student Learning goals for this year.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administration Training</td>
<td>-Administrators simultaneously trained by consultants. -Some administrators attended teacher led training sessions.</td>
<td>-First cycle of evaluations for teachers with professional status. -First year of Summative evaluation for some Professional Status teachers.</td>
<td>-Administrators continue to meet with consultations focusing on techniques of evaluating and calibration of the tool.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
School Context and Staff Profile

The elementary school selected for this study is one of 15 schools in the identified public urban school district. There are three high schools, two middle schools, and ten community-based elementary schools. The school mission is to engage students to become life-long learners who will be productive and contributing citizens in their communities. There are approximately 400 students who attend this elementary school with a district-wide total number of 7,841 students enrolled during the 2014-2015 academic school year. This school district is nested within the Commonwealth of Massachusetts where approximately 955,844 students attend public schools.

A total of nine staff members responded to the recruitment letter and volunteered to participate in the proposed study. Two were administrators, two were teachers who are also trained trainers, and five were fellow elementary teachers who have attended trainings. All of the participants are bound to adhere to the parameters of the new educator evaluation. All of the respondents were female and highly qualified professionals who hold a master’s degree or higher in education related fields that include administration, elementary education, special education, or curriculum instruction. Their ages are distributed between the identified categories of 25-35 (2), 36-46 (3), and 47-55 (4). Each participant has professional status, which means that they have been in their position for three or more years, meeting all of the professional qualifications and received satisfactory evaluations during that period. Two teachers, although established in the district are relatively new to this particular school and one of the two administrators, at this school is new to her current position. Table 2 is a summary of the participant’s demographic information. This information is provided in for future replication of this study or in the event that the data may be used to compare to larger population, thus allowing for the findings to be
generalized to larger populations. This researcher opted to summarize the demographics and not associate quotes with the person, but as general comments to further protect the confidentiality of the participants due to the small sample size.

Table 2

Demographic Information Provided by Interviewees

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total Interviews/Type</th>
<th>Race/Ethnicity/Gender</th>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Education Level</th>
<th>Area of Specialty</th>
<th>Position/Role</th>
<th>Years in Position</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6 Individual</td>
<td>Caucasian Non-Hispanic 6</td>
<td>25-35 (2) 36-46 (1) 46-55 (3)</td>
<td>Master Degree (3) Masters + 30 (3)</td>
<td>Curriculum Instruction (2) Elementary Education (1) Special Education (2)</td>
<td>Teachers (4) 2 are TTT trained Administration (2)</td>
<td>Average (17) Average (3.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Focus Group</td>
<td>Caucasian Non-Hispanic 3</td>
<td>36-46 (2) 46-55 (1)</td>
<td>Master Degree (3)</td>
<td>Administration (1) Special Education (2)</td>
<td>Teachers (3)</td>
<td>Average (8)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The researcher, who is a special education team chairperson and student adjustment counselor, has been with the district for over a decade and was newly assigned part-time to the elementary school that is the site of this research study. It was through the support of administration and an established trust and working relationship with staff that this study was possible. Teachers and administrators were very forthcoming to offer their time to discuss their experience and insights about how the new educator evaluation was implemented into practice. Individual interviews lasted approximately forty minutes, with a longer focus group time of sixty minutes in length. Although this new model of performance evaluation has been in effect for the past three years, it should be noted that there has been continued changes to modify its
application to include staff responsibility. Many of the adjustments are noted throughout the interviews and identified as both improvements and challenges to adhere to and implement the model.

Data collection focused on capturing the individual’s perceptions of her participation of implementing the new educator evaluation mandate. The use of a system’s approach was then used to examine the interactions that occurred between staff members within the system to incorporate the external demand of the new educator evaluation into practice. Teachers and administrators openly shared their thoughts and feelings about the process and how using the model influences their practice. As this is now the third year of working with the educator evaluation, those interviewed were able to not only recall how it was implemented, but also share what their experiences have been as an individual, in a group, and in the context of the school since learning about and working with the model for an extended period. The changes produced by incorporating the model have, as it will be demonstrated, in fact have changed practice.

Similar to the government goal to improve professional growth for teachers and learning for students, those in the school have formulated their individual and student goals for success. This has produced an accordion like effect where change is slowly infused and the pressure released through the support of peers in preparation for the process to repeat.

**Explanation of Data**

The researcher began to prepare for this study as the proposed change took shape. Union meetings were attended before the model was adopted, training was completed as a trainer, and hours were spent interviewing school staff members to hear about their experiences and thoughts. Interviews were crafted to allow teachers and administrators to share their experience as an individual in a school that accomplished the change. Focus was placed on the shaping of
patterns of interactions throughout the process between teachers and administrators while adhering to Yin’s (2014) case study procedures. Each shared her perspective about how the leadership roles were identified as well as how leadership was distributed throughout the system to accomplish the change. Interactions were highlighted through an examination of the structures and routines that were implemented. In particular, the use and influence of train-the-trainer model to introduce and instruct staff about the new evaluation system was discussed as this approach allowed for all staff to not only be trained, but to have built in peer consultants that were readily available as a resource for questions and problem-solving. In addition to reflecting on their experiences and practice, teachers and administrators shared their thoughts on how the process is currently working as well as implications for future proposed changes.

Semi-structured interviews using open-ended questions were conducted with teachers and administrators at the school in a location selected by those interviewed. The interviews were the main data source. All recorded data was then transcribed, coded, and analyzed to identify themes representative of how the educator evaluation was implemented, what forms of leadership were utilized, and how resources were generated to not only introduce the change, but efforts made for it to be infused into and sustained as a general practice. A cross check of perceptions was completed to compare data between the individual and focus group interview.

Data collected was reviewed using an inductive strategy (Thomas, 2006; Yin, 2014). Detailed readings of the transcribed interviews were completed to conduct first and second cycles of coding using In Vivo and Process coding to identify patterns and review for themes presented related to participants’ experiences throughout the implementation process (Saldana, 2013). Then, second cycle coding was completed using a logic model developed by Wholey (1979). The identified model is similar to pattern matching and explanation, however,
incorporated a chain analysis to capture the events that took place over the extended period of time the educator evaluation was implemented. This technique was layered with constant comparative analysis with an ongoing comparison from various perspectives. Finally, a comparison between the codes developed from the individual interviews with those from the focus group interview to increase the validity of the findings (Boeije, 2002). A coding manual was developed and emergent themed compared back to the identified areas of focus.

Code weaving of individual interviews was intersected on various levels, which includes school, work groups, and the individual. These codes were then reduced to short phrases and memos were included to add depth to the content as the second cycle coding was used to formulate the identified themes. All data was analyzed through the lenses of organizational change and distributed leadership and linked back to the research questions for interpretation and, hence, find meaning.

Table 3 and 4 outlines the first and beginning of the second coding cycles of data from the transcribed interviews.
## Table 3

*Codes - Intersections from a Systems Perspective from Individual Interviews*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intersection - levels and individual reports</th>
<th>Cognition (Thinking)</th>
<th>Emotional State (Feeling)</th>
<th>Resulting Action (Doing)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School</td>
<td>- Increased interactions, which benefits students</td>
<td>- Shared ownership and responsibility</td>
<td>- TTT effective for program development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Administration is now an extension of classroom</td>
<td>- Ambiguities with the process – trainers held tension between groups</td>
<td>- Sharing between leaders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Tiered supports</td>
<td>- Connections were formed/trust/seed people/culture builders and carriers</td>
<td>- Interdependence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Interactions create interdependence</td>
<td>- Concern expressed re: adjustments i.e. tie student data with performance rating</td>
<td>- Staff and staff and admin mirror student assessments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Caring environment</td>
<td></td>
<td>- Lack of updates for trainers – reverting to top down?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Working of model to practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group/Social</td>
<td>- Concerted effort through established group cohesion</td>
<td>- Time and incremental introduction of change helps to ease the fear and create possibilities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Flexibility of model to fit multiple roles or “hats”</td>
<td>- Same boat</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Efforts resulted in a solid base to build practice for student learning</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Group effort – grade level teams, faculty meetings</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Learning together</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Ongoing assessment and evaluation (meta-application to all levels)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Collaboration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Open communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Trust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Unity promotes group think</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>- Evolution - program</td>
<td>- Change = nervous with resistance</td>
<td>- Improved level of organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Accountability on each level</td>
<td>- Voice – more participants brings richness to outcome</td>
<td>- Able to showcase work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Understanding system to use day-to-day</td>
<td>- Internal supports help to ease anxieties</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Decision-making about students</td>
<td>- Positive approach</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Empowered</td>
<td>- Internal supports</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4

*Codes - Intersections from a Systems Perspective from Focus Group Interview Codes*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intersection - levels and individual reports</th>
<th>Cognition (Thinking)</th>
<th>Emotional State (Feeling)</th>
<th>Resulting Action (Doing)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| School                                      | - New Contract                                                                      | - Need for formal leader to have oversight                                              | - Positive use of consultants  
- Confusion with changes – from paper to computer portfolios  
- Administrator sets example  
- Mentors are resources |
|                                             | - Change creates need to adjust time and resources                                   | - Importance of relationship between all staff                                         |
|                                             | - Increased concerns expressed                                                      |                                                                                        |
| Group/Social                                | - Competent/problem solving approach                                                | - Time and incremental introduction of change helps to ease the fear and create possibilities | - Completed training  
- New tool  
- Team meetings  
- 1st vs. 2nd year evaluation  
- Benefit of refresher |
|                                             | - Open to talking about less than positive experiences                              | - Want validation                                                                     |
|                                             | - Peer support and empathy                                                          | - Value of own and others’ experience                                                  |
|                                             | - Available team work                                                               |                                                                                        |
| Individual                                  | - Understanding of expectations                                                     | - Empathy                                                                              | - Administration about to consult with consultants  
- How to manage unique positions  
- Small group support |
|                                             | - New jargon to learn                                                               | - Overwhelmed                                                                          |
|                                             | - Looking for opportunities                                                         | - Anxiety about “being judged”                                                        |
|                                             | - Wearing multiple “hats”                                                           |                                                                                        |
|                                             | - Years of experience                                                               |                                                                                        |

These tables provide an at-a-glance summary of the codes identified. The codes were extracted and paired with various levels of application along with how the participants related their experiences according to their thoughts, feeling, and actions that coincided with implementing the education evaluation. The codes identified various phases of the change and how the participants approached learning about and incorporative key elements into their repertoire of daily practice both individually and in relation to their peers and the expectations of their administrator.

The new educator evaluation was initially implemented school-wide, by formal and informal leaders. The directive was given that peer trainers would introduce the mandate and the evaluation tool was incorporated into practice as a discipline or small group effort. Hired consultants provided the initial training to the trainers and have remained involved with training administrators to date. The first identified professional group goal was for staff to learn about the new system. Student learning goals were then crafted at the department level following an assessment process. Trainings commenced and teachers brought the information back to their identified work groups to implement.

**Document Review and Supporting Evidence**

In addition to conducting the individual interviews with teachers and administrators and the focus group with teachers, the training modules provided by MDESE were carefully reviewed, all trainings provided by the consultants were attended, and other available information about the new evaluation systems was read. These data sources allowed for the use of triangulation from the multiple sources to cross check the findings. The presentation data identified through the interviews and focus group session is provided for each developed theme. This information was in turn used to address and provide evidence to research questions as well
as support and document the participant’s experience when implementing the mandated change. The information illustrates how one school adopted and adapted to the new educator evaluation, which was implemented through collective effort of many in the school in this case study as well as district-wide.

**Emergent Themes**

The new educator evaluation was found to both encourage transparency and increase interactions between teachers and administrators, which contribute to strengthening group process with the intent to benefit teacher growth and student learning. The initial premise was that school department personnel created the platform for staff interaction and collaboration to occur. It is interesting to note, however, that it may be inherent in the evaluation tool that communication and increased interdependence is in fact required to accomplish the level of depth of practice that the new system warrants. The use of the train-the-trainer model, as the data demonstrated, contributed to the process of shared leadership and encouraged cooperative learning by staff, which expedited the implementation of the 5-Step Cycle of Performance Evaluation.

**Individual and Focus Group Interviews**

Across the six individual and one focus group interviews the following themes emerged:

(a) *A shared vision* that resulted from the federal and state governments through RTTT initiative. The directive mandated that a new educator evaluation system that would promote continued professional development and student learning in public schools. The new educator evaluation was introduction and implemented through a train-the-trainer peer-to-peer model in the school that is the focus of this study.
(b) Anxiety and fear that the federal and state mandate produced for the collection of teachers and administrators. This is a cyclic experience as it occurred in the initial implementation phase and reappears with the progression of changes.

(c) Learning together and reciprocity that led to the belief that staff integrating the new system. Teacher and administrators learn the system simultaneously. This approach developed a mutual reliance and interdependence as each participant made sense of the system individually, as a group, and across role divisions. Each established professional and student goals that were interwoven throughout the school.

(d) Shared Responsibility that was evident through the interactions and resulting teamwork demonstrated in grade level meetings, faculty meetings, and professional learning communities to operationalize the mandate. Opportunities were provided for teachers to meet together and openly communicate with one another to alleviate stress through clarification of expectations and set course for professional practice and student learning.

(e) Culture Carriers that were created through the elected use of the Train-The-Trainer model. This practice put staff in the position of learning about and buying-in to the model through their participation in being trained and training staff to implement the change in practice. These informal leaders established the base from which further development and final institutionalization of the new system occurred.

The following section expands upon the above themes, by identifying staff perceptions of their related significance, and how they are evidenced through participant quotes, experiences, and practice:

* A shared vision that resulted from the federal and state governments through the RTTT initiative. The government mandate for the new educator evaluation created a vision for
the school district. The approach taken by the school district to implement the evaluation tool was representative of and can be viewed as an attempt to bring staff together. Although the district leaders were driving the forced change, teachers and other staff members volunteered to be strategically placed to ultimately share the responsibility of working collaboratively through peer-to-peer trainings or a distributed leadership model to implement the mandated change. The challenges posed by a new educator evaluation required staff and administrators to understand, interpret, and incorporate the mandated change into practice. Time allotted through various forums was needed to familiarize and desensitized staff in order to make the mandate manageable to incorporate the new system with the desired outcome to positively contribute to staff growth and student learning. One teacher summarizes her experience:

What I have seen, and this is exactly what we have been told regarding the evaluation, that it's going to help recognize excellence in teaching. It's going to help the classroom teacher recognize different levels of student learning, student progress, growth and development in students… We put different material on our Teach Point and then the collaboration between the teacher and the administration would make it easier to see where the teacher is at, whether or not we need a little bit of help or they're doing well. I think it's a collaboration of both.

Teachers, who volunteered to be trained as trainers viewed the shared responsibility as an opportunity to be involved in decision-making and learned firsthand what the new expectations were. Their view of leadership and actions encompassed taking an active role in the change process. This idea is demonstrated in their perception of how the district planned to distribute leadership to multiple levels, and as one teacher explained:
There was a posting at school for trainers for the new evaluation system and of course for a number of reasons it would interest me…As a trainer I'd have opportunity to learn it deeply, which would benefit me personally, but also in my other roles in my school. I was interested in taking that on as an addition to my other roles in my school already.

Teachers opted to be change agents that guided the movement for peers throughout implementation. Those who volunteered to act in the capacity of trainer received a stipend to attended consultant lead trainings and later presented the new materials to their peers during structure sessions designed for adult learners to engage in the process. There was a noticeable level of teamwork and communication that enabled staff to wear multiple “hats” to support each other as they adopted the shared vision and practice.

The use of the TTT model resulted in a shift in power to include various leaders who formed a collective who were available as additional resources and staff support. In essence, using the model was a pathway, which eased the learning that needed to take place for the new system to be implemented. The trainings were then provided during time allotted throughout the academic year as professional development. The training modules were introduced incrementally in schools. This, in turn, created unity and group processes to implement the changes in the school and system wide. The underlying message to teachers was that each person has a key role to play in the evaluation process for self-growth that contributes to student learning and school culture.

Shared leadership empowered teachers to take responsibility and ownership. One teacher summed up this finding: “I think it gives you more of an opportunity to have some input into what is put into your evaluation.” The majority of participants in this study noted that the TTT model was an approach that provided for a positive experience. The inclusion of staff in the
implementation of the new educator evaluation system, therefore, contributed by providing peer trainers as catalysts for changing practice. Thus, it created a shared belief through developing a similar understanding of how to implement the new system by each person, which then resulted in a dorm of collective unity.

Anxiety and fear that the federal and state mandate produced for the collection of teachers and administrators. The next theme describes how the participants initially felt and later described concerns about implementing the new evaluation system and resulting changes. Participants relayed the anxiety and worry that accompanied the new mandate. A trainer recounted her experience:

Having that training and being the building trainer helped, but then I actually had to do...I was training staff for their part of it and what they're going to do. It was a very unique experience. I feel that all those trainings were very helpful to me, because they (consultants) were very thorough and they provided a lot of information, I also feel that I was able to help ease the anxieties of some staff members, because when you bring on something new, sometimes, people get nervous. I find now that everyone is pretty comfortable with it.

The fear and uncertainty cycled as new components of the initiative were introduced and resurfaced with each additional change. Teachers reported feeling “overwhelmed” and sometimes in the position of having to “defend” their work. One teacher said. “I think a lot of this evaluation also is proving ... It's all about proving yourself or proving what you do and proving that you're worthy…” The trainers, too, noted ambiguities in how the materials were interpreted as well as what the expectations involved. “I think there was a lot of resistance from a lot of staff about it, because everything new is scary. Everything new is scary, and the fact that
when it was initially put out, there were so many unanswered questions.” One trainer spoke directly how she handled teachers concerns during a training session by saying, "Listen, it's going to take time. Don't melt down. We're going to get through this together." As she predicted, the expectations became clearer and the tensions began to level off over time.

The perception of teamwork with an evolving practice contributed to a development of routine and predictability. The sense of team resonated from the classroom teacher through the building administrators. One teacher summarized her perception of the implementation of the new educator evaluation using a team model as follows:

I'm very fortunate that my team members, we collaborate well together and it just seems that we were able to work questions altogether, issues altogether. I do know that at several of our faculty meetings last year, we were given clarification on things that seem to be confusing. We're pretty fortunate here because our administrators will give us reminders that the timeline just needs to be completed by the state and I don't think that's so in other buildings. Between my grade level team, colleagues, and administration, I really do feel like we're working together here.

The school administrator also spoke positively about the use of a team approach to ease with the adjustment and build in mutual support for staff and commented:

A routine that we’ve established here is team goals. I feel like that routine has assisted in making people feel more comfortable. It’s scary to put yourself out there with an individual goal, because, “What if I don’t meet the goal? What if I’m the only one that doesn’t meet the goal?” One of the ways that we really embraced here is through team goals because it feels a lot … you feel a lot more protected...
Teachers appear to have found solace within the context of their teams. However, a number of the teachers because of their area of specialty were without an identified team and therefore receive support and validation through other structures such as Professional Learning Communities and faculty meetings or, stated that they have a level of comfort in seeking answers to their questions from the identified building trainers.

Future projected changes are another source that sparks stress that creates anticipatory anxiety for both teachers and administrators. Changes in formatting of responsibilities, the need for increased depth in formulating goals, and future rollouts from the government continue to complicate the general implementation of the new educator evaluation system. One particular change that many of those interviewed noted was the transition from a primarily paper artifact collection system to a computer system called Teach Point. Teach Point was an add-on to the district wide system, which each staff person was required to incorporate into how practice was recorded. A level of comfort and savvy with using the computer was necessary for this portion of the reporting system. Needless to say, how this portion was received was relative to past experience as one teacher remarked, “It made a lot of people really uneasy and especially veteran teachers who are not necessarily super-comfortable with using the computer, using the website.” The trainers along with additional trainings were then provided and proved useful for those who were in need of developing this skill set.

Now that the initial phase of implementing the new educator evaluation system is operable as this is the third year in use, faculty and administrators continue to be evaluation using the new format. Although there is a varied level of proficiency, the amount of comfort reported continues by an individual with resulting connections to each other either through the use of peers for guidance or team shared goals. The tensions are again increasing as many are
now expected to create new goals, which should be based upon self and student assessments. Staff members are adjusting their goals from the initial cycle to “doable” levels that are representative of what their expectations are for themselves and the students. One teacher educator remarked:

They're (teachers) looking at depth, and I think that they're being more conscientious.

They've developed their systems where we could be more specific. Where I felt I needed that structure before, this year there have been changes in the forms that are in Teach Point which offer structure.

This bit of progress and reassurance, too, has been complicated with the simultaneous introduction of Common Core Standards. The governing education departments within the federal and state continue to add additional initiatives and, as a result, there are questions surfacing about how to blend the mandates to create efficient and effective operations. Fear is again beginning to surface for staff related to their questioning about if and how state-testing results will possibly be used within the formatting of the new educator evaluation system. It is evident that the level of concern and comfort by staff ebb and flow with the introduction of incremental changes made.

*The belief that staff learning together created reciprocity opening the school to integrated the new system.* Teacher and administrators learn the system simultaneously. This approach developed a mutual reliance and interdependence as each participant made sense of the system individually, as a group, and across role divisions. Each established professional and student goals that were interwoven throughout the school. Another major theme that participants reported was the fact that all staff, regardless of their role or status, learned about and how to use the new educator evaluation together. The metaphor of Noah’s Ark, that was noted earlier,
originated from several of the participants commenting, “We were all in the same boat.” This cliché was used because the new system was in fact introduced to everyone at once, with teachers and administrators adopting the mandate together.

Consultants first provided the initial trainings to teacher educators and administrators. These highly valued consultants provided trainings on the model modules during the summer and throughout the first academic year of implementation. Although the trainings with the consultants for the trainers discontinued, they did, however, continue for the administrators throughout the second and third year of implementation. The administrators continued to learn about how to evaluate staff using the new model, whereas those trained teachers, without additional designated district or school-based time or stipend, continued to provide assistance and support to their peers. In addition, administrators allotted time for teachers to continue to work together through faculty meetings, grade level, and professional learning communities. Teacher also reported that they would approach a colleague who possessed a certain skill for assistance as needed.

The new educator evaluation provided a tool for staff and routines were put into place to set the system into motion. Teachers and administrators spoke about how the new system was ultimately an improvement in the evaluation process with the inclusion of day-to-day practices that produced evidence, observations, timelines, and reminders that were used in an attempt to make the required changes more manageable. Interestingly, teachers felt empowered as evidenced by this statement, “I feel like it makes it a little bit easier. It's not just what they come in and see two times during the year. You have the opportunity to say, ‘Oh, well, remember, I had 100% of my conferences done.’ ‘Oh, remember, I have this phone call log where I had to call this parent every week for the entire school year.’” Likewise, administrators reported that
somewhat paradoxically spending more time in the classrooms and reviewing uploads on Teach Point was not only less work, but more productive.

One third of the participants, however, had a contradictory experience. Even though they had attended the trainings and had available all of the same resources, their evaluations took place during the second year of the new educator evaluation system. This position, they felt, put them at somewhat of a disadvantage. As one teacher noted:

The year it was implemented I was not on an evaluation year so not that I was by any means sitting back and saying, ‘Oh, I don't need to know this until next year.’ I was taking notes but I didn't feel the stress that I think a lot of other people were because I still had … I think we all did, had the extra year.

The extra time resulted in those who were evaluated during the second year utilizing the team goal, but the lack of either ongoing or refresher trainers for trainers or teachers resulted in the power shifting back to the administrators to introduce new changes and then, themselves, provide additional support to the school staff. Some teachers also noted that they are in unique positions, which adds another level of difficulty. It was necessary for these teachers and specialists to either craft a goal specific to their position or reach out to like colleagues throughout the district for support and assistance. Here are two examples that portray various approaches. The first one teacher reported how she managed the startup phase of writing her goals:

It was difficult for us around creating our goals as a Special Education staff, because when the district rolls out goals and they say, ‘Here, this should be for third grade. This should be for fourth grade...’ We found it challenging to modify them to us, but the district has been very good about that.
The next teacher found support in her small group of colleagues that approach the problem of goal writing for specialists in a collaborative manner, made the following observation:

We're going to do this as a group activity, which was another way to learn. You put kids in groups to learn from each other. Some had more knowledge, some less. We did it as a group and we were able to successfully learn from each other so that was a good learning technique.

The new educator evaluation system promoted staff to forge new and creative usages of established work groups, grade level teams, and how each person interfaced with colleagues who were peer trainers. Those with similar job responsibilities or the same grade level banded together and established new patterns of interactions with other teachers and their administrators. The new educator evaluation was a work in progress that needed to be interpreted and applied to practice. The first common professional goal that staff shared was to learn about using the evaluation system, self-assessment, and goal writing. Next, staff in their grade levels and smaller work units identified a common student goal. Again, this goal may or may not fit across all classes based upon the student’s ability and focus of intervention. Regardless, there was a sense of unity and promise for improved student learning that permeated the school culture. Teachers ultimately believed, through the guided individual and group training sessions, that they would implement the new education system with the intended fidelity. Teachers continue to remark about how the new system has resulted in their strengthen connections and created interdependencies with peers to accomplish the professional and student goals that they identified in their individual written evaluations. One teacher summarized the influence the new system had on her practice:
I really think that this new teacher evaluation has also brought us together as a group and even closer because it seems anytime we get to speak with one another, it's about our teacher evaluation. If something comes up about the new evaluation, ‘Hey, did you do this? I think I missed this. Can you help me with this?’ We realized we're all in this together, and I think it's brought us closer as a group.

This teacher later continues the discussion and comments about the role of leadership:

I think that starts from the top. I really do. We have an administration here that will tell us we're doing a great job that she understands what we need to do. Yet on the other hand she has to do her job. If we keep this as a positive thing, I think it's going to be okay and if we can keep a positive attitude. It's all about attitude and it's all about collaboration.

This remark demonstrated how the teachers and administrators work together in order to implement the new educator evaluation system. Figure 3 is a visual representation of the interactions and the importance of ongoing interface between formal leaders who are the administrators, informal leaders who opted to take on the role of facilitator and intermediaries, the participants, also known as the followers, and the situation, which in this case is the adoption and adaptation to a new evaluation system into the context of a school. The participants in this research study clearly articulated that teamwork and collaboration are important and crucial factors in order for an effective system to be implemented and become a part of the day-to-day-routines.
Figure 3. The Implementation of the 5-Step Cycle of Educator Performance Model using a Distributed Leadership Approach

*Shared Responsibility that was evident through the interactions and teamwork demonstrated in grade level meetings, faculty meetings, and professional learning communities to operationalize the mandate.* Opportunities were provided for teachers to meet together and openly communicate with one another to alleviate stress through clarification of expectations and set course for professional practice and student learning.

The teachers’ spoke of the importance of how leaders responded to their needs and to what was required to comply with directives from the government. Within the context of team meetings and in agreement with administration many, but not all of the teachers, at this school opted to share a student goal that focused on a writing benchmark for students. This proved to be somewhat of a challenge as evaluations commenced. As a result, the grade level team opted to modify the student goal, which was accomplished through working to problem-solve with peers and with the support of the administrator. One teacher recalled her experience:
Last year, I discussed the student goal with my grade level team. I'm very fortunate that my team members, we collaborate well together and it just seems that we were able to work questions altogether, issues altogether. I do know that at several of our faculty meetings last year, we were given clarification on things that seem to be confusing. We're pretty fortunate here because our administrators will give us reminders that the timeline just needs to be completed... I don't think that's so in other buildings. Between my grade level team, colleagues and administration, I really do feel like we're working together here.

This comment as well as the next accentuates the necessity to have clear direction and input for changes to be understood and implemented school-wide over time:

What has to be done has been communicated. It's not, ‘Well, what is it exactly we need?’... We've learned over the past year and a half exactly how we need to respond to the program, what we need to put up as evidence.

The base established by the trainers eased the transition for the teachers and administrators by encouraging open dialogue and cooperative problem solving throughout the implementation of the new system. The district then added additional structure with established reporting timelines for submitting individual growth and student learning goals along with supporting evidence.

There was a sense of mutual ownership and responsibility that resonated throughout all of the interviews. Teachers have gradually become familiar with how to navigate the new system. One of the teachers, who clearly articulated her understanding of the evolving process and described:

We're all in this together and we all have different roles. The teacher trainers are more in the background right now compared to what they were when this first came out. I would
say that the administrators do have a large role right now. You're talking about observing the teacher; you're talking about writing up that observation; you're talking about looking over the information that the teachers have put on the Teach Point, so they have a very large role. Our role is to make sure that we do keep up with our Teach Point. We do post what we need to do and we have a calendar that we have to follow. Those teacher trainers are there in the background, but we know that they're there and if we have any problems, we know we can go to them anytime. Again, colleague collaboration is very, very important.

The teachers and administrators are working in conjunction with each other. The new system has taken shape and is creative a natural flow to the process.

Establishing tools and routines is crucial when incorporating a new practice. The predictability of what the expectations are is comforting, which in turn allows for the development of a plan to be able to assess, reassess, evaluate, and respond as needed when faced with associated challenges. The previous quote, as well as many others, spoke to the ability of teachers to access assistance from their peers and openly dialogue with administration. The structure of the new educator evaluation, with the increased capacity for teachers to record their own evidence, appears to have empowered educators to take a more active role in the evaluation process as well as recognize their contributions to others. The best way to demonstrate one’s own learning is to then be able to share it with another, and as one teacher pointed out:

I also feel that I'm an informal leader. I have some mentees in the building that they'll come to me and question regarding whether they have done this correctly. I'll bring up my Teach Point, they'll bring up their Teach Point and we'll collaborate. Obviously, they are non-professional status and I am, but still, we still have to put the same material on.
They just have different dates. I think I have like a dual role. I don't feel myself as just a teacher, but I think behind-the-scenes of helping my colleagues I would say as an informal leader role as well as a participant.

This quote also accentuated the theme that was repeated throughout the interviews, like a mantra, “We are in this together.” Another teacher speak specifically to tools and routines and described:

I think the expectations are clear and concise between all of us. We now know what our expectations are and if we feel that we are not coming together with these expectations, this is where our colleagues come together and we sit down and we talk about it.

Another teacher shared the previous sentiments and remarked:

It was supposed to make it easier for us, for administration to evaluate us, to look at ourselves of what we're doing in the classroom, to look at the students. I think, in reality, I think all of those things came together and it's flowing now.

As time passes, the system becomes more ingrained and staff is able to build upon the model.

Another teacher spoke to how structure contributes to the process of incorporating change:

They're (teachers) looking at depth, and I think that they're being more conscientious. They've developed their systems where we could be more specific. Where I felt I needed that structure before, this year there have been changes in the forms that are in Teach Point which offer structure.

The acceptance of change and interdependence that was encouraged from the beginning by the peer trainers contributed to the culture of a team spirit of collaboration that permeates throughout the school and is evident through the strengthened relationships that resulted from incorporating the mandate.
Culture Carriers that were created through the elected use of the Train-The-Trainer model. This practice put staff in the position of learning about and buying-in to the model through their participation in being trained and training staff to implement the change in practice. These informal leaders established the base from which further development and final institutionalization of the new system occurred.

The use of the trainers provided seed people who provided the fertile ground and acted as culture builder for the new educator evaluation system to be accepted into practice. The trainers led staff in learning about the new system and provided the support for them to begin using it. The dedication and willingness of the trainers mirrored what was later evident in the context of interviews. Connections were made that resulted in a group of individuals who collectively rallied together to not only meet the requirements of putting the new educator evaluation into practice, but exceeded them by incorporating the new system through a tiered internal structure that was able to pass the knowledge and from one level of staff to another. The trainers trained the teachers and the teachers then took on the responsibility of training each other. Established teachers reached out to new teachers as mentors and opened their classroom door to novice teachers through practicums. The internal supports offered to each other represented a supportive and caring environment. One administrator interviewed summarized this point:

We have our in-building trainer. She also provides support to other staff members. One thing I do see a lot with our staff members, they collaborate together too. When somebody finds something that's working for them or they'll collaborate as a team to come up with their professional practice goals and their student learning goals.

The TTT trainers initially listened to staff concern, which alleviate their anxiety. The training groups, forging ahead through the initial resistance, were able to accomplish the identified goal
of implementing the new educator evaluation. The use of peer trainers, who acted in the capacity of informal leaders, modeled to others a willingness to learn about the new system. This level of calculated risk permitted others to eventually buy-in to the process of not only using the new system, but also imparting the information to others through their teams and across the school in larger faculty groups. The willingness of the trainers, by example, allowed others to be vulnerable. The following teacher’s quote speaks to the connections between the individual, her associated teams, the school, and the state of Massachusetts, where the mandate initiated. As one teacher expressed:

I’m going to say it (education evaluation) has made me more aware of what I need to do, what my responsibilities are. Not saying that I didn't know, but you think about it more often. Sometimes you take things for granted and after all these years of teaching, it's almost like, ‘Yeah, I can do that. I'll do that.’ When, again, making sure that we follow all rules and all expectations of what, not only this public school district wants us to do, but the State of Massachusetts.

This statement is reflective of the cycle of change. The high level of support and mutual assistance among teachers and administrators lead to the implementation of the new system. Teachers, while incorporating the new system into practice folded the requirements into other roles, such as mentor for new teachers in the district and preceptor for student teachers from local colleges and universities. The introduction of the new system and its associated requirements also led to a heightened awareness of including another key component of the system of student learning, which is the family members. One of the teachers clearly identified how the new system accentuates the importance of including parents in the education process as well as taking other factors into consideration and explained:
Overall, looking back from the beginning to now, it helps us with problem solving, all right, not only with the new teacher evaluations, but we take a step back and we stop and think what is really important in our eyes and in the student’s eyes. We've always wanted a lot of parent involvement, but we've said it and it went by the wayside, but now, with that, the standard and new teacher evaluation, it's right there. We make sure that we make it part of our teaching, going to things like books for bingo, the breakfasts, any type of activity that we have here at school. We try to make it a best effort to be there.

It is also evident that administrators are aware of the availability of staff is to assist one another and commented, “When new staff have trouble, they have mentors. Then we also direct them to building trainers (as an additional resource).” The tiers of people helping each other feel accomplished through the recognition that there are formal and informal leaders that both contribute to instituting the new practice and formed the layers of support for staff to continue to promote its use. Thus, there is a fluidity that balances the mandated change with various supports. This process is able to then maintain and sustain the new system as other changes are introduced.

**Differences between Individual Interviews and Focus Group Findings**

The themes identified and reviewed demonstrate the similarities noted between the individual and focus group interviews. Overall, participants recanted their experiences in a positive light. Each person interviewed was open to sharing their initial fears and struggles with either imparting or learning the new material and how it applied to their individual, group, and school-wide practice. While all those interviewed spoke at length about how they utilized each other for support and as available resources, the members of the focus group went into greater depth about how shifting to the use of the new evaluation system has strengthened not only the
understanding of expectations, but how this increased awareness has contributed to developing stronger bonds with each other as professionals in the classroom. One teacher in the focus group said, “You were going to be held accountable in a way that you weren't necessarily before.” The group members also spoke about how they used the requirement of the new system to provide artifacts and adhere to timelines as an opportunity to showcase their work.

Focus group members appeared to be more open to discussing their concerns, such as how the system continues to change in ways that improve practice as well as continue to raise their anxiety level with implementing these additional changes. There were a number of more concrete examples about how unannounced observations are viewed by these members as too unstructured. In contract, teachers and administrators who were interviewed individually reported feeling that the shorter observations yield quality data and is a sufficient tool for evaluation along with the use of other artifacts that are provided by the individual. True to the problem-solving stance of this focus group, members discussed how the observations could possibly be improved. They suggested choosing a theme per month, such as a “focus wall”. This focused observation would then lend itself to allowing teachers to incrementally skill build. This approach would, according to the participants also lessen the possibility of a “gotcha”, which is what group and individual participants described as how administrators can punish or discredit teachers with a negative report.

Another example of difference was the focus group participant’s willingness to talk about the perception of increased pressure to participate in school community activities. Although all teachers reported their desire to be an active participant, the focus group members spoke about how the increased level of participation has created additional stress to their already demanding
positions. The following example from one of the teachers highlighted how a sense of uncertainty and wanting to do their best work changed teachers’ actions:

I think that this system was forcing people to go to these events. I mean last year I literally went to several PTO meetings. Not that I don't go to PTO meetings but I certainly don't go to all, but I knew I was on a year (for evaluation)... I went to Bingo for Books and Breakfast for Santa... you should see the PTO meetings. They're packed because people are so... There's a sense of fear...

The lack of clarity about how much constitutes enough, as previously noted continued to be addressed through a trial and error process. One of the teachers, an administrator, and a participant in the focus group all reported a situation where one teacher submitted the receipt from McDonald’s night as evidence of her participation. The story was told in an attempt to describe the learning curve that took place while implementing the new system. Teacher, now, with experience, the support of teachers and administration, and a revised union contract have a clearer sense of what quality evidence looks like.

Unlike how the individual participants view their level of ownership of the new educator evaluation, focus group members accentuate not only their responsibility, but also the importance of administrators taking responsibility for oversight and setting an example in the building. While all teachers provided multiple examples of how they are providing evidence, the group participants emphasized the importance of administrators taking charge of recording the participation of teachers in common events. One example is simply keeping a sign in sheet for after hour events as a reference of who attended instead of having the teachers take time to enter this in their Teach Point electronic file. “We're spending all this time having to prove or provide evidence of what we do, rather than utilizing that time working on plan books, curriculum, data-
driven instruction, and things like that, this time is used for this tool.” The union in fact heard this complaint, as teachers, who are beginning a new contract, are no longer required to upload evidence. Teachers will continue, however, to provide evidence if they so choose to demonstrate an exceptional level of performance, which will then be reflected in their evaluations.

Teachers want to be validated and recognized for their hard work. The participants of the focus group emphasized similarities they observed between measuring teacher growth through using the new educator evaluation and how student learning is assessed. “I recognize the language and sometimes it's not necessarily specific. It's very general for multiple people to have the same thing. Much like we would with a student, honestly.” Teachers also spoke about learning how to use the new educator evaluation tool through the small group format. They felt that although the TTT model provided information and support, the condensed sessions that were held over the course of the school year was too concentrated to the point of oversaturation. One teacher remarked, “I was so overwhelmed, I'm like a sped kid myself.” Even though the sessions felt latent with too much content by the participants, all group members remarked favorably about the level of empathy and sensitivity the trainers offered. The level of expertise was, however, limited to the information provided to the trainers during the limited amount of time they were trained. Considering this gap, it was suggested by focus group participants that those trained either continue with refreshers as new changes emerge or that there be a continued connection between the trainers or other teachers and the hired consultants as a resource. The consultants do continue to train administrators and are available on an as needed basis to answer questions. The discrepancy in access by teachers and administrators gives the appearance that the system is reverting to a hieratical rather than a shared information model. As one participant remarked, “Knowledge is power.”
Teachers repeatedly shared comments about their investment in student learning and being a positive contributor to the school community. Their love of their profession coupled with the need for balance with the various new demands and additional responsibilities was echoed throughout the interviews. Therefore, teachers such as this one quoted, preferred to be involved in decision-making processes:

My big thing is and always has been I really wish the classroom teachers were able to have a bigger role when making decisions for us, meaning the teachers in the classrooms, who are the ones that are working with these kids day in, day out, who are the ones working with these parents, who are the ones working with the curriculum. It's us. It just seems to me we are not asked our input. I mean even the new teacher evaluation. Refresher courses would assist trainers to maintain a current understanding of the expectations as they continue to be an available support for teachers and administrators.

Summary

Teachers contributed to and benefit from involvement with implementing change such as the new educator evaluation. Shared leadership is equivalent to collaborative learning. Staff, as evidenced by their reported perceptions and experiences, implemented the new educator evaluation through the efforts of teachers, acting in the capacity of informal leaders, by teacher who are dedicated to their work with students, and with the ongoing leadership that is provided by administrators. As a result, relationships school-wide are stronger because of how the new system highlights, recognizes, and validates the work that is done by teaching staff on a daily basis.

Staff anxiety was containing and lessened through the use of peer-to-peer instruction, creating interdependence, and teamwork that occurs on grade levels, by discipline, and through
faculties. Trainers helped their peers to gain an understanding of the process and each person continues to integrate the mandated change with the support of fellow teachers and administrators to refine the skills that are needed in using the tool to improve practice, showcase their quality teaching strategies, and demonstrate how students are learning in the classroom. Those interviewed for this study demonstrated how efforts continue from the recent implementation and application of the new system to expand depth of practice and move toward institutionalizing these changes through collaborated efforts.

The themes that appeared through the detailed review of the materials enabled the researcher to better understand how the new educator evaluation was implemented through the perspectives of the teachers and administrators who lived the experience in the context of one elementary school. These findings inform the main research question as well as the three sub-questions that were driving this study. The themes identified suggest that the interactions and relationships that were formed through the use of the Train-the-trainer (TTT) model opened the system to a collective implementation between formal and informal leaders and teachers.

The findings from this study prompt a further discussion of how distributed leadership may influence the implementation of mandated change by the government to school systems. In sum, the findings may indicate distributed leadership not only contributed to only organizational change, but also to organizational growth. The teachers’ perceived that they were empowered by learning about the new system through informal leaders and that the TTT approach might have contributed to their motivation to learn, increased commitment to the process, and eventual led to the ownership of the new system.

The evaluation tool adopted from the state also contributed to promoting increased faculty collaboration, interdependency, and reciprocal dependence amongst and between staff. It
is clearly indicated that while distributed leadership operated within the context of the school hierarchy, it opened a democratic process that encouraged teacher involvement and interpretation in the process of learning to use and implement the new evaluation. Overall, this research study provided an example of how teachers and administrators perceived the use of distributed leadership in this K-5 school to direct learning through interactions to collectively implement the new 5-Step Cycle Performance Evaluation.
Chapter V: Discussion

This study described how teachers and administrators made sense of the new educator evaluation by learning from each other through interactions to implement the 5-Step Cycle Performance Evaluation Model into practice. The findings represent the perceptions of teachers and administrators who collectively worked to adopt the new mandate and adapted their practice in a single elementary school within a larger urban district. The findings were interpreted through an organizational change theoretical framework and a distributed leadership lens (Harris, 2012; Mayrowetz, 2008; Spillane, 2006; Weick & Quinn, 1995). The study was designed to further explore the following research questions:

The central question:

How did the construct of distributed leadership help us to understand how one elementary school community implemented the mandated educator evaluation system?

Sub-questions:

1. What structures and strategies were included (or absent) in the processes that made it possible for administrators and teachers to implement the new educator evaluation system into practice?

2. What opportunities did the mandate provide for teachers to act as informal leaders who worked in conjunction with formal leaders and participants?

3. How did the implementation of the new educator evaluation contribute to administrator and teacher professional growth and student learning?

Chapter One presented the problem of practice and the significance of developing a collaborative school culture to meet the demands placed on teachers and administrators in public schools. Chapter Two reviewed the literature related to teacher leadership and other topics as
related to the research questions. Chapter Three discussed the case study research design, data collection, and techniques for analysis. Data for this study were then collected from multiple sources in order to triangulate the findings from the various sources and perspectives to craft a case study that provided a rich description of how leaders and participants implemented the government mandate into practice (Merriam, 2009; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2014).

The results in Chapter Four indicated that distributed leadership positively contributed to implementing the mandated change, built collaboration, and therefore, affected the attitudes and beliefs that ultimately led to the interdependence amongst faculty and a strengthened school culture. The findings demonstrated how the teachers and administrators learned about the new educator evaluation system and the elements that contributed to the development of structures that assisted in accomplishing this evolutionary change (Weick & Quinn, 1995). Overall, the sharing of knowledge and power through the construct of distributed leadership practices provided opportunities for teachers to take and share responsibilities throughout implementing the initial change as well as those adjustments made later to refine the practice.

Synthesis of Findings

The case study analysis in Chapter Four identified five major themes. The five main findings that emerged are best summed by the word verity, which is representative of the subjective truth of the participant’s according to their experiences. Verity is therefore used as an acronym to summarize the findings of this study. The V represents a shared vision or mission. E, evidenced the emotional reaction that was sometimes seen as reluctance or a barrier. The R is the reciprocity that was evident throughout the learning experience, which was a collaboration of the I or interactions that led to a shared responsibility. And the TY was the theory of organizational change and distributed leadership that resulted from the development of culture.
carriers who provided an understanding of the new educator evaluation and promoted an opportunity that then led to others to step up and embrace leadership roles. Multiple teachers who adopted various informal leadership roles demonstrated the practice of post-heroic or distributed leadership at the identified study site and produced a process of teachers teaching teachers, a somewhat meta occurrence (Spillane, 2006).

*A shared vision was created using peer-to-peer instruction.*

The findings illustrated the importance of informal leaders or key point people for adult learners when incorporating change. Teachers and administrators at the K-5 elementary school identified in study, along with the district staff, originally questioned the change, and challenged how it would be implemented. A plan was devised, through a series of meetings with various stakeholders, to utilize educators as trainers for the district. Given the magnitude of the directive, it was determined that the charge was too large and complex for traditional forms of professional development. Therefore, the teacher’s union along with the central office administration devised a plan to work with a consulting firm that trained educators as trainers for the remaining staff.

The teachers and administrators that were interviewed did report favorably about the train the trainer (TTT) model that was utilized. Participants in this study repeatedly expressed how the process reinforced the current teams’ efforts and added other routines such as goal formation in order to accomplish implementing the mandated evaluation. The trainings and resulting structures can be viewed similarly to how Spillane (2008) described distributed leadership, which involves multiple individuals and uses tools and routines to accomplish identified goal.

Teachers and administrators noted the increased interactions between teachers as a main contributor to how the new educator system began. It began, according to their account, as a
veneer and later moved to becoming embedded into the school culture (Gronn, 2002b). The teachers and administrators joined forces, which promote two-way communications over time. This finding indicated that the understanding the trainings provided to the teachers laid the groundwork for day-to-day practice. This not only empowered teachers, but also resulted in administrators working as an extension of the classroom rather than being separate from the interactions. Teachers and administrators spoke candidly about how learning about and incorporating the new system added depth to individual and team practice through their professional growth, which they anecdotally reported contributed to improved student learning.

Peer led trainings were viewed as the foundation to the interdependent relationships that were necessary to implement the new system (Suhrheinrick, 2011). It is likely using the evaluation model format, which was provided by the state, and created a springboard for examining how practices might be improved. The participants in this study acknowledged how the use of multiple leaders or what Spillane (2006) labeled a leader plus approach enhanced the learning process as well as their own ability to implement and utilize the new system both individually and as a collective unit.

It was evident throughout the interviews that the principal’s behaviors, along with the vice principal, encouraged the staff in the school community to interpret and apply the changes to their teaching practice through distributed leadership. Although the teachers felt empowered by the shift to be included as active participants in the evaluation process, they also clearly stated that it was imperative that there be a point person, in this case the principal who oversaw the changes and was equally accountable to the teaching staff and school district. All participants, including teachers and administrators, stressed the importance for ongoing mutual support and
the need for continued open communications for professional growth and student learning to benefit.

*Teachers are more open to learn from peers who share a similar perspective.*

The expression of emotion was paramount as teachers and administrators told their stories. The heightened affect reported was a cyclic experience as it occurred in the initial phase of implementation and resurfaced with the progression of later adjustments to the format thus changing their routines. Despite their role, which varied from classroom teacher to specialist, the educators were required to individually and collectively make sense of the directive by learning about the new system and working collaboratively with one another (Weick, 1995). The emotion that staff experienced appeared to be a reflection of the perception that their professional identity was challenged. This challenge, along with the shifting of power from the administrators to the teachers, resulted in the teachers becoming more responsible for self and student assessments in the context of the new educator evaluation. This change then created initial uncertainty, thus challenging the status quo.

The shift to the use of informal leaders as experts who trained peers about how to use the 5-Step Cycle of Performance Evaluation created a new standard, one in which the teachers were active participants in the process. Similar to the definition used by Harris (2004), Mayrowetz (2008), and Spillane (2006), a key finding in this study illuminated how distributed leadership works effectively within a hieratical structure with bottom up involvement from informal leaders and follower in the context of the situation. It was ultimately the guidance from the informal leaders that assisted the teaching staff to align their thinking about the new process with each other.
Predictably, the increased level of anxiety and fear was palpable with each training or introduction of each new responsibility or routine. Although over time, peer support helped to ease the general upset and resistance. Generally, teachers expressed worry about being judged and/or feared being undervalued. Once versed with and sharing a mutual understanding of the new expectations their level of worry decreased. Teachers were then able to comprehend the added components and developed the skills needed to implement the changes to adjust to the new practice.

Study findings suggested that teachers preferred to work with peers who were within the same school and content or grade level. Teachers reported a positive attitude towards their training experience using the train-the-trainer (TTT) model. It was surmised that the use of peer trainers offered a level of comfort and encouraged the participants to identify with the group, thus forming a collective mindset. Those within the collective were then able to apply the new educator evaluation to the existing system as well as create additional routines and structure to accomplish the mandate. Hence, the practice of collaborative learning defined the interactions between the leaders and participants creating interdependencies within this context (Spillane, 2006).

The research findings also demonstrated that the interactions and shared responsibilities that are required to implement the new educator evaluation were ingrained in the model itself. The 5-Step Cycle for Performance Evaluation Model in and of itself required a connection with increasing staff capacity and professional growth. Through their interviews it was evident that teachers clearly describe their new sense of identity, as well being vested by taking ownership of the new system. This self-reported ownership suggests a connection to their increased commitment to the process. The level of responsibility and accountability these teachers
demonstrated might therefore be viewed as contributing to the integrity of the new educator evaluation in practice and in turn contributed to strengthening the school culture.

**Change involved time for teachers to interpret the new expectations.**

The fresh start with a new model resulted in the development of mutual reliance and interdependence as each participant worked to make sense of the system individually, as a group, and across roles in the school (Hollingworth, 2012). The understanding that individual teachers as informal leaders would take a position of problem solving was beneficial to each person as well as aligning staff together across various professional positions. Those interviewed for this study often commented on the benefits of sharing the burden of change, which in turn made the process more tolerable and meaningful. In addition, the inclusion of multiple informal and formal leaders created an atmosphere that promoted discussion and encouraged further inquiry. The new model was bestowed upon staff to interpret the system in order to effectively apply it.

The teacher trainers and administrators helped to create strategies to manage the change, which were later routinized into structures including grade level meetings, content specific groups, and faculty meetings (Spillane, 2006). These structures reinforced and repeated the process of sensemaking for each individual and throughout the school to form a culture where staff increasingly became more reliant upon one another (Harris & Muijs, 2007; Harris, 2004; Heller & Firestone, 1995, Weick, 1995).

The use of informal leaders may be viewed as the beginning of the process of shifting the leadership authority to the teachers as well as permitted the teachers to interpret the meaning or sensemaking of the new system (Weick, 1995). Teachers found it helpful when trainers shared the information and prompted an opportunity to interpret the new system as they rebalanced while simultaneously infusing the change into the existing system. Finally, the learning that was
achieved through the internal change process provided the foundation for staff to incorporate a new identity, which as staff reported resulted in increased heedful or mindful practice (Weick & Roberts, 1993). Findings of this study that are similar to Heller and Firestone (1995) indicated the new system was implemented through redundancy, or the recreation of the action, within and throughout the school by multiple leaders and teachers.

The first step in the process of sensemaking for the teachers was to construct an identity (Weick, 1995). The role of each individual including administrator, teacher trainer, and teacher were clearly identified in the participant sample (Figure 4). Individuals were initially identified by their status of teacher or administrator. As noted earlier, anxiety and fear initially resulted from the fact that everyone questioned why the change was necessary and why it was being implemented. As the process solidified, so did the vision. However, in order for the implementation of the new educator evaluation to occur a review of past events or looking retrospectively was necessary to obtain a frame of reference. Teacher trainers, teachers, and administrators all evidenced this through their stories of their sense of competency and their demonstrated ability to refine practice to meet the current expectations.

It was evident that the teachers and administrators found comfort in learning together as a social collective working collaboratively to implement the new system. Individual evaluation timetable along with multiple additional changes resulted from extracting cues or feedback from practice. Finally, the last indicator that the process of sensemaking that was utilized included the fact the project was based on plausibility, rather than accuracy. The process moved from teachers and administrators needing information and support initially to refining their skills within specific groups for professional growth. Implementing the mandate, therefore, demonstrated an example of the sensemaking perspective in the context of this change.
The educator evaluation was instituted into practice with established timelines, reviews, and ongoing teacher and student assessments. Teachers and administrators described how established routines promoted the continuation of leaders and participants acting collaboratively in the education setting (Gronn, 2012b). Through a series of reciprocal occurrences the leaders and followers have influenced one another, resulting in interdependence throughout the process that can be viewed as a positive contribution to opening communications, thus strengthening their interactions.

**Interactions and teamwork resulted in new practice.**

Teachers and administrators noted the creation of a working team model that mirrored the student teacher model where there are clear expectations and an identified path utilizing formative and summative assessments. The complex circular process of changing to the new education evaluation created challenges along the way due to the sensitive nature of the content. Those interviewed, although sometimes reluctantly, voiced the opinion that the new educator evaluation system improved the overall level of organization to the evaluation process and resulting functionality. The interactive approach led to increased trust, available support, and therefore promotes group unity and cohesion.

The multiple leaders and participants, working together, provided the foundation for a more effective practice. It is possible that the inclusion of multiple leaders led to the new system’s implementation of the new educator evaluation not as a task completed, but with integrity and richness that had permeated and consequently changed daily practice. The interdependence between teachers and administrators was evident as the teachers and leaders shared responsibilities that sometimes overlapped and often complemented one another.
The mutual reinforcement that resulted from the various interactions is what Heller and Firestone (1995) described as “redundancy”. Redundancy is the repetition that occurred with the leaders interacting with the teachers along with reciprocity between the teachers with leaders (Heller & Firestone, 1995). This behavior, as we have seen in this study, had the potential to strengthen the culture, which perhaps resulted in improved functioning. The interactive behaviors produced a synergy amongst all stakeholders involved in the change. These findings are validated by both Gronn’s (2002b) assertion about the dynamics of role or position has in the context of distributed leadership and Spillane (2006) who identified practice as significant.

The transparency that resulted from the process was only possible with the full commitment from the school principal (Harris, 2012; Heller & Firestone, 1995; Hollingworth, 2012). She, through her own and other’s reports, was able to embrace the new system through collaborative efforts. This was evidenced through the established train-the trainer model and her due diligence with the trainers and teachers to weave the new expectations into the existing grade level teams, professional learning communities, and other established groups such as faculty meetings. This sharing of power led to the development of an understanding of the necessary patterns of interactions or sequencing to provide a standardized practice with a common meaning.

Informal leaders act as culture carriers who positively influenced others.

The use of informal leaders as teacher educators put staff in the position of learning about and committing to the model through their participation in being trained and training staff to implement the mandated change into practice. This finding was especially significant as it represented how the new system would be sustained and further developed over time. Initially, the content pointed to the trainers as the culture carriers who influenced the implementation of the change. This is true, however, upon closer review of the data as it was evidenced that there
were multiple tiered levels of culture carriers. Again, it was assumed that the train-the-trainer approach might be one of the key elements that influenced the implementation process so significantly.

The findings suggest that the subjective interpretations of the teachers and administrators identified the bottom up approach that drove implementing the change in response to the top down mandate. These staff members as trainers were the initial group of sense makers who then led others to follow. The TTT approach, therefore may have endorsed that the teacher trainers share the vision with the teachers, which might have increased their level of participation. The tools and structures that stretched over all staff then resulted in the development of interdependencies and a sense of belonging, thus forming group cohesion (Gronn, 2002a; Spillane, 2006). In essence, the new educator evaluation changed practice and shaped the practice away from the single leader to a distributed leadership model. It is important to remember that although tools framed the interactions it is the practice of routines that encompassed the leaders and participant setting a new direction for the school community.

The study findings indicated that teacher leaders who engaged in work groups with colleagues influenced the teacher’s understanding of the process and therefore, integrated the proposed changes into their professional practice (Hollingworth, 2012). Similar to Spillane’s (2006) findings, several of the participants in this study mentioned the importance of working collaboratively to learn, interpret, understand, and integrate the new initiative into practice. Although the new educator evaluation model appeared straightforward on paper, the staff had multiple questions about how to apply it to their daily practice at school. The teachers, who opted to be trained as trainers placed themselves in the position of learning and then trained their peers to adapt to the proposed system while collectively interpreting the nuances of the 5-Step
Cycle Performance Evaluation to mold tools and routines into the current system. It was observed that the informal leaders, as culture carriers, began the chain reaction that promoted the series of interactions, which made implementation possible.

It is suggested that the use of peer trainers demonstrated that leadership responsibilities were stretched over a group of individuals to allow for multiple interpretations, prompting a discussion that ultimately resulted in decision-making that influenced and defined how the mandate was implemented (Weick, 1995). The trainers were able to empathize with the teachers because of their familiarity with the complexities inherent in learning the new system. Teachers were then able to practice the new requirements in a supportive setting with peers to develop skills that they would then use in the context of their work (Suhrheinrick, 2011).

Using distributed leadership to implement the new educator evaluation encouraged collaboration and sensemaking of the proposed changes. The development of these essential skills continues to be an ongoing process. The findings of this study illustrated the complexity of undertaking a government mandate and that implementation entailed more than just the initial training and subsequent work sessions. Staff noted that although it is the third year of the implementation they are still learning and continue to benefit from peer interactions. This finding similar to Leithwood and Mascall (2008) indicated that learning is situated and socially constructed.

Distributed leadership, as seen in this study is still situated in the context of a hierarchical power structure, however, with bottom up influence. Informal leaders working with formal leaders and participants demonstrated how leadership was shared. This study, therefore, validated the existence of a shift from the heroic, single leadership theory in this particular school to a collective who led the mandated change. Formal leadership from the principal, as
cited in the literature and as seen from the findings, however, need to continue in order for the
construct of distributed leadership to continue to contribute to the implementation of the new
system to become institutionalized within the system (Harris, 2014).

This study demonstrated that schools require multiple leaders rather than an individual
leader due to the level of complexity involved in implementing change. The use of the TTT
model is one representation of a new approach to expand leadership to include teachers.
Distributed leadership in the context of the school in this study facilitated the mandated change
and strengthened the professional identity of the teachers, which may have increased their
motivation and commitment to implementing the change. This study was, therefore, able to
demonstrate how informal and formal leaders implemented the mandate school-wide working
with participants through a distributed leadership process. The process showed how the mandate
was implemented by a top down directive through the voices of the informal leaders and teachers
worked cooperatively on the ground to make sense of the 5-Step Cycle Performance Evaluation
and incorporate it into their practice school-wide.

Limitations of the Research

Although this research study generally addressed the research questions, the findings
must be interpreted with several limitations. First, in a qualitative case study the findings are
limited to one particular context. This research study focused on the implementation of the new
educator evaluation in one school, which is a subset of larger district, in Massachusetts. The
findings are also limited by the study design, which is a qualitative single case study. As
defined, a case study is a descriptive method rather than explanatory (Creswell, 2013; Yin,
2014). The data collection was descriptive and therefore did not yield the statistical analysis that
quantitative research would have produced. In essence, without a controlled condition conclusions about cause and effect relationships cannot be drawn.

A second key limitation of this study is the small sample size that is specific to a geographical location. This study was specific to a public K-5 elementary school located in an urban setting in Western Massachusetts. This case study approach, therefore, does not lead to generalizing the results to other areas or communities. However, because the data was from specific grade levels the approach to change might mirror similar practices in other urban elementary schools. The findings may or may not be applicable to other grades, as there may be different patterns in middle or high school because of a variety reasons. Next, all participants in this study sample were women, which may have also influenced the findings. Therefore, this study is possibly limited as it may provide a gendered perspective from their lived experiences, which may have highlighted a female voice. In sum, the emergent themes and findings are based upon the context of the research and therefore not necessarily generalizable beyond the sample.

Another limitation that is significant is the fact that this study only provides insight into patterns of distributed leadership that developed over a short period of time based upon the perceptions of trainers, teachers, and administrators. It is therefore suggested that additional longitudinal research is needed for data to be collected for an in-depth examination past the implementation phase, examining institutionalization of the mandate, which is beyond the scope of this study. For example, how is the practice of multiple leaders maintained or does the structure shift back to a more traditional hierarchy once the mandate is a common practice? Utilizing a mixed methodology approach in a future study might also provide more pertinent information into the actual effectiveness of the educator evaluation with concrete measurements of teachers’ and administrators’ professional growth and student learning through statistical
analysis. In addition, this study does not quantify how distributed leadership influences school improvement and student learning. A variety of methods and empirical investigations are required to gain additional knowledge in this emergent field of study to examine post-heroic leadership types that are used to implement mandated changes.

A final limitation might have resulted in that the data collected from the participants, which in some cases was retrospective and could possibly be biased by participant’s memory. This case study also had the possibility of being biased by the researcher. The researcher, as previously noted, does work part-time within the school community in this study. Steps that were taken to ensure the trustworthiness of the data included member checking and reflective memoing to heighten my awareness throughout data coding and interpreting the findings. However, contrary to researcher bias, the insider perspective may have provided insight into understanding the complexities of this case study (King, 1994).

**Implications for Researchers**

It is suggested that this research thesis, with its limitations, may contribute to and build upon the understanding of how the construct of distributed leadership contributes to the process of implementing a mandated change in a public elementary school. The findings may expand upon and increase the understanding of organizational change theory through a distributed leadership lens. The approach utilized by the district in this study, and consequently employed at the school study site, encompassed a train-the-trainer model. The use of this model contributed to the development of teachers as informal leaders who, working in collaboration with formal leaders and participants, accomplished implementing the change mandated by the state and federal government. The structures and the strategies utilized prompted open communication to learn, interpret, and implement the new educator evaluation. Findings included cognitive,
affective, and behavioral components to capture how a mandated change was incorporated on the individual and group levels.

This thesis contributes to literature, broadening the understanding by incorporating an organization change theoretical framework and a distributed leadership lens to examine how implementing the mandated change influenced school practice from teacher and administrator perspectives. As the findings suggested, the effectiveness of implementation was due to the peer-to-peer instructional model when introducing the change and incorporating it into practice. Therefore, the findings of this study described a blending of formal and informal leadership that orchestrated change and therefore may be used as a researched model for future change initiatives.

This case study research design extended the findings from other research studies in several ways. First, the findings reinforced conclusions by Harris (2012) and Spillane (2006), which identified the important contributions of interactions between informal and formal leaders and participants, which improved practice through capacity building and promoted student success. The findings of the study demonstrated a cycle similar to Heller and Firestone’s (1995) study that identified a repetitive structure, which was also reported by the participants in this study. As noted, informal leaders, tools, and routines contributed to how the leaders and followers made sense of the new mandate. Teachers and administrators were able to adopt the identified vision of the 5-Step Cycle Performance Evaluation Model to the extent that the process of implementation influenced the teacher and administrator identities through reflection, assessment, and evaluation of practice.

Second, this study’s expanded lens examined the impact on a school as a unit of study within a larger system that implemented the mandated change. More specifically, this study
provided empirical support for the proposition that collaborative leadership contributes to school improvement through building capacity, which over the three year time appears to have yielded a shared understanding and mutual drive to continue to improve professional growth and student learning by teachers and administrators interviewed. The changes in assessment and evaluation practices are evident in how instituting the new educator evaluation has permeated into dialogues between teachers in specific grade level, teachers and administrators, content specific groups, and staff-wide discussions that occur during faculty meetings. The identification of shared professional and student learning goals have, therefore, narrowed the gap between individuals, grade levels, and across specific roles.

Implications for Practitioners

The results of this study illuminated informal leaders who are teacher educators and active members of the school community who increased their visibility, and provided credibility to the new evaluation system. Similar to other research study findings, the school’s operation in this study is too complicated for only one person to possess all of the knowledge and skills to meet the plethora of demands (Ben-Peretz, 2001; Darling-Hammond, 2010; Elmore, 2003; Gronn, 2002a; Harris, 2012; Harris & Spillane, 2008). The use of distributed leadership, as demonstrated throughout this study, provided a rich approach to accomplishing not only the daily demands within a school, but can also mobilized the staff to embrace change. To summarize, the main implications for administrators and teachers evidenced in this case study can be condensed to the following points:

1. Teachers as informal leaders foster peer-to-peer learning, which facilitated carrying out the mandate and increased ownership by establishing a shared vision.

Understanding the role of leadership is important to institute change. Stakeholders who
promoted peer-to-peer collaboration in concert with administrative actions contributed to school and district-wide change. The use of reciprocal learning and redundancy through various levels of practice will lead the mandated initiative from implementation to institutionalization. Validating other research findings, this study indicated that the interdependence created between teachers, teacher leaders, and administrators through distributed leadership appeared to have contributed to the expansion of leadership capability and therefore contributed to the school culture (Gronn, 2002b; Hallinger & Heck, 2010; Harris, 2004; Thompson, 1967).

2. Teacher leaders bridge possible gaps by collaborating with formal leaders and peer teachers to implement change and create feedback loops that can then significantly impact student learning and positive school culture building. The findings of this study contributed to the understanding of distributive leadership as suggested in other research studies (Harris, 2012; Heller & Firestone, 1995; Spillane, 2006), and therefore may expand the understanding of how teachers practice as informal leaders through their work in collaboration with formal leaders, and participants in the context of a school setting. The promotion of multiple leaders by the school district encouraged a shift from an individualistic or heroic leadership design to a community-oriented distributed leadership model (Elmore, 2003). The interdependencies that were created within the K-5 school promoted the pooling of resources and through reciprocity created a predictable sequence to accomplish the identified goal to implement the new educator evaluation (Thompson, 1967).

3. Distributed leadership operates within a hieratical frame as this study and others indicated the importance of a strong leader, or in this case administrative team, that acts in the capacity of a base from which change can occur. Results of this study were also similar to the study by Bogler and Somech (2004) who illustrated the benefits of the principal’s support
and involvement in establishing working conditions that encourage informal leader and follower participation. Teacher educators as informal leaders acted as catalysts who then championed the change by working collaboratively with consultants and formal leaders to establish a shared vision in order to implement the mandated change (Heck & Hallinger, 2009). The benefits of distributed leadership that were evident included the development of trust and open communications in practice through collaboration across and within roles and in this case to introduce and implement change through teachers’ professional growth (Harris & Spillane, 2008).

The resulting changes in practice identified by teachers and administrators that occurred through distributed leadership not only successfully implemented the mandated change, but also created an internal system where each participant made sense of the mandate through tailored interpretations, interdependence, and reciprocity to fit the particular setting. Teachers became empowered through their increased participation, thus, created layered ownership, which resulted in the formulation of culture carriers. This study provided an example of descriptive, qualitative research that was conducted to further understand how leadership might be distributed in schools, leaving the open question for educators to answer how school outcomes are influenced. Therefore, the next step is for quantitative data to be collected and analyzed to measure how the implementation of the new educator evaluation has impacted student learning.

4. Including teachers in collective decision-making permits both administrators and teachers to interpret how the mandate is implemented. This is crucial to creating tools and establishing routines that will sustain successful utilization. Taking a prospective approach, it was recommended by the teachers that they continue to be included in decision-making as they are the experts who have ideas about how the system can be made more effective. It is suggested
that trainings continue to be offered by peers in order to sustain the progress that were made as well as continue to develop competencies to meet identified individual and team goals. The reciprocal trust that has been built between informal and formal leaders will then continue to inform practice. In sum, it is evident that distributed leadership should continue to have an important role in the context of school leadership practice.

5. **The use of multiple leaders opens the system to change by capitalizing upon and pooling the varied skills and talents that each person contributes to the process through distributed leadership.** The integrated approach that built partnerships between teachers and administrators while implementing the new educator evaluation mandate provided additional leadership opportunities for teachers. Existing structures with new strategies were cultivated to implement the mandated change and expanded the leadership roles to include informal leaders who provided training and support to peers. Teachers not only responded to the implementation of this mandate as informal leaders for training, but also continued to support the needs of existing teachers and expanded as mentors for new teachers and preceptors to student teachers. The sense of engagement and confidence that was evident in the content of the interviews demonstrated unity between teachers and administrators in their commitment to work collaboratively to improve professional growth and student learning through the use of the new educator evaluation.

Finally, this research study highlights sources of school leadership beyond the principal, linking collaboration amongst formal and informal leaders with participants to impact capacity building for professionals to better perform their assigned teaching responsibilities. This finding may influence how to approach future mandated changes using an effective distributed leadership model. The findings are, however, relevant to the particular mandate that was
instituted at the specific school identified in this study in response to the perceptions and experiences of teachers and administrators who volunteered to participate in this study.

**Implications for Policymakers**

With multiple new initiatives and mandates it is imperative that policymakers review how funding is allocated, what are the best standards of practice for instituting change, and develop overarching policies and procedures that govern how changes are implemented. The use of informal leaders contributes to a collaborative and integrated approach. Mandates, such as the new educator evaluation, are in fact opportunities for both formal and informal leaders to join to form a vision through established partnerships for teacher professional growth and student learning. It is through the interpretation of the mandate by the teachers who can make the organization more effective. Recognition of and funding for peer-to-peer trainings may contribute to sensemaking and therefore, instituting the multiple initiatives that public school administrators and teachers are faced with.

The findings of this study may suggest that consideration for funds to be allocated to train more teachers to act as informal leader and therefore, culture carriers to improve outcomes in professional growth and student learning. As previously noted, the teacher trainers, unlike administrators, are no longer being actively trained. Hence, administration may view the trainer role as needed only during the implementation phase of the new educator evaluation. Perhaps, since the majority of the staff is now familiar with the new system, presentations about the system are only provided during new staff orientation and on a one to one basis with a supervising administrator. Teachers did, however, speak to the value of continuing the practice of having trainers available as peer consultants and identified value in refresher trainings due to varying demands connected with timetables and periodic adjustments to the process.
The identified gap of future training may indicate that there is a possible need for program development and continuing education opportunities through area teaching colleges and universities. These relationships would sustain the instructional component to equip and remediate adult students with information about system requirements as they continue to work or prepare to enter public school settings. Continuing education institutions linked with the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education for professional trainings continue to be a source that positively contributes to the training and development of informal and formal leaders.

**Future Studies**

Several of the prominent researchers and theorists including Harris (2012), Mayrowetz (2008), and Spillane (2006) noted the importance of additional empirical studies to further define and evidence the occurrence of distributed leadership in school settings. Although this study does document how distributed leadership was utilized to implement a mandated change in one school, as noted, the findings of this study are based on qualitative inquiry. Therefore, it is proposed that a quantitative or mixed methodology designed study be instituted to collect more data and focus on the next step of measuring student learning.

Future comparative research studies may also indicated with other schools to further validate the benefits of using a distributed leadership train-the-trainer (TTT) model as a means to provide an opportunity for teachers to act in the capacity of informal leader who then act as peer trainers. A study comparing the school in this study to another school that did not use the TTT model to implement the new education evaluation could further examine the value of the outcome from this study that focused on collaboration and benefits related to how leadership was distributed to informal and formal leaders. It would also be of value to compare the perceptions
and experiences of the participants in this elementary school to other middle and high schools in the district to gauge if the TTT model had similar results at different grade levels. An examination of the TTT model in a similar setting might then possibly further assess if the peer-to-peer instructional model does contribute to the development of a cascade of capacity building, increased commitment, and a positive school culture.

Next, a future study is warranted to determine what other elements contribute to collaboration and coordination for best practice to implement mandated that include both teachers and administrators. The ability to match strategies with improvement is a worthwhile undertaking. Again, it is suggested that a longitudinal study would shed additional light on the nuances of continuous change as the staff and school culture continues to adopt and adapt to future adjustments to this and other change initiatives. While this suggestion may appear self-evident, the response to the changing environment may have unforeseen effects on the process as described in this time limited study.

A longer term study could possible identify what supports are necessary to continue to focus on professional growth through capacity building for teachers while simultaneously working to sustain the progress that was accomplished. Future empirical studies at this particular school study site might also shed light on how teachers and administrators implement other mandates in comparison with the one in order to demonstrate possible patterns of learning and reaction to forced changes and how they are incorporated into practice.

**Conclusion**

This research study explored the implementation of the 5-Step Cycle Performance Evaluation through the lens of distributed leadership in one urban K-5 elementary school based upon the perceptions and lived experiences of teachers and administrators. This study builds
upon previous research study findings about the phenomena of distributed leadership in schools. Organizational change theory was also included to examine how the two constructs might explain the process of implementing a change mandated by the state and federal government (Harris, 2012; Harris & Spillane, 2008; Spillane, 2006).

The analysis of data supports prior research findings indicating the departure from the heroic single leader to multiple leaders, which benefits the system by including various talents, viewpoints that then encouraged shared ownership and responsibility. The findings of this study highlighted the importance of being cognizant of the intersection between the teachers and administrators that occur when they are learning about and incorporating change. One of the major components that all participants reported was the need to become aware of and address the affective response by staff that accompanies expected change in their behavior or practice.

The results of this research study provided important insight into the phenomena of distributed leadership and organizational change. The findings of this study suggested that a tiered leadership occurred, where multiple informal and formal leaders acting as culture carriers not only implement, but also sustain the new practice through their collaborative efforts. It was through the process of collaborative sensemaking that permitted teachers and administrators to learn about, interpret, and implement the new educator evaluation. The results of this study also provided a pattern of change that may characterize how building capacity and professional growth occur. Although the use of the informal leaders that was initially sanctioned by administration through the train-the-trainer model is currently not as visible it still exists as the role of informal leaders has become embedded into practice.
References


