ILLUMINATING THE DYNAMICS OF EFFECTIVE TEACHER LEADERSHIP IN A

PUBLIC ELEMENTARY SCHOOL: A NARRATIVE INQUIRY

by

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DEDICATION

To my mother, Jo Ann: my first teacher, friend, and mom who helps me grow better each

day. I love you so much and then I love you some more.

To Lincoln and Landon: my boys and special gift. Keep growing and find your passion.

Nanni Chai loves you.

To Jamilia: my angel here on Earth, friend, and unexpected gift from God. You have

been a blessing to my life and a friend whom I will protect always. I heart you forever.

To Dr. Westbrook: May your vision for teacher leaders stay with educators always.

To Teacher Leaders: Remember… Collaborate, Be Reflective, Always Empower, Be an

Expert, and Be Flexible.

"If you are always trying to be normal, you will never know how amazing you can be."

– Maya Angelou

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ABSTRACT

This study documents the narratives of three teacher leaders and their stories of teacher leadership practice using a framework of distributed leadership rooted in Snell and Swanson's (2000) dimensions of teacher leadership. The research questions guiding the study are: Primary Research Question: How is teacher leadership practiced in an elementary school community? Secondary research questions: What are the key moments in a teacher leader's journey that helped them see themselves as a teacher leader? How do these teacher leaders do the work of teacher leadership? What supports their practice of teacher leadership and what obstacles impede their practice of teacher leadership?

The data sources for this study include individual and focus group interviews, journey maps, and teacher leader journals. Chapter 4 presents the study findings by introducing the three teacher leaders and their stories using their own words, narrated in first person. Chapter 4 also presents the teacher leader's understanding of teacher leader practice and analysis about how they do the work of teacher leadership. Chapter 5 provides further analysis and interpretation of the research questions and findings, implications for further research, and another dimension of teacher leadership identified from the data. Finally, Chapter 5 also includes the researcher's own story of teacher leadership and reflective thoughts.

I: INTRODUCTION

The stories of teachers are fascinating to me. So much so that I wonder about how teachers get from one point to the next after years of working with colleagues and students. Many times, teachers are responsible for a variety of tasks and, different roles and responsibilities are given to teachers even though classroom management and instruction is the top priority. Sometimes the role of teacher work is not clearly defined, resulting in teachers limiting their role solely to classroom instruction (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001). Research on the organization of schools assumes that the core of what teachers do is academic instruction in classrooms but a large substance of teacher work is being responsible for passing on society's way of life and culture (Ingersoll, 2003). So, where does the story of teacher leadership fall in improving school culture?

Teachers lead. The need for teacher leadership within schools has never been greater. Schools are under pressure to improve results for all students, with a focus on those who have been previously underserved (Danielson, 2006). Teacher leaders are present in many shapes and forms throughout schools. Sometimes teachers know they are leaders and have identified themselves as such. Through this identification, teacher leaders have assumed roles and responsibilities to improve school environment and instructional practice (Frost, 2008). Teacher leaders are generally experienced teachers who have tested their beliefs about teaching and learning and codified them into a platform that informs their practice (Ackerman & Mackenzie, 2006). There are also teacher leaders who participate in many activities within schools and have not thought about these activities as leadership. Many teachers reveal leadership informally by

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sharing expertise, asking questions of colleagues, and mentoring new teachers (Ingersoll, 2003).

This study arose from self-reflection about my own journey as a teacher leader. My self-reflection led to wonderings and assumptions about other teacher leaders. These wonderings and experiences evolved into questions that guide this study. To make meaning of my inquisitiveness, this study was designed to explore the journey and practice of teacher leadership within a distributive framework of improving schools.

School Improvement

Improving schools has been the overarching idea of changing the way we look at educating students for many years (Fullan, 1993; Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009; Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2001). In the United States, as well as other countries, school improvement has become the major focus in educational reform (Harris, 2002). Researchers such as Hargreaves and Shirley (2009) and Fullan (1993) have conducted international research and have shown the importance of leadership to secure and sustain improvement in schools. The impact of leadership upon school effectiveness and school improvement has been significant (Harris, 2004). Education and student achievement have focused on whole systems, individual schools, leadership, and classrooms. Within these systems, the focus on school leadership has taken a front seat to how we improve schools. Focusing on the improvement of school leadership has led to highlighting the centrality of teaching and leading in the pursuit of sustained school improvement (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009; Harris, 2002).

Successful school improvement is dependent upon the school's ability to manage change and development among its stakeholders (Fullan, 2001). The stakeholders of

schools can be described as principals, community members, teachers, parents, and district administration working collectively to improve school culture and student achievement. Researchers focused on school improvement have found various definitions of school improvement when working with various stakeholders involved in the process of school change (Fullan, 1993; Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009; Harris, 2002). Harris's (2002) view on school improvement involves the focus on school culture, the quality of inter-personal relationships, and the nature and quality of learning experiences. The time spent on building relationships among teachers, students, and principals, is key to the success of student achievement. Building school culture through capacity with teachers and learning experiences strengthens the relationships with those involved with making change (Harris, 2002).

Hargreaves and Shirley (2009) discussed school improvement as moving to a *Fourth Way* through history to change educational systems and focus on diversity and shared leadership. They prescribe ways to change education. Hargreaves and Shirley's (2009) research suggests the distribution of leadership, creativity among schools and the community, and professionalism among all those involved in educational and social change. With culture playing a big role in educational change, Hargreaves and Shirley (2009) studied various cultures, societies, and diverse learning groups. Since the world is becoming more diverse, global, and reliant on one another, the *Fourth Way* of education needs to embrace and understand the diversity of all of its stakeholders.

Fullan (1993) describes school improvement as building capacity at the school and classroom level. This capacity building involves building relationships between leaders, teachers, and students. The process of improving schools means investing in the

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development of teachers. When teachers are given the power to act and are involved in the development of the school there is more potential for school growth (Fullan, 1993). The common thread with all of the understandings of school improvement for this study is that the ideas are all about processes over time. This is a process that involves two key stakeholders: teachers and leaders.

Distributed Leadership

The idea of changing or improving schools cannot happen with one person. Principals cannot change the culture of schools alone. While the traditional view of a school leader has often pointed solely to the principal or other administrator, it is recognized that this can no longer be the case. There are too many roles and responsibilities of the modern principal and demands are nearly impossible to meet (Danielson, 2007). Beginning with encouraging collaboration from the community, ensuring curriculum alignment to standards, promoting best practices, evaluating staff, facilitating meetings, and you have a small piece of the principal's workload. When you incorporate student discipline, evaluating student needs, student achievement, paperwork, reports required by local and state agencies, you add another layer to the workload and the role of leader can no longer fall to a single individual. The role of the leader needs to be "shared" within the organization (Spillane, 2005).

Because of the large workload and high demand of the principal, there is a need to spread and share these leadership functions effectively within the school to other leaders. Schools have taken on the distributed leadership approach to create an atmosphere where stakeholders are solicited and encouraged to use their individual talents and expertise toward achieving a common goal (Spillane, 2005).

Leadership functions can vary within situations and therefore the leadership style may also vary (Sergiovanni, 2007). Sergiovanni (2007) states that leadership is essentially an individual activity. Distributed leadership is "a way of thinking about leadership" (Harris, 2004). Leadership is shared between several individuals within the school. Multiple leaders in the school "practice" leadership and collectively share responsibilities based on the knowledge and skills one possess. Distributed leadership is a type of leadership practice that implies a different power dynamic within the school (Muijs & Harris, 2003). The distinctions between followers and leaders tend to combine together and the primary concern is with the relationships and connections among people. Tasks are aligned with skills and teaching and leading are shared within the learning community.

The theory of distributed leadership can focus on identified activities needed to improve the culture of the school and practiced by multiple leaders with and without formal positions (Spillane, 2005). This thinking about leadership as practice relates to the transformation on teaching and learning. Distributed leadership focuses on a vision of practice. Practical goals are identified and practical tasks are organized and completed for teaching and learning to take place (Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2001).

Teacher Leadership

The traditional view of a school leader has pointed to the building principal or administrator but with the current demands of education this is no longer the case (Danielson, 2007). The phenomenon of teacher leadership can assist the principal with the task of improving schools. In order for school improvement to occur, teachers need to be committed to the process of change that will involve them in examining and

changing their own practice (Harris, 2002). Schools facing uncertain or changing conditions need to invest in their own learning and embrace improvement strategies that best meet the needs of their students and teachers (Harris, 2002). Improvement strategies that include teacher leaders committed to change can be effective and purposeful in securing and sustaining school improvement. Strategies such as professional learning communities, mentoring, and supervision create opportunities for teacher leaders to work collaboratively to improve teaching and learning.

The phenomenon of teacher leadership greatly fits within the theory of distributed leadership because teacher leaders can be guided to improving instructional practice (Muijs & Harris, 2003). This guidance from principals and other leaders can be dispersed between teacher leaders within the school. Leadership positions may be either formal or informal based on the role or the teacher.

Teacher Leadership and School Improvement

Teacher leadership is linked to improving schools because of the large amount of work it takes in the process of school change. Teacher leadership is associated with the reform movements calling for greater professionalism and more collaboration in schools. In the late 1990s, school improvement processes resulted in the increased sharing of decision-making with teachers, and teacher leadership became a means of coping with change in a more meaningful way (Anderson, 2004). Teachers became more involved with their principals and the decisions made for students. Teacher leaders can be key change agents within the current context of schools coupled with the increase in student accountability (Lieberman &Miller, 2004).

Improving schools with teacher leaders also means knowing what teacher leaders do. Teachers live and teach in a world of meaning and action (Margolis & Deuel, 2009). Teacher leaders use strategies, attend professional development, and interact with peers seeking to improve instructional practice. To better understand teacher leadership and truly transform schools, then we have to look at the structures that support teacher leadership. Structures such as mentoring, purposeful professional development, and formal leadership roles are ways to support teacher leadership to build capacity for sustained change efforts (Harris, 2002; Margolis & Deuel, 2009).

Statement of the Problem

In many schools, teachers have roles and responsibilities that stem from principals. Principals share this work with teachers in order to involve teachers in improving schools and build leadership capacity. Leadership distributed throughout the school environment creates the phenomena of teacher leadership (Danielson, 2007). Various forms of distributed leadership have been crucial for improving student achievement in successful schools (Fullan, 1993). The role of the principal has come to be seen as critical in implementing the shared decision-making process and providing teachers with an increasingly important role in building leadership (Ingersoll, 2003). Many principals have utilized the skills of teachers to build leadership capacity among teachers that can be called teacher leadership.

Pellicer and Anderson (1995) state most schools can still be described as loosely coupled organizations, with little connection between teachers who are quite autonomous within their classroom, but have little power beyond it, an organizational structure which has been found to lead to alienation (as cited in Muijs and Harris, 2003). If more school

systems are moving towards a culture of distributed leadership practice, and teachers are becoming involved in this practice, then we need to further study the phenomenon of teachers as leaders and their practice within the culture of change. School change efforts must combine the efforts of both principals and teachers to truly take effect (Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005). There is a need for teachers to be utilized to their maximum capacity as leaders both in and out of the classroom in order to benefit student learning and improve schools.

It is the role of the principal to recognize teachers as leaders, build upon their practice, and respect their expertise and successes in their individual classrooms. Sometimes disconnect often happens when attempting to establish a common vision in the learning community that empowers teachers to utilize their abilities to emerge as teachers (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001). In order for schools to improve, principals and teacher leaders must come to a common understanding of the phenomenon of teacher leadership. A piece of the research literature needing expansion is the narrative of the experiences that develop leadership, and the blending of experiences, skills, and expertise that are accumulated by teacher leaders over the years and through many professional experiences to explain this phenomenon of teacher leadership.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine teacher leader practice in one elementary school and how it is sustained in the school community. I wanted to understand teacher leader experiences and explain the perceptions and lived experiences of teacher leader practice. The need for further research is the narrative behind teacher leader practice as a

catalyst for change. Studying the narrative of teacher leaders was one part of

understanding the impact of teacher leadership on school improvement.

Need for the Study

This point in time centered on school change calls for educational systems to go

beyond improving schools with the principal alone. The voice, skill, and practice of the

teacher must be present and further developed in order to assist with improving schools.

This era emphasizes the importance of shared decision-making, collaborative work, and

the collective responsibility for educating students. Many school districts are invested in

the development of teachers and teacher leadership (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001).

Districts need to provide professional development and teacher leadership models to

facilitate the development of teacher leaders.

Snell and Swanson (2000) found the experiences that develop leadership, and the

combination of experiences, skills, and expertise that are accumulated by teacher leaders

over time and through many professional experiences, is missing from the literature.

There was a need to study and report on the complex journey that teachers undertake over

the course of their careers to become instructional leaders and agents of change.

I was interested in knowing how other teacher leaders identified themselves as

such and better understand their experiences within their journey of teacher leadership.

Effective classroom instruction and increased student achievement usually mean there is

a teacher leader present or in the making (Barth, 2001; Danielson, 2007). If this is true,

then how does one get there? What is their story? Does one think or know they are a

teacher leader? Do they encourage other teachers to grow and develop to improve their

practice? The purpose of this study is to add to the growing depth of knowledge of

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teacher leadership as it is identified and practiced in schools. By identifying factors that can be used to cultivate the knowledge and skills of teacher leadership, this study was designed to help teachers and principals understand the influences and experiences that help develop the practice of teacher leadership.

Research Questions

Primary Research Question: How is teacher leadership practiced in an elementary school community? Secondary research questions: What are the key moments in a teacher leader's journey that helped them see themselves as a teacher leader? How do these teacher leaders do the work of teacher leadership? What supports their practice of teacher leadership and what obstacles impede their practice of teacher leadership?

Objectives/Goals

The goal of this study was to investigate the stories of teacher leaders and understand the practice of teacher leadership and its influence on school improvement.

Definition of Terms

To obtain a better insight into central ideas of this study, I have defined the following terms: capacity building, culture, distributed leadership, school improvement, and teacher leadership.

Capacity building – Capacity building for change means creating the conditions, opportunities, and experiences for development and learning. Capacity building from a relatively simple perspective is creating the experiences and opportunities for people to learn how to do things together (Harris, 2002). Capacity may be built by improving the performance of teachers, adding more resources, materials or technology and by restructuring how tasks are undertaken (Fullan, 2001; Harris, 2002; Sergiovanni, 2007).

Culture – School culture described in this study focuses on the shared vision and values that are at the heart of bringing the stakeholders together in a common direction. The culture of the school provides norms and a framework for the school community to govern and helps to decide on what makes sense and how people should interact with one another. Sergiovanni (2000) borrows German philosopher Jürgen Habermas' terms *lifeworld* and *systemsworld* to explain the importance of managing culture as a system within schools. When principals and school leaders bring culture, relationships, and respect into the system of managing a school, the lifeworld is the force that drives the systemsworld. Both worlds are important and have value, but the essence of beliefs, purpose, and expression of the needs of people are found in the lifeworld of the school (Sergiovanni, 2000).

Distributed Leadership – This study will refer to distributed leadership as leadership duties, skills, and tasks that are shared between multiple leaders within the organization of the school. "A distributed perspective frames leadership practice in a particular way; leadership practice is viewed as a product of interactions of school leaders, followers, and their situation" (Spillane, 2005, p. 69). The distributed perspective defines its interactions between people and their situation. Engaging expertise wherever it exists in the organization and studying leadership practice collectively and distribute skills throughout the organization (Harris, 2004; Spillane, 2005).

School Improvement – An approach to educational change that has the dual purposes of enhancing student achievement and strengthening the school's capacity for change (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009; Harris, 2002). School improvement is a process of

changing the school culture. This definition views the school as the center of change and the teacher as an intrinsic part of the change process.

Teacher Leadership – Specific to this study, teacher leadership is the teacher's expertise about teaching and learning to improve the culture and instruction in schools so that student learning is enhanced. Teacher leaders are leading among colleagues with a focus on instructional practice and improvement on teaching and learning. Katzenmeyer and Moller (2001) define teacher leadership as "teachers who are leaders lead within and beyond the classroom, identify with and contribute to a community of teacher learners and leaders, and influence others toward improved educational practice" (p. 5).

II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The United States has been improving schools over several decades. In 1983, the National Commission on Excellence in Education brought about the publication of *A Nation at Risk*. The report was published and based on two years of data collection, public hearings, and conversations regarding the educational situation of the United States. Schools were declared to be in serious need of reform and schools were to be held accountable for student achievement (Urban & Wagoner, 2000). As a result, there was a push toward standardization and accountability. This brought about changes in teacher certification, financial support, and state-developed testing programs were made (Urban & Wagoner, 2000). These practices however came from a top-down approach of leadership and did not "forge an equal and interactive partnership among the people, the profession, and the government" (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009, p. 71).

Lieberman (1992) states, "Teacher participation in leadership may be the most critical component of the entire process of change" (p. 159). Even then, educators saw the importance of involving teachers in decision making and change processes. Ingersoll's (2003) study shows that the distribution of decision-making influence and the breadth and depth of organizational control and accountability in school is important because the "distribution of control and influence in schools profoundly affects how well schools function" (p. 13). Principals do not have the time or the comprehensive expertise necessary to fully drive instruction in the classroom to meet the needs of each student. This is where the development of teacher leaders becomes important to the improvement of student achievement. Classroom teachers provide the experience and the immediate

frame of reference that allows the greatest possibility to increase student performance (Ingersoll, 2003). In order for schools to be successful in meeting the needs of students, a distributed approach to leadership must be present within the school community. This chapter examines the distributive leadership framework, teacher leadership, and the practice of teacher leadership within improving schools.

Conceptual Framework: Distributed Leadership

The phenomenon of teacher leadership can work well within distributed leadership practice (Spillane, Halverson, Diamond, & 2001). Spillane (2005) explains the definition of distributed leadership as a perspective on leadership that moves us beyond seeing leadership as synonymous with the work of the principal and therefore involves a recognition that the work of the leadership involves multiple individuals including teacher leaders. Leadership responsibilities and tasks are distributed to many members of the school community. The distributed leadership practice is defined by how leaders act together as well as the situation they must act within. This perspective focuses on how leadership practice is distributed among formal and informal leaders (Harris, 2004).

Distributed leadership primarily implies a social distribution where a leader's power of decision-making is dispersed to all members of the school who are then viewed as a collaboration of leaders (Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2004). Duties and tasks of an organization are identified and shared with individuals in the organization. Distributed leadership theory promotes the decentralization of the leader, and leadership in this context is fluid rather than individually fixed as a specific role defined within the

organization (Harris, 2004). Distributed leadership does not imply that everyone is a leader, but opens the possibility for a more collective leadership approach.

This study views teacher leadership within a distributed framework where leadership concentrates on engaging expertise wherever it exists within the organization. York-Barr and Duke (2004) found that distributing the responsibility and control for leadership throughout the organization has the potential of developing teacher leadership through motivation, ability, and action. The distributed leadership framework opens the space to the importance in understanding the development of teacher leadership as it is directly linked to school effectiveness, development, and improvement. Teacher leaders are recognized as an important part of improving schools. "Teacher leadership is a powerful idea because it recognizes that teachers' ability to lead has a significant influence upon the quality of relationships and teaching within the school" (Muijs & Harris, 2003, pp. 444-445). The next sections explore distributed leadership and teacher leadership situation and practice, and the relationship between principals and teacher leaders.

Distributed Leadership: Situation and Practice

Harris (2004) defines distributed leadership as "a form of collective agency incorporating the activities of many individuals in a school who work at mobilizing and guiding other teachers in the process of instructional change" (p. 14). In the organization of schools, leadership can be extended to individuals other than the school principal. The distributive perspective focuses on how leadership is practiced and the situation in which leadership is distributed. Spillane's (2006) research on distributed leadership address the *situation* as an important component of leadership because a "distributed view of

leadership shifts the focus from the school principals . . . and other formal and informal leaders to the web of leaders, followers, and their situations that gives form to leadership practice" (p. 3). According to Spillane (2006), in a distributed perspective on leadership three elements are essential:

> Leadership *practice* is the central and anchoring concern; leadership practice is generated in the *interactions* of leaders, followers, and their situation; each element is essential for leadership practice; and the *situation* both defines leadership practice and is defined through leadership practice. p.4

Leadership models are less concerned with individual capabilities, skills and talents and more preoccupied with creative collective responsibility for leadership action and activity within a situation.

Leaders and followers. Distributed leadership is more than delegating tasks. It is having people within the school community take on roles, engage in acts of leadership, and collaborate with one another. Distributed leadership includes everyone who wants to be a leader or active follower. The leaders and followers component of distributed leadership framework is that leadership roles distribute to various individuals throughout the organization whenever necessary. The distributed leadership framework represents a shift in the aspect of traditional top-down leadership paradigm because it recognizes the importance of teacher leaders and other individuals in the leadership process. Harris (2004) found that using a number of strategies for distributing leadership within a school was central to achieving the school's purpose. Harris (2004) states these strategies should "involve others in decision-making, allocating important tasks to teachers and rotating leadership responsibilities within the school" (p. 18).

Followers are an important part of the process of distributed leadership because leaders and followers work together to shape the interaction that occurs. Through interaction a situation is defined and leadership practice occurs (Spillane, 2006). What we see here is leaders and followers supplementing and extending one another's actions. Leaders collectively constitute their practice in interactions with followers, and in this way, followers contribute to defining leadership practice (Spillane, 2006). The dynamics in the relationship between leaders and followers in a distributed leadership model is more fluid than in traditional approaches because there is mobility and transfer of roles according to the needs of the organization.

Harris (2002) notes that in the field of school improvement, there is an importance of capacity building as a means of sustaining improvement. Enacting leadership tasks are often distributed across multiple leaders in a school, including principals, assistant principals, curriculum specialists, teacher leaders, and classroom teachers. In Spillane, Halverson, and Diamond's (2001) study of 13 Chicago elementary schools, leadership tasks were executed among multiple leaders within the schools. In regards to teacher leadership, formal leadership can be distributed across many roles and functions in a school to teachers. Teacher leaders can help other teachers to embrace goals and understand the changes that are needed to strengthen teaching and learning and to work towards improvement (Harris, 2004).

Practice. Spillane (2005) states distributed leadership is about leadership practice rather than leaders or their roles, functions, routines, and structures. Spillane's (2005) understanding of distributed leadership practice is based on *The Distributed Leadership Study* (School of Educational and Social Policy at Northwestern University) of an

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elementary school. Leadership practice is viewed as a product of the interactions of school leaders, followers, and their situation (Spillane, 2005). The situation means that there is a network of individuals involved. The distributed framework recognizes that managing and leading schools involves a net of individuals beyond those in formal leadership roles. Leadership practice involves opportunities to surface through continuous conversations.

Distributed Leadership: Principals and Teacher Leaders

It is unrealistic to hold the view that a principal can know everything about an organization as complex as a school (Spillane, 2006). Distributed models in schools are not a set in stone format that always follow a prescribed recipe for success. The schools that follow a distributed model are prepared to adapt to all situations because they foster a culture that allows persons to apply leadership qualities of individuals as they match individual strengths and areas of expertise (Harris, 2004). Within distributed models, principals can turn to the knowledge and skills of teacher leaders in situations to improve instructional practices. School change can be interactive and participative and the principal's role is to build an organizational climate that encourages and supports leadership throughout the school.

Boleman and Deal (2002) suggest school principals can no longer deal with the challenges of the organization of the school alone. Improving schools is a process of reciprocal influence centered on questions of purpose, values, and strategies that involves the constituents of the organization (Boleman & Deal, 2002). Boleman and Deal (2008) speak of organizations as cultures. "Over time, an organization develops distinctive beliefs, values, and customs" (Boleman & Deal, 2008, p. 269). Within the organization,

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the principal works with stakeholders, including teacher leaders, to help build the schools culture. The members of the team share responsibilities and over time develop beliefs, values, practices, and artifacts that work well for the organization (Boleman & Deal, 2008).

A cultural perspective of teachers as leaders in a distributed framework would suggest that leadership is part of an interactive process of meaning making by all members of the school's organization. Harris (2003) notes that shared meanings represent the prevailing values, norms, philosophy, rules and climate of the organization, the culture. Distributed leadership is about learning together as a team and constructing meaning and new learning collectively and collaboratively.

A lot of what we know about factors influencing the development of distributed leadership in schools is with the research on teacher leadership (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001). Leithwood, et al. (2007) suggest that the extent to which teachers take up organizational leadership tasks and functions depends on features of the school's culture, opportunities for capacity building, the nature of teacher-principal relations, and active encouragement and support for distributed forms of leadership by principals. When principals involve more people in the decision making process, a sense of ownership occurs that in turn enhances a commitment of the teacher leaders involved.

Teacher input is needed in aspects of the school's day to day functioning in order to sustain change within the organization. The principal works collectively with teacher leaders on the purpose, values, and strategies to enhance teacher and student learning (Ingersoll, 2003). Principals can work with and support teacher leaders to be skillful communicators to influence school culture and enhance student achievement. One

perspective is to see school improvement advancing from a "teacher-proof curriculum to mandated changes to shared decision making and, presently, to the teacher's role in improving student performance outcomes" (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001, p. 40).

The distributed leadership framework of a school has been successful when principals involve constituents and stakeholders within the organization. Principals and teacher leaders working together on the values and purpose of the school build on teacher leadership skills and enhance student achievement (Ingersoll, 2003). Successful schools have leaders that distribute leadership tasks to others within the organization (Scheurich & Skrla, 2003). Principals can improve the school culture by drawing on the leadership potential of all stakeholders, especially teachers. Supervision of teacher leaders calls for school leaders to expand teacher's roles as leaders and empower them to lead. Leadership in a distributed framework that will make a difference and impact teachers and students is that of teacher leadership (Gabriel, 2005). Empowering teachers as leaders can potentially nurture teachers' professional identity as change agents that can lead to school improvement.

Distributed Leadership: Strengths and Challenges

Distributed leadership does not mean that everyone in the school has a role in every leadership function or routine. "The distribution of leadership differs, depending on the leadership function or routine, the subject matter, the type of school, the school's size, and a school or school leadership team's developmental stage" (Spillane, 2006, p. 33). There are strengths and challenges to a distributed leadership framework.

Strengths. Distributed leadership is a more reflective way to think about leadership practice. Leadership is distributed to members of the leadership team and this

can create a certain climate for school culture. In relation to teacher leadership,

distributed leadership allows for teachers to have a voice in school improvement

initiatives. Distributed leadership "implies that teachers have the agency to lead change

and to guide organizational development and improvement" (Harris, 2003, p. 322).

    Challenges. School leaders may take on the thought that distributed leadership is

a cure for their organization. Spillane (2005) noted that shared leadership, team

leadership, and democratic leadership are not synonyms for distributed leadership.

"Distributed leadership is a perspective, a conceptual or diagnostic tool for thinking about

school leadership . . . not a blueprint for effective leadership nor a prescription for how

school leadership should be practiced" (Spillane, 2005, p. 149).

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Teacher Leadership

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Defining Teacher Leadership

    Before we can begin to get a clear picture of how teachers exercise leadership

roles and responsibilities in schools, we should have an understanding of what teacher

leadership is. This is not as simple as it sounds because the literature suggests

overlapping and sometimes competing definitions of teacher leadership (Muijs & Harris,

2003). Many researchers often provide a summary of an overarching concept of what

teacher leaders do instead of what would be considered a typical definition. Katzenmeyer

and Moller (2001) consider teacher leaders to be "teachers that lead within and beyond

the classroom, identify with and contribute to a community of teacher learners and

leaders, and influence others towards improved educational practice" (p. 17). Central to

this definition is the idea of using influence to guide others towards improvement.

After reviewing 20 years of research on teacher leadership, York-Barr and Duke (2004) arrived at a comprehensive definition of teacher leadership:

> The process by which teachers, individually or collectively, influence their colleagues, principals, and other members of school communities to improve teaching and learning practices with the aim of increased student learning and achievement. (pp. 287-288)

Childs-Bowen, Moller, and Scrivner (2000) believe teachers are leaders when they function in professional learning communities to affect student learning, contribute to school improvement, and inspire excellence in practice (as cited in York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Fullan (1993) describes leadership as commitments of moral purpose and continuous learning and knowledge of teaching and learning, educational contexts, collegiality, and the change process. A common theme within these concepts of teacher leadership is the focus on teaching and learning to improve instruction and leading among colleagues.

After reviewing the literature, it is clear that there is no common definition but teacher leadership is not necessarily about power. Teacher leadership is about extending practice beyond the classroom and seeking additional responsibilities and opportunities for growth. Harris (2003) notes regardless of how one defines teacher leadership, it is important to acknowledge that its foundation is rooted in notions of distributed leadership. The success of models of distributed leadership in education is dependent on the growth and development of teacher leaders (Smylie, Conley, & Marks, 2002). There will continue to be formal designation of specific roles and responsibilities of principals

and teachers, but the distributed framework permits the teacher leader to be collectively involved in the leadership of the school community.

Identifying Teacher Leadership

Over the past two decades, the United States and Canada have widely accepted the idea of teacher leadership and how it is practiced (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). The identification of teacher leaders can come in many forms. Teacher leaders are usually identified and serve in two fundamental types of roles: formal and informal (Danielson, 2007). Some teacher leaders are identified by the roles and responsibilities they naturally assume and some are asked to lead specifically by their principals. The number of teacher leadership programs has grown reflecting informal and formal activities (Muijs & Harris, 2003).

Formal teacher leaders fill roles and responsibilities such as curriculum writer, department chair, instructional coach, master teacher, and mentor (Danielson, 2006; Gabriel, 2005; Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001). These teachers typically apply for positions and are chosen for the roles through a selection process. Informal teacher leaders fill classroom related roles and responsibilities such as team planning, mentoring, creating schedules, and communicating goals (Danielson, 2006; Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001; O'Dell, 1997). These teacher leaders usually "emerge spontaneously and organically" and they take the initiative to address a problem (Danielson, 2007, p. 16).

In the book *Awakening the Sleeping Giant*, Katzenmeyer and Moller (2001) describe teacher leadership as an untapped resource. The skills that teachers possess need to be awakened and used to impact student achievement. "By helping teachers believe they are leaders, by offering opportunities to develop their leadership skills, and by

creating school cultures that honor leadership, we can awaken this sleeping giant of

teacher leadership" (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001, pp. 2-3). Three adjectives can be

used to help teachers and principals identify potential teacher leaders: competent,

credible, and approachable (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001). Teachers and principals

usually know who is competent in their classroom. The students respond to daily lessons,

classrooms are organized, and this "naturally establishes this teacher as credible"

(Katzenmeyer and Moller, 2001, p. 47). Being an approachable teacher is a critical

characteristic because collaboration means the ability to build positive interpersonal

relationships (Danielson, 2006; Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001).

Danielson (2006) notes that optimism, enthusiasm, confidence, and the

willingness to take risks as characteristics of teacher leaders. These are dispositions that

many teacher leaders possess and largely define an individual's approach to situations.

Teacher leaders are "can do" people; they do not adopt a defeatist attitude when things to

do not go right. Danielson (2006) states the teacher leader weighs options, considers

alternatives, and assembles colleagues to help solve problems. These are characteristics

principals look for in teachers to help lead school improvement.

As teachers move from teacher to leader, Katzenmeyer and Moller (2001) have

identified factors that influence a teacher's readiness to assume the role and

responsibilities of a teacher leader. These factors include excellent professional teaching

skills, a clear and well-developed personal philosophy of education, being in a career

state that enables one to give to others, having an interest in adult development, and being

in a personal life stage that allows one time and energy to assume a position of

leadership. Kaztenmeyer and Moller (2001) do not explicitly state that these readiness

factors imply that teacher leadership is for teachers in the middle of their career, but we assume teachers demonstrate a high level of teaching competence.

In a comprehensive study of six schools, Anderson (2004) studied teacher leadership with the identification of twenty-eight teachers and their principals. The research included surveys and interviews. Anderson found that some formal teacher leaders' roles impeded some forms of teacher leadership. There were large numbers of formal teacher leaders that often excluded others from other leadership roles within the school, and this sometimes reduced the distribution of teacher leadership functions and decision-making at the school.

York-Barr and Duke's (2004) two decades of research about teacher leadership found that individuals who function as teacher leaders have a solid foundation of teaching experience and opportunities grow out of success in the classroom. Principals who notice successful classroom experiences tend to indentify these teachers as leaders. Crowther, Ferguson, and Hann's (2009) study with the Teachers as Leaders Framework, suggested the importance of the teacher leaders influencing effective classroom practice.

Danielson (2006) suggests teacher leadership is the exhibition of the following attributes:

1. Providing influence beyond one's own classroom

2. Mobilizing and energizing others

3. Engaging in complex work with others

4. Having passion for the core mission of the school

These attributes are identified and developed as teacher leaders grow and work together with colleagues and principals to improve schools. Teacher leaders are involved in their

own classrooms, across the school, or beyond the school applying action that enhances teaching and learning (Ackerman & Mackenzie, 2006). As principals identify the teacher leaders in the school, the next step is to clearly identify roles and responsibilities, and then support teacher leaders with the appropriate professional development in order to carry out those responsibilities.

Teacher Leadership Roles and Responsibilities

Teacher leadership is practiced through a variety of formal and informal roles and positions in the daily work of schools. Whether formal or informal, each role or responsibility has its own importance in how the school functions and impacts student achievement. Teacher leadership begins with "learning to collaborate, being in a group that builds a shared commitment and collective responsibility for student improvement, and becoming open to continuous learning" (Lieberman, 2013, p. 170). Teacher leaders typically see themselves first as *teachers*; although they are not interested in becoming administrators, they are looking to extend their influence (Danielson, 2006; Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001). Danielson (2006) states there are two types of teacher leaders. One is a formal leader who takes on official roles like instructional coach or grade level team leader. The other is the informal leader whose roles are those that emerge when teachers are given opportunities to use their expertise to benefit the entire school community (Danielson, 2006). York-Barr and Duke (2004) found that teacher leadership can be demonstrated in informal ways such as coaching peers to resolve instructional problems, encouraging parent participation, working with colleagues in small groups and teams, modeling reflective practice, or articulating a vision for improvement.

Within the school system, teachers must function with each other, the principal, and their students in order to impact student achievement. Gabriel (2005) describes four broad areas in which teacher leaders function:

1. Influencing school culture

2. Building and maintaining a successful team

3. Equipping other potential teacher leaders

4. Enhancing or improving student achievement (p. x)

Several of the roles of teacher leaders fall under more than one of the broad areas defined by Gabriel (2005). Just as the characteristics that teachers possess may widely differ, so are the roles that teacher leaders may fill within a school.

Teacher leaders have numerous roles that require skills that can be developed over time. Research has shown that specific skills are needed in certain acts to support the work of principals in schools. Danielson (2006) outlines skills that are needed to exercise leadership in schools.

1. Using evidence and data in decision making

2. Recognizing an opportunity and taking initiative

3. Mobilizing around a common purpose

4. Marshaling resources and taking action

5. Monitoring progress and adjusting the approach as conditions

6. Sustaining the commitment of others and anticipating negativity

7. Contributing to a learning organization (pp. 29-36)

Teacher leaders begin leadership opportunities by using evidence from data. Recognizing an opportunity and having the ability to take an initiative to lead is a critical

characteristic according to Danielson (2006). In a study conducted by York-Barr and Duke (2004), teachers served as powerful leaders when they work collaboratively with others to encourage examination and evaluation of instructional practices and their effects on student learning and progress. The skill of taking the initiative is often coupled with improvement because teacher leaders recognize that things could always be better.

Principals often recognize teacher leaders as catalysts for change. Danielson (2006) found that three teacher leaders took the initiative to improve specific areas of interest to them in their schools using data regarding enrollment and student achievement. These teachers used data to open up communication with other teachers and involved them around a common purpose.

The skill of communication is important for the role of teacher leadership. In order to be successful with teacher leadership, "a teacher leader must be a skilled communicator who can neutralize resistance, which will invariably and unfortunately arise from fellow teachers and from administrators" (Gabriel, 2005, pp. x-xi). Crowther, Ferguson, and Hann's (2009) comprehensive study of teacher leadership focuses on dimensions of teacher leadership practice in which relationship building and collaboration are a major theme. Within these dimensions, teacher leaders exert influence through collaboration with other teachers in the learning organization. The communication required to work with others is needed to help teacher leaders move their work forward to improve student learning in schools.

An important role for teacher leaders is to act and commit to a course of action to improve conditions (Du, 2007). Teacher leaders can provide the energy for that action. York-Barr and Duke (2004) present a framework for teacher leadership grounded in a

study from literature and several teacher leaders. The framework suggests a theory of action meaning when teacher leaders are respected as teachers by their colleagues and principals, they will "assume a learning orientation in their work and demonstrate or be viewed as having the potential to develop leadership knowledge, skills, and dispositions to lead" (York-Barr & Duke, 2004, p. 289). This is the beginning of a teacher leader's journey of action of their leadership influence and an outcome of improvement in teaching and learning practices.

An important role for teacher leaders is monitoring progress and adjusting an approach as conditions change (Danielson, 2006). Monitoring of progress is accompanied by the skill of reflection. In Danielson's (2006) work with three teacher leaders, she found that "teacher leaders engage in critical reflection on the consequences of actions, on the impact of an approach on student learning" (p. 33). Teacher leaders engage in critical reflection in their own classrooms and practice, and they also extend this to other responsibilities and projects they are involved with in the school.

In a comparative study, Gordon (2011) identifies rewards teacher leadership through themes that emerged from the data. This study looked at the attributes of effective teacher leaders as wells as problems, support, and benefits associated with teacher leadership. Gordon's (2011) study compared the perceptions of two groups (1990 and 2011) of teacher leaders. Common problems among the two groups were appropriate incentives and rewards, negotiated principal-teacher relationships, work-load policies, and coaching of teacher leaders. Themes of rewards of teacher leadership identified in 2011 not present in the 1990 data were improved student achievement resulting from teacher leaders' work with colleagues; the feeling of being respected by

other members of the school community because it increased the teacher leader credibility; being in a formally designated teacher leader role was rewarding; and teacher leaders felt a sense of accomplishment (Gordon, 2011).

As teachers in a school improve their practice and share their findings with colleagues, the collective wisdom increases. Teacher leaders must become incorporated into the more general professional learning community (Danielson, 2006). An important role for teacher leaders is to make significant contributions to their own schools and to the profession. Teacher leaders "recognize that the true benefits of improved practice are not realized when confined to a single setting; they must become incorporated into the more general professional community" (Danielson, 2006, 36).

Professional Development and Teacher Leadership

Teacher leadership has been shown to be centrally important in achieving both school and classroom improvement (Muijs & Harris, 2003). Because teachers know firsthand what is needed to improve student learning, promoting and supporting teacher leadership are crucial to the success of improving schools. Teacher leadership thrives on meaningful professional development (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001). Professional development opportunities can allow teacher leaders to engage with their colleagues in reflecting upon the practices of the classroom. This type of staff development encourages leadership and these experiences must be on-going (Snell & Swanson, 2000). School leadership models that support the development of teacher leadership and systematically provide teachers with opportunities to use leadership are more likely to create organizational change and enhance school reform efforts (Fullan, 2001).

Research about teacher practice and professional development for teachers has been a focus over the last three decades because of accountability. Katzenmeyer and Moller stated, "We continue to struggle to find effective ways to measure results, as evidenced by the emphasis on standardized testing in the 1990s and now standards of high-stakes testing in the 2000s" (p. 40). Teacher leaders need specific knowledge, skills, and opportunities to improve to be successful change agents.

In a 2011 study, Ross et al. found that teacher leader programs like the TLSI (Teacher Leader School for Improvement program) led to transformations in the ways teachers understand and approach teaching and leading. Teacher leader programs like TLSI: 1) develop pedagogical knowledge to enhance the use of instructional strategies to support student learning, 2) develop the ability to use data, 3) assume leadership and mentoring roles to improve the effectiveness of the professional community, and 4) develop and inquiry stance to teaching that can be shared with other professionals (Ross et al., 2011). This professional development and graduate program impacted the way 43 teachers thought about teaching practice, their colleagues, and their schools. Teacher leaders who collaborated on a regular basis believe they have greater autonomy to express and act on their professional knowledge (Ross et al., 2011). This study showed how teacher leader programs and professional development transformed teacher leader perceptions about teaching and leading.

Professional development has had its own stages in the history of school improvement. In the 1970s, professional development began with teacher-proof curriculum where teachers attended workshops. A trainer delivered a curriculum package with the expectation that strategies would be used and teachers returned to their

classrooms and taught the way they thought most effective. In the 1980s, "the expert

training models asked teachers to set up a program, to employ new practices in their

classrooms, and to focus their attention on an innovation" (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001,

p. 40). School districts became more involved with providing training but new mandates

required new roles for teachers that learned towards shared decision-making (Harris,

2002).

In the 1990s, professional learning communities emerged as way to engage

teachers and staff in collaborative learning and result in improved student learning

(Harris, 2002). With professional learning communities teacher leaders learn more about

teaching as they learn collaboratively with each other. Teachers find themselves learning

more about theory and practice. Teacher practice was focused on student performance

outcomes and learning was job-embedded. Moving forward, the professional learning

community becomes even more important because teachers seem to learn best when most

professional development is job-embedded at the school. Teachers need time to reflect

and internalize new understandings in light of their experiences. "The professional

learning community offers teachers a collaborative environment in which new learning

can grow and develop nestled in the real world of their teaching" (Katzenmeyer &

Moller, 2001, p. 43).

Leiberman and Pointer Mace (2009) examined different programs developed by

the Carnegie Foundation and the National Writing Project that link professional

development and accomplish teaching. The National Writing Project allows participants

to get together to teach each other what they are doing to improve student achievement in

the classroom. Leiberman and Pointer Mace found that teachers are engaged in:

Teaching demonstrations (where teachers teach each other favorite practice,

author's chair (where teachers read what they are writing and get continuous

feedback on their work, a writing group (where they work on a written piece).

p.461

The participants alter between teacher and learner and are a part of a learning community

to share strategies and improve practice.

York-Barr and Duke (2004) focused on a framework developed by Rogus (1988)

that emphasized teacher development content. The framework aligned content

development needs for teacher leaders with specific leadership functions. Specific areas

of the framework included:

demonstrating skills of effective instruction, demonstrating an inquiry orientation

to teaching, working with others, creating community, leading curriculum review

and improvement, articulating and communicating vision, fostering ownership

among peers for programs, empowering self and others, developing political

support for change, and demonstrating patience and persistence. (York-Barr &

Duke, 2004, p. 278)

This framework for professional development gave schools and programs content

domains for what teachers should know and be able to do.

School improvement efforts indicate the importance of the teacher's knowledge

and skill in improving student performance outcomes (Ingersoll, 2003). In a study

conducted by Blasé and Blasé (1999) with instructional leaders, findings indicated that

teachers' participation in developing as teacher leaders resulted in reflective practice and

increased student achievement. Crowther, et al. (2009) also found that teachers'

participation in developing as teacher leaders resulted in improvement in self-confidence, attitude towards work, teaching, and working with colleagues.

Teacher leaders not only need training, but also need opportunities to break out of isolation and build professional networks of teachers who share a vision of education excellence (Dozier, 2007). Through networks, teachers learn from each other and gain knowledge in areas such as mentoring, leadership, and education policy issues.

When teachers move into leadership roles, their learning should be supported in three ways:

> First teacher leaders need to learn the leadership skills to function successfully in school reform efforts within their schools; second, as competent teachers, these individuals build their knowledge, skills, and attitudes over the span of their career; third, teacher leaders should be connected in a multitude of ways with the professional development of others. (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001)

Once teachers become teacher leaders and serve in leadership roles, they should request opportunities to expand their leadership skills through professional development (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001). Through professional development opportunities, teacher leaders can engage with each other and learn how to lead together.

Obstacles of Teacher Leadership

Organization. Obstacles of teacher leadership can take on many forms. Organizational structures outside of the school building can hinder leadership growth among teachers. "It is amazing that teacher leadership is possible in schools as they are currently structured" (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001, p. 81). Traditionally, schools are organized with a top-down management structure where teachers have little voice in the

decision-making process (Harris, 2002). Challenges in promoting teacher leadership

include: traditional top-down leadership instead of distributed leadership, lack of teacher

access to one another, and insufficient time for leadership work (Katzenmeyer & Moller,

2001). Attempts to provide teachers with leadership opportunities have also been

interpreted as a threat to the authority of principals. This hierarchical structure relies on

formal leadership positions, which makes it difficult for teachers to emerge as leaders

(Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001).

The identification of teacher leaders may be an obstacle due to the selection of

formal or informal roles. When teachers are selected by their principals to lead,

favoritism may be perceived, discouraging individuals from accepting such roles

(Gabriel, 2005; Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001). An identification and presence of formal

leadership roles may create resentment between colleagues. Teacher leaders serving in

formal roles may tend to exclude others and impede the distributed leadership model and

decision-making within the school (Muijs & Harris, 2003). Other teachers in the school

may also perceive those teacher leaders who have identified formal roles as

administrative.

Another obstacle to teacher leadership is preparation and the lack of clarity of

roles available to teacher leaders. With this lack of clarity, it can discourage some

teachers from accepting roles. Preparation is critical for teachers to be successful in their

leadership roles. When teachers do not fully understand their role, certain tasks do not

get accomplished and the organization may suffer. Killion and Harrison (2007) found

that teacher leaders are being asked to assume roles with little or no training. Principals

must be aware of the knowledge and skills of teacher leaders and offer support and training to enhance these skills.

Common planning and conference times have also presented obstacles for teacher leaders. York-Barr and Duke's (2004) study found that some of the effects on teacher leadership indicated planning and conference times are not always common among teams, little support is provided for leadership work, and there is limited opportunity for developing leadership skills. Professional development and team learning is often shared during planning times and is difficult to improve practice if teachers do not share their planning times. This becomes an obstacle of time and having to schedule meeting time outside of the school day to have conversations about students, data, and teacher practice.

Crowther, et al. (2009) have developed a CLASS (Creating Leaders to Accelerate School Successes) Plan to build new forms of leadership capacity in schools and the teaching profession. The work of Crowther, et al. (2009) is the outcome of decade-long research with teacher leader initiatives in the United States, Australia, Singapore, and Sicily. During their studies, they reached new understandings about teacher leadership relationships with principals, and the exercises used were linked into an overall professional learning framework that is both practical and theoretical (Crowther et al., 2009).

The CLASS Plan provides leaders with exercises to lead principals in encouraging and supporting teacher leadership. "Our experience suggests that one particularly important exercise for principals to encourage, and experience with their teachers, involves identification of barriers to teacher leadership within the profession as well as the school" (Crowther et al., 2009, p. 43). Barriers to leadership researched by

Crowther, et al. (2009) often included lack of principal support, unclear understanding of the concept, no time for development, a system that expects only principals to be leaders, no rewards for extra effort, and previous failures with lead teachers.

The reality is not everyone is for the concept of teacher leadership. Whether it is due to the operation of the organization or the lack of clarity and professional development, the path to successful teacher leadership practices is not without obstacles. Recognizing obstacles to teacher leadership involves teachers and principals. In recognizing these obstacles, we move the practice of teacher leadership forward to improve teaching and learning in schools.

Dimensions of Teacher Leadership

Snell and Swanson (2000) have adapted a conceptual framework from the work of Costa and Garmston using the cognitive coaching process. Costa and Garmston identified "five states of mind" that individuals could cultivate within themselves in order to stimulate change and growth in others and in the system surrounding them. For the purpose of examining the role schools play in the development of teacher leadership, Snell and Swanson (2000) adapted the framework into "The Dimensions of Teacher Leadership" as an analytic tool to help teachers reflect upon the phenomenon of teacher leadership. For the purpose of this study, the five dimensions are used as a frame to research the practice of teacher leadership and as a lens to collect and code data.

Snell and Swanson's (2000) study of ten teachers captured their understanding of what they know and are able to do within the five dimensions of empowerment, expertise, reflection, collaboration, and flexibility.

Empowerment. Empowered teachers are confident in their ability to make a difference in student learning (Snell & Swanson, 2000, p. 7). Potential teacher leaders come forward and rise to the occasion when presented with recognition, confidence, and trust (Crowther et al., 2009). Empowerment is about principals stepping back from their own leadership roles and encouraging teacher colleagues to step forward and share in organizational decision making. Teacher leader growth happens when principals recognize the need to share decisions among the organization. Empowerment of teaching implies that teachers are empowered by others and empowerment is linked to shared decision making (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001).

Expertise. Fueled by a passion for their subject area, expertise in teaching requires deep pedagogical content knowledge (Snell & Swanson, 2000, p. 7). These teachers know the content and standards, and understand the goal that must be for each student. Teacher leaders with expertise have increased knowledge and improved attitude about teaching and learning (Muijs & Harris, 2003). Expertise in teaching requires a commitment to rigor and high expectations for students and ongoing opportunities to learn.

Reflection. Reflective practitioners are able to discern what is happening in the classroom and adapt their efforts by understanding their perspectives of others, while, at the same time, being conscious of their own values, thoughts, and biases (Snell & Swanson, 2000, p. 7). Teacher leaders reflect in their own classroom and own practice. Reflection on teaching can be defined as "the capacity of the individual teacher to reflect on his/her own practice, and to put it to the test of practice" (Harris, 2002). The power of

critical reflection can move teacher practice forward by allowing teacher leaders to think about their experiences with colleagues and principals.

Schön's (1987) reflection-based epistemology provides a framework for the scaffolding of individual knowing by characterizing the nature of thought into reflection-in-action, reflection-on-action, and reflection-for-action. Teacher leaders can use this critical reflective practice to reflect before the experience, during the experience, and after the experience. Schön (1987) explains the act of learning about "reflection-in-action" as follows:

> Reflection-in-action is the reflection of practice in the moment (thinking on your feet). Reflection-on-action requires the analysis of a situation after it has occurred. Reflection-for-action is the process of reflecting on practice before an experience has occurred. (p. 23)

Becoming a reflective practitioner is what Schön (1987) described as one who reflects on the phenomenon before him and on the prior understandings which have been implicit in his behavior. With this model, teacher leaders can reflect on their experiences, connect these experiences to feelings, and inform the actions taken during and after situations.

Collaboration. Characterized by a high degree of collegiality and cooperation, collaborative teachers value consensus and compromise rather than competition (Snell & Swanson, 2000, p. 7). Teacher leaders must work in collaborative teams in order for them to learn and grow as a network. Muijs and Harris (2003) state teacher leadership not only flourishes most in collaborative settings, but one of the tasks of the teacher leader should be to encourage the creation of collaborative cultures in school, and to develop common learning. Teachers working individually have their own specific

content knowledge but Danielson (2007) stated a group of teacher leaders working together "can supply the variety of professional knowledge needed for sustained school improvement" (p. 16).

Flexibility. Flexible teachers understand that teaching is an art and a science, requiring innovation and improvisation along with structure and planning (Snell & Swanson, 2000, p. 7). Working within this dimension requires teachers to be able to think creatively and flexibly, staying true to the goal at hand but willing to adjust as needed.

Journey Mapping

Reflective practitioners are able to discern what is happening in their classroom and adapt their efforts by understanding the perspectives of others, while, at the same time, being conscious of their own values, thoughts, and biases (Snell& Swanson, 2000). Reflecting on the experience can allow teacher leaders the opportunity to share this story of teacher leadership with others in order to improve teacher practice and student achievement. One technique used to help teachers think about their practice and define teacher leadership is journey mapping. Snell and Swanson (2000) used journey maps with ten middle school teachers to prod their thinking about their capacities in five dimensions to articulate how they acquired knowledge and skills as leaders. These dimensions included empowerment, expertise, reflection, collaboration, and flexibility (Snell & Swanson, 2000, p. 7).

Designed to be a tool to promote inquiry and reflection, a journey map is a visual record of past experiences and the relationship among these events, and it is also a "powerful way to showcase the evolution of an individual's personal and/or professional

path" (Snell & Swanson, 2000, p. 8). A journey map coupled with narratives gives teacher leaders the opportunity to reflect on the work of their lived experiences of teacher leadership.

Narratives of Teacher Leaders

Narrative psychology provides a basis to examine every day lived experiences. Crossley (2000) found that these lived experiences are meaningful and this is a "frame for understanding the self and others" (p. 9). Everyday reality is permeated with narratives of the human experience. Narrative studies are influenced by phenomenology's emphasis on understanding lived experience and perceptions of experience (Patton, 2002). Narratives provide a basis to examine and understand lived experiences and pathways to those experiences. Narratives of teacher leaders can help schools gather the stories of teacher leaders to improve practice and student achievement. Coupled with journey mapping, teacher leaders can reflect on the complex journey through their careers to becoming leaders.

A narrative theory advocates the need to focus attention on human existence as it is lived, experienced and interpreted by each human individual (Crossley, 2000, p. 45). Narratives are the stories we tell from our experiences that we have lived. The teacher leader's story can be told through the perceptions and experiences of the individual over time. Sarbin (1986) notes that human beings think, perceive, imagine, interact and make moral choices according to narrative structures (as cited in Crossley, 2000, p. 46). As teacher leaders move through their narrative with the maps, these structures and experience happen and we make meaning of the experiences. Upon reflection of the

story, we can find "human sentiments, goals, purposes, valuations, and judgments" (Crossley, 2000, p.46).

A basic principle of narrative psychology is that individuals understand themselves through language. Engaging in lived experiences and reflecting by writing and talking allows people to understand and create meaning themselves. Crossley (2000) stated, "It is through narratives that we define who we are, who we were, and who we may become in the future" (p. 67). Narratives can be used to reflect on an entire experience in part or whole. The purpose is reconstruction of the lived experience in chronological order (Glesne, 2011). Other terms which describe narrative are: (a) life history, (b) personal narrative, (c), narrative of lives, and (d) self-report (Crossley, 2000).

Conclusion

This literature review examines the conceptual framework of distributed leadership, teacher leadership as a function within distributed leadership, and the skills, roles, and responsibilities of teacher leaders. I have also discussed professional development for teacher leaders, obstacles for teacher leadership, dimensions of teacher leadership, and narrative and journey mapping. This extensive literature review indicates that teacher leadership is important in moving schools forward to increasing student achievement, improving teacher practice, and building relationships with principals and teacher leaders. Distributed leadership and teacher leadership are both important components to the organization of schools. We must shift our focus to the story behind the teacher leadership journey and learn from the voice of teacher leaders to further develop the practice of teacher leadership.

Teacher leadership experiences with the support of the principal will be used in the study to examine the practice of teacher leadership. Studying the experiences, skills, and expertise of teacher leaders open the pathway to guide teacher leaders to influence improvement in the school community. The next chapter examines the methodology of this study.

III: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this qualitative study is to understand the perceptions and lived experiences of elementary teacher leaders in their journey through teacher leadership. Additionally, this study sought to identify the influencing factors connected to how participants viewed themselves as teacher leaders and the practice of teacher leadership. The following questions guided this study:

Primary Research Question: How is teacher leadership practiced in an elementary school community? Secondary research questions: What are the key moments in a teacher leader's journey that helped them see themselves as a teacher leader? How do these teacher leaders do the work of teacher leadership? What supports their practice of teacher leadership and what obstacles impede their practice of teacher leadership?

The Qualitative Approach

In order to address the research questions of this study, a qualitative research design was used. "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" (Merriam, 2009, p. 13). This study sought to understand the perceptions and experiences of teacher leaders in their natural setting. The overall purposes of qualitative research are to achieve an understanding of how people make sense out their lives, delineate the process of meaning making, and describe how people determine what they experience (Merriam, 2009).

The epistemological stance of constructionism forms the overarching perspective of this study. The views of constructionism (constructing meaning through a social experience) drove this study to make meaning of the experiences of the process (Crotty,

1998). I wanted to understand how the teacher leaders construct knowledge about their reality in this study (Patton, 2002). Constructing meaning requires that "all knowledge, all meaningful reality is contingent upon human practices being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world" (Crotty, 1998, pg. 42). The multiple realities of teachers researched in the study were analyzed from their perceptions in the phenomenon. Constructing knowledge requires us to be active, to engage with phenomenon in our world and make sense of it directly and immediately (Crotty, 1998). An interpretivist paradigm derived from constructionist epistemology focuses the researcher on understanding participants' meaning-making in relation to the phenomenon of teacher leadership.

Interpretivism provides the "context for the process involved and a basis for its logic and criteria" (Crotty, 1998, p. 66). The idea within interpretivism is the understanding of social reality. The social construct of schools provided me with examples of lived experiences of the participants. Interpretive research, which is where qualitative research is most often located, "assumes that reality is socially constructed, that is, there is no single, observable reality" (Merriam, 2009, p. 8). Interpretivism allowed me, the researcher to understand the realities of attitude, behavior, motivation, and action with the participants in the study. This view created the opportunity for me to construct meaning and interpret the experience. Constructing meaning means we have something to work with and in this case it is the perceptions of teachers in their world. The theoretical perspective of interpretivism drives the methodology and methods chosen to complete this study.

Narrative Inquiry

For this study with teacher leaders, I chose the approach of narrative inquiry to understand the lived experiences of teacher leaders. Chase (2011) states narrative inquiry revolves around an interest in life experiences as narrated by those who live them. Qualitative forms of research "help us understand and explain the meaning of social phenomena with as little disruption of the natural setting as possible" (Merriam, p. 5).

Narrative inquiry has varying meanings and there are differing ways in which researchers collect data, although researchers do agree that narrative research is "an oral, written, or filmed account of events told to others or oneself" (Smith, 2000 p. 328). Patton states qualitative researchers "try to develop a complex picture of the problem or issue under study, this involves reporting multiple perspectives, identifying the many factors involved in a situation, and generally sketching the picture that emerges" (2002, p. 39). Chase (2011) states narrative inquiry is "organizational research that is concerned with collecting stories about people and their lived experiences" (p. 423). Connelly and Clandinin (1990) describe narrative inquiry as the study of the ways humans experience the world. The method of narrative inquiry was chosen for this study to make meaning of teacher leader's roles, relationships, and their experiences in the world of elementary school. Narrative inquiry allowed me to understand the teacher leader phenomenon through the participant's story of social involvement. Merriam (2009) states "stories are how we make sense of our experiences, how we communicate with others, and through which we understand the world around us" (p. 32).

A central idea of narrative inquiry is that "stories and narratives offer a translucent window into cultural and social meanings" (Patton, 2002, p. 116).

Researchers use stories as data and first-person accounts of experiences told in narrative form. Characteristics of narrative inquiry like storytelling, allow researchers to gain knowledge of the participant's journey from beginning to end because the personal story is the participant's reality as they know or tell it. Features of narrative inquiry can include participant observation and interviews that allow the researcher to interact with participants of the study. Narrative studies place "emphasis on understanding lived experiences and perceptions of experience (Patton, 2002, p. 115). The researcher can make meaning of events and lived experiences told over periods of time.

The main component of narrative inquiry is the discourse involved in telling stories of lived experiences. Narrative discourse requires meaning making through the shaping or ordering of experiences, a way of understanding one's own or others' actions, or organizing events and objects into a meaningful whole, of connecting and seeing the consequences of actions and events over time (Chase, 2011). The method of narrative inquiry for this study allowed me to listen and collect stories about the participant's everyday experiences in order to understand and identify themes within their experiences.

In narrative research, the context of the experience is important to interpretation. The context of the participant plays an important role in analyzing narrative inquiry because meaning about socially constructed reality can be difficult to analyze (Chase, 2011). The researcher draws themes from the perspective of the participant so the stories need to be based within a specific context. To become context specific, the approaches to data collection from narratives must be planned to elicit the correct data to interpret (Patton, 2002).

The method of narrative inquiry involves conversations and telling stories of experiences to inform, instruct, and empower teachers in their social constructs. There are a number of different methods of data collection so that the researcher and participants can work together in a collaborative relationship. Merriam (2009) states the researcher is the primary tool in qualitative research. Qualitative methods allowed me to become deeply involved in the experiences of the participants, and use an iterative process of data collection and analysis where I could continuously member check and check assumptions (Chase, 2011).

Research Design

To begin this study, I started with a look at myself, my own story, and my own journey through teacher leadership. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) state, "humans are storytelling organisms who, individually and socially, lead storied lives" (p. 2). I decided to use narrative inquiry to understand and tell the story of teacher leaders and how they practice leadership using "The Dimensions of Teacher Leadership" as a lens. I chose to use Snell and Swanson's (2000) dimension as a lens to identify what is important to the teacher leaders in their practice. Most qualitative approaches depend on a variety of methods for obtaining data (Glesne, 2011). The methods used for gathering data in this study are journey mapping, interviews, focus group interviews, and journaling. Through data collection and triangulation, I sought to understand the multiple perspectives of the participants.

Sampling

The sampling for this study followed purposeful sampling. Patton states "the logic and power of purposeful sampling lies in selecting information-rich cases for the

study in depth" (2002, p. 230). The three teacher leaders chosen for this study were purposely chosen because they were identified by the principal of the research site as displaying characteristics and qualities of teacher leadership on the campus. I created a questionnaire for the principal that outlined features, qualities, and characteristics of teacher leadership as defined by the literature (see Appendix A). As a preliminary step and with school district approval to conduct the research, the principal completed the questionnaire and named three teacher leaders who were invited to participate in the study. The questionnaire outlined criteria based on the literature. Teacher leaders demonstrate high levels of instructional expertise, collaboration, empowerment, and have an interest in adult development (Katzenmeyer and Moller, 2001; & Snell and Swanson, 2000; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). This questionnaire helped to outline the areas of instructional practice, collaboration, reflective practice, and roles and responsibilities teacher leaders may assume. Purposeful sampling directly reflects the purpose of the study and guides in the identification of information-rich cases (Merriam, 2009).

Participants

The study involved three teacher leaders from one elementary school in a large urban school district in Texas. The focus of this study was on teachers who are leaders in their school purposely selected by the principal, based on attributes and characteristics of teacher leadership from the literature. These attributes and characteristics that help leaders identify teacher leaders within schools are listed on the questionnaire given to the principal (Danielson, 2006; Gabriel, 2005; Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). The three participants chosen were from different grade levels with varying levels of experience. The following is a table listing information about the teacher

leaders and their characteristics, followed by more details about their first career and

leadership. The teacher leaders are described in more detail in chapter 4.

Table 1

Teacher Leader's Characteristics

Pseudonym	Teaching Experience	First Career	Teacher Leader Characteristics
A – Ann	Kindergarten: 5 years; First Grade: 5 years; Second Grade: 1 year	Manager with a Communications company for 30+ years	Willingness to work with others, dependable, competent, knowledgeable, take risks, passionate, provides influence
B – Brenda	Fourth Grade: 4 years; Third Grade: 4 years	12 years with the Military	Competent, positive, willingness to work with others, confident, knowledgeable, dependable
C – Cara	Fifth Grade: 3 years	2 years with a Pharmaceutical company	Flexible, competent, positive, willingness to work with others, enthusiastic, knowledgeable

Ann. Ann began her first career at a communications company and retired from

that career as a manager. The company she worked with funded her undergraduate

degree in Business Administration and a master's degree in Organizational Behavior.

She worked for the company for over thirty years. As an experienced manager of

projects and people, she brought the characteristics of dependability, influence, risk-

taking, and willingness to work with others to teacher leadership from her previous

career. While working at the communications company, Ann also volunteered at a local

elementary school and tutored students in reading and math.

Ann retired from the communications company and was comfortable, but a friend

called upon her to take a teaching assignment at a charter school. Ann's teaching

experience has been in the primary grades for the past eleven years. She began her teaching journey at the charter school then moved to her current district to an elementary school to teach Kindergarten and 1st grades. Ann is a teacher leader who seeks new learning so she received Special Education certification and also went on to receive her doctorate.

   Brenda. Brenda began her career in radio news and journalism, and then became a sergeant in the military. In this career she learned control, compassion, and flexibility. She brings these characteristics of leadership with her to teacher leadership. She always had thoughts of becoming a teacher and received her alternative teaching certification and has taught 3rd and 4th grades for eight years. Brenda felt that she was always supposed to teach, she just took a different path to begin teaching. Brenda obtained a second bachelor's degree in Education and Spanish and then elementary certification to teach 3rd grade. She has been teaching for eight years.

   Cara. Cara had first thoughts of being a pharmacist so she obtained her undergraduate degree in Biology. She began a career with a pharmaceutical development company and pushed a lot of paperwork to ensure doctors and patients were in compliance. Cara felt this job was not meaningful and she was not challenged. She loved biology so she thought about being a biology teacher and she enrolled in a teacher certification program. Cara brought the skills of flexibility, competence, and willingness to work with others to her teacher leadership journey. Cara received a master's degree in educational leadership and seeks professional development to enhance her teaching and leading skills. She has been teaching for three years.

In order to gather stories of teachers and their journeys of teacher leadership, the participants were chosen to cultivate the knowledge and skills of teacher leadership. The participants show characteristics such as optimism, excellent teaching skills, providing influence beyond one's own classroom, and confidence (Danielson, 2006; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). The participant's years of experience, knowledge, skills, credibility, and engagement with others helped bring about the stories for this study.

Research Site

This study explored the practices and experiences at Lincoln Elementary School, a small Title I elementary school in a large urban school district in Texas. I am using a pseudonym for the school to protect the parties involved. This pre-kindergarten through fifth grade Title I elementary school was founded in 1969 and named after a prominent figure in the community. Lincoln Elementary's student body population fluctuates between 290 and 320 students throughout the school year. The demographics are 48% Hispanic, 44% African-American, 4% White, and about 97% of the students are labeled economically disadvantaged and receive free and reduced breakfast and lunch. Special populations of the school consist of 13.7% Special Education and 24.2% Limited English Proficient (LEP). Attendance rates have improved to 96.3 % for the 2012-2013 school year from 95.7% for the 2011-2012 school year (Academic Excellence Indicator System, 2013).

Staff at Lincoln Elementary consists of the principal and assistant principal, an instructional specialist, mentor teacher, four Special Education teachers, eighteen General Education teachers, three special area teachers (Art, Physical Education, and Music), seven teacher assistants, two librarians, and a parent support specialist. Lincoln

Elementary also has cafeteria workers, custodians, and special programs like Communities in Schools with staff members that support the school.

Accountability results for Lincoln Elementary for the 2012-2013 and 2013-2014 academic school years show that the school met the state standard but has room for improvement. Overall percentages for meeting Phase 1 Level II performance for 2012-2013 are: 4th Grade Writing, 58%; 5th Grade Science, 74%; Reading 3rd-5th Grade Students, 62%; and Math 3rd-5th Grade Students 61% (Texas Academic Performance Report, 2013). Overall percentages for meeting Phase 1 Level II performance for 2013-2014 are: 4th Grade Writing, 55%; 5th Grade Science, 68%; Reading 3rd-5th Grade Students, 69%; and Math 3rd-5th Grade Students 62% (Needs Assessment Data Profile, 2014).

The principal of Lincoln Elementary will describe the community as "close knit" that comes together for special social school events, especially Fall Carnival, Talent Show, and Track and Field Day. There is less parental involvement for school wide academic events like Math and Literacy Night although parents and families are usually more motivated to attend if there is food. The principal describes the parents as very trusting to the school when it comes to academics. They are hands-on when they need to be and just a phone call away. Many of the parents work one or two jobs and trust the teachers and administrators to handle the education of their children.

Role of the Researcher

My role during this study is observer as participant. My activities are known to the group and "participation in the group is secondary to the role of information gatherer" (Merriam, 2009, p. 124). During observer as participant roles, the researcher remains

primarily an observer but has some interaction with the study participants. At times I am

solely the researcher gathering information. During specific moments in order to better

define data collection for the participants, I am a participant observer engaged with the

participants while collecting information. At this point during a focus group discussion, I

presented my own journey map to clarify journey mapping and identify dimensions of

teacher leadership for the participants (Snell & Swanson, 2000).

Information Collection

Interviews

I interviewed each teacher leader in a semi-structured environment to address

their understanding of the dimensions of teacher leadership, to build a working

relationship with the researcher, and to introduce them to the journey maps they later

created. The interview guide approach was used to list questions or issues that were to be

explored during the course of an interview (see Appendix B). This qualitative approach

is prepared to "ensure that the same basic line of inquiry are pursued with each person

interviewed" (Patton, 2002, p. 343). This interview process lends support to an in-depth

inquiry and exploration of the subject and has the flexibility to enable the researcher to

respond to the participant, the context, or to new issues.

Interview questions for this study were created from a review of the relevant

literature. The interview format and questions for this study cover the participants': (a)

past and present teacher leadership responsibilities in their schools and district, (b) past

and present professional and personal influences, (c) the personal model of teacher

leadership, and (d) their teacher leadership experiences.

Focus Group Interviews

Focus group interviews were used with the three teacher leaders as a form of data collection. A focus group interview is an interview with a small group of people on a specific topic (Patton, 2002). The purpose of focus group interviews for this study was to get high-quality data in a social context where people consider their own views in the context of the views of others (Patton, 2002).

There were four focus group discussions that focused on the journey maps. The first focus group interview was an introduction to journey maps when I shared research about journey maps and the reflective process. The teacher leaders shared their journey maps in the next three focus group interviews that were guided by semi-structured questions (see Appendix C). The questions focused on five dimensions of teacher leadership as reviewed in the research literature: flexibility, empowerment, expertise, reflection, and collaboration (Snell & Swanson, 2000). Focus groups were conducted to obtain a variety of perspectives and increase confidence in whatever patterns emerge (Merriam, 2009). The power of focus groups resides in the manner in which the discussion is shaped. Therefore each interview will be narrowly focused on the topic of one participant's journey map.

Document: Journey Map

Document analysis is an important part of qualitative research. Documents are the product of the context in which they were produced and grounded in the real world phenomenon (Merriam, 2009). Snell and Swanson (2000) used a form of data collection called *journey maps* in research with teacher leaders. The journey map used for this study is based on their research experiences. I chose the approach of creating a journey

map to obtain a visual representation of the participant's story. I chose to add a journey map to my data collection process in order to get a picture into what the participants found important and their personal perspective. A journey map can be considered a personal document and refers to any first-person narrative that describes an individual's actions, experiences, and beliefs (Merriam, 2009).

Snell and Swanson (2000) conducted a study with ten teacher leaders and used an approach called journey maps to get teachers to think about their skills as teacher leaders. Snell and Swanson (2000) described journey mapping as a visual record of past experiences and the relationships among these events. A journey map can be used to showcase the evolution of an individual's personal and/or professional path (Snell & Swanson, 2000, p.8). My goal for the participants in completing the journey map is to reflect on their life of teacher leadership.

I began the first focus group discussion by sharing research and examples of journey maps and some of the research about reflection. The participants had the opportunity to discuss ways to organize their thoughts and think about ways to develop their own journey map and how to present it to the group. The participants then had two weeks to create their own journey map. As the teacher leaders began their discussion and focus group meetings progressed, my understanding of the phenomenon in question grew as I mad use of the journey maps and journals that were a part of the teacher leader's lives (Glesne, 2011).

Document: Journaling

Journaling was also used as another data source to discover and support information relevant to emerging themes aligned with the dimensions. Journals made by

participants in the practical setting are a source of data in narrative inquiry (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Participants were asked to keep a journal over a six-week period and document their teacher leader activities. Visual data, documents, and artifacts provide contextual dimensions to interviews (Glesne, 2011). Journals can offer a powerful example of the participant's lived stories. Participants engage in writing to tell stories, explain situations, paint pictures, and reflect on lived experiences. The participants' journals, along with the journey maps, individual and focus group interviews informed comprehensive data sources to better understand teacher leader experiences. Journaling supported, expanded, and challenged my portrayal and perceptions of teacher leadership (Glesne, 2011).

Data Collection

Data collection began by gathering the teacher leaders together for a focus group interview. The topic of discussion for the first focus group interview was presenting the teacher leaders with information about journey maps and protocol for journal writing. The teacher leaders then had six weeks of journal writing to reflect and document their teacher leader activities. Two teacher leaders chose to keep a hand written journal and the third kept an electronic written journal. I provided the teacher leaders with guiding questions and protocol to prod their thinking about reflecting on their daily practice. The guiding questions were as follows:

1. How do I do the work of teacher leadership?

2. Who helps me do the work of teacher leadership

3. What are the challenges or obstacles I face as a teacher leader?

4. What are the activities I do with other teachers?

5. How do I feel doing the work of teacher leadership?

6. How do I influence and motivate others?

I used the teacher leader's journals and journey maps as documents or artifacts for a data source. Artifacts are material objects that represent the culture of the people and setting you are studying (Glesne, 2011). The journals and journey maps provided me with useful artifacts that were pieces of the teacher leader stories.

During the time the teacher leaders wrote in their journals, I conducted three additional focus group interviews and three individual interviews. The average length of the interviews was 48 minutes. Before the next focus group interviews, the teacher leaders had two weeks to complete their individual journey maps that would be presented to the group during the next three focus group interviews. The teacher leaders expressed their journey through teacher leadership in a visual form. One teacher leader also wrote a narrative to go along with her journey map. The narrative was a descriptive analysis to accompany the journey map. Group interviews are useful when researching action and experiences because participants can express multiple perspectives on a similar experience (Glense, 2011). The focus group interview questions focused on each individual teacher leader's journey, professional experiences that influenced teacher leadership development, and the work of teacher leadership (see Appendix C).

I also conducted an individual interview with each teacher leader. The focus for the individual interviews was to obtain each teacher leader's personal story about teacher leadership. Through the individual interviews, I was able to sit down with each teacher leader and listen as the story unfolded. Topics discussed during the individual interviews

were definitions of teacher leadership, skills and activities of teacher leaders, and the supports and constraints of teacher leadership practice (see Appendix B).

While collecting data, my understanding of the teacher leader phenomenon grew (Glesne, 2011). I was able to make use of the documents and interviews and put them together to form the stories of teacher leader's lives. The interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim.   The following is a chart identifies the research questions and methods of data collection and shows the relationship between the two.

Table 2.

Research Methods and Research Questions

	Individual Interview	Focus Group Interview	Journal	Journey Map
Q1. How is teacher leadership practiced in an elementary school community?	X	X	X	
Q2. What are the key moments in a teacher leader's journey that helped them see themselves as a teacher leader?	X			X
Q3. How do these teacher leaders do the work of teacher leadership?	X	X	X	X
Q4. What supports their practice of teacher leadership and what obstacles impede their practice of teacher leadership?	X	X	X	

Information Analysis

A process of coding was used to interpret what the participants are saying and doing, and then analyzed to make meaning of the phenomenon of teacher leadership. Using the methods of individual and focus group interviews, journey maps, and journaling of all three participants, I found themes related to the dimensions of teacher leadership prioritized in this study (Snell & Swanson, 2000) and coded these themes into categories. With the intention of identifying various themes and patterns, different methods were used to gather data, a process known as triangulation. Triangulation was used to strengthen the dependability of this study (Merriam, 2009). Triangulation is defined as the use of multiple data-collection methods, data sources, analysis, or theories as corroborative evidence for the validity of qualitative research findings (Patton, 2002). Triangulation using multiple sources of data means comparing and cross-checking data collected through observations at different times or in different places, interview data collected from people with different perspectives or from follow-up interviews with the same people (Merriam, 2009). This process helped me gain in-depth understanding of teacher leader practice by providing different perspectives on the same conditions. I had the opportunity to examine, verify, and reinforce the information collected from one data source to another.

To ensure validity and credibility of the data, I conducted member checks (Merriam, 2009) with the teacher leaders. Member checks are a common strategy used in qualitative research to rule out the possibility of misinterpreting meaning of what participants say and do (Merriam, 2009). The teacher leaders checked interview transcripts and data analysis for plausible interpretation. I received feedback from the

participants on the emerging findings from the transcribed interviews. Once the data was transcribed, the participants received a draft to determine if the data accurately described the participant's response to the interview questions. The teacher leaders verified the accuracy of their responses. I locked all the data collected, and kept them secure at all times. The data was only shared between the researcher and participants at all times.

Conclusion

Chapter 3 provides information about the methodology and methods for collecting data. This study was meant to understand teacher leaders and how they interpret and make meaning of teacher leadership. Qualitative researchers are interested in how people interpret their experiences and what meaning they attribute to their experiences (Merriam, 2009). By focusing on teacher leaders and the practice of teacher leadership, I want to tell stories of teacher leader perceptions in order to increase teacher leadership sustainability and school success. It was my intent to gather evidence from elementary school teacher leaders to add to the growing body of literature on teacher leadership within a distributed leadership framework. Chapter 4 discusses the results of this study.

IV: DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Chapter 4 presents the findings of three teacher leaders and their journeys to teacher leadership. The purpose of this study was to identify and understand the influencing factors connected to how the participants viewed themselves as teacher leaders and the practice of teacher leadership. First, I present the participants' stories in their own words and narrated in first person to provide the reader the opportunity to imagine their journey to teacher leadership. I constructed the narratives by putting together excerpts from various interview questions and journal entries. The teacher leaders' responses to interview questions provided substantive data for the teacher leader narratives (see Appendix B). As teachers begin to believe in their leadership capabilities, they take on school wide responsibilities and in doing so affect teaching and learning throughout the school (Crowther et al., 2009). The three teacher leaders discussed relationships, situations, and experiences that have helped develop their practice within their school community. A major consideration for teacher practice is planning and encouraging staff development and how it will contribute to individual and school wide improvement (Harris, 2002).

This chapter is organized into three sections: first, the participant's stories of teacher leadership told in their own words; second, the participant's understandings of teacher leadership practice; and third, themes related to the Dimensions of Teacher Leadership (Snell & Swanson, 2000) that emerged from the data. Immediately following each teacher leader narrative, I provide highlights of the findings and make connections to literature. The participant's accounts are also examined throughout the chapter with

appropriate quotes in an effort to authentically capture the participant's experience (Patton, 2002).

Teacher Leader Stories

It was important for this study to provide an authentic account of teacher leader experiences. Narratives are stories and the study of narratives illuminates ways that humans experience the world (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). The following table summarizes the three teacher leader's experience and teacher leader activities and is followed by a more in depth presentation of their narratives.

Table 3

Three Teacher Leaders

Pseudonym	Teaching Position	Teaching Experience	Teacher Leader Activities
A – Ann	Kindergarten	11 years	Team Leader, Facilitator for PLC, Team Leader for Professional Development Unit, Student Learning Objective Facilitator, Teacher Mentor
B – Brenda	Fourth Grade	8 years	Team Leader, Facilitator for PLC, Teacher Mentor
C – Cara	Fifth Grade	3 years	Team Leader, teacher of the year, Facilitator for PLC, Science Campus Contact

Ann's Journey

I did not know I was doing teacher leadership. I like to think of my journey beginning with what I am doing now and then I reflect back to the beginning. Teacher leadership is ongoing and my journey is still going. Teacher leadership in regards to being on campus is collaborating with my team, sharing with them, supporting them,

regardless if I am the head over the team, it is still teacher leadership. It's making sure

that my students are successful in the classroom. It's debriefing and needing help myself

because I think that is big. Being a leader is not only saying that I am the leader because

I need help too, and it's being able to say when I need help. That's my teacher

leadership practice. It was destined for me to be a teacher.

I wasn't even thinking about going into teaching, but someone else was. God

knew I was going to teach others, he just had to prepare me for it. It has been what I call

divine intervention. I have always liked explaining things to others but it has always

been informal. I would always learn something in my other profession and then go tell

someone about it. When I look back, this was the teacher leader preparation. I was

involved with the community service partner projects with a charter school and I

developed a close bond with the directors. When I retired from my other job, the director

said come teach for a year. So, I did. Then I taught for another year, I decided to get

certified, and then it's all downhill after that. This is the divine intervention of working

and learning with teachers and students.

I know others consider me a leader and I have leadership roles and

responsibilities but I do not really like it all the time. I still don't consider myself a

teacher leader because it sounds so authoritative. I think being able to be honest about

my position and my roles, and going to my peers, sharing with them when they need help

is what I like. I support them and I debrief with them. It is about collaboration. I used to

say unload and now I call it collaboration. I guess that shows growth on my part.

Teaching is my second career so the leadership somewhat came naturally with me

from my other career. I learned from my colleagues, went to classes, read books, and

attended professional development so I could find out what to do with my students. I think I started leading when my principal asked me to do certain jobs. For example, leading PLCs (Professional Learning Communities) and data meetings. I like to look at data because it drives what we do. It tells us about the students and what they need. So now, I am sharing what I do and collaborating with the Kinder and Pre-K teams on a weekly basis.

I do this work of teacher leadership because I want to see growth in myself, in my students, and my team. I want to learn more. Teaching and leading is continuous. It is ongoing. It is an ongoing process because even though you know something and you think you are doing it right, you have to go back and really reflect on your work, and share your work and its impact with others. I have to keep the end in mind. I look at the end and then come back because if you know where you're going, then you can come back and take the right steps for your students.

My leadership responsibilities are first and foremost my classroom. I am also team leader at my grade level, facilitator in my professional learning community and team leader in my professional development unit. I perform these duties informally every day and I guess these duties or roles are what make me a better teacher. It is stressful, but they make me think about what I do as a teacher leader.

I enjoy being a teacher. Sometimes I wish that the word leadership wouldn't follow behind but I like and think I need to be this teacher. For the good of the school, my team, and my students. I have a purpose, I like that better than teacher leadership, a teacher with a purpose.

Ann presents as very humble about her accomplishments and having the title "teacher leader." Ann's roles as grade level team leader, PLC facilitator, Professional Development Unit facilitator, and teacher mentor on the campus formally label her as a teacher leader but she expresses that the heart of her leadership is with her students. The student interaction part of teacher leadership and working in her classroom is where she grows the most. Harris states, "teachers are able to lead within and beyond the classroom" (Harris, 2002, p. 80). Ann felt that when she is teaching, she is learning about her students and improving her craft. Planning for instruction, working with her own students and their engagement, reflecting about her instruction, and making improvements in her instruction guide her work in collaborating with other teachers. Lambert (2003) posits a teacher leader may be seen as a person who is awakened by engaging and collaborating with colleagues. Ann grows as a teacher leader because she studies her students by planning instruction and checking for understanding with her students. When she has new learning, she turns around and shares with other teachers and engages in dialogue about improving teacher learning and student achievement. The work she does with her team and other teacher leaders initiates with her understanding of her own students.

Ann's story expresses that uncomfortable feeling she sometimes has when leading, but she faces it to improve teaching and learning on her campus. Teacher leaders know themselves, their purpose, and their intentions so that they are not intimated into silence by others (Lambert, 2003). She is able to overcome her feelings by focusing on her purpose which is improving teaching and learning on the campus. Ann wants to grow as a teacher and learner so she engages in the responsibility of leadership with

others in order to learn herself. Ann leads and/or facilitates Professional Learning

Community (PLC) and team meetings realizing her purpose which she brought with her

into the profession of teaching (Lambert, 2003).

Brenda's Journey

This is home and teaching is leading. Teaching is home for me. I look at

leadership in terms of reading instruction and being responsible for my students because

that is where I spend most of my time. My practice is being responsible for my grade

level and working to support my team so that we can support the children. I make sure

the guidance is there in all aspects… getting everything ready. That is my leadership, my

role, my practice.

I think I was told that I was a teacher leader, but my leadership in general started

with my military background. It is kind of natural for me to be assertive and take charge

but still yet listen to everything and everyone and be open. I link my teacher leadership

journey beginning back to my second year of teaching. My first year I was trying to

figure it all out and digest what being a teacher was so that I could understand the

curriculum and my students. It is one thing to read a book about teaching and it's

another thing in real life.

When I think about teacher leadership it is not being afraid to step up when you

need to step up, whether it's an official position or it's informal. When we have our

vertical team meetings, we all bring something to the table, but we have to decide how to

present the data. Someone just kind of naturally has to take the lead and so, most times

it's me. So, I don't think it's just an official thing. I think teacher leadership is your

daily work, in your presentation even when you are talking to your colleagues, sharing

information. To me, teacher leadership is collaboration.

A key moment for me that I can remember is "waiting." I don't know what I was

waiting for but I knew I wanted to become a stronger and better reading teacher. When I

was teaching in North Carolina, I knew I should go back to school but I was waiting. I

had family and personal obligations but I was still waiting for some reason. I was

waiting to be told to attend training or told to do this or that. Then, I said what are you

waiting for? You don't have to wait. You can get out there and do this and make this

happen. That was a very big experience for me. So I went back to school and started

tutoring kids in reading in local schools.

Administrators have an expectation of teachers and I guess I've met some of the

expectations set for me because it has been a natural progression to take on some of my

leadership activities. I lead most definitely in the classroom. I lead by example so I can

motivate my students and my teammate. I want them to think, oh I can do this too

because she's doing it. I don't always lead. Sometimes they see me follow because I ask

my students to come before the class and do things so it is not always me.

Teacher leadership with my colleagues is keeping everyone in the loop so we are

aware of what is going on. My teammate is new so I lead with her. We're either texting

or we meet with each other every day. We meet with other teachers too because there is

something constantly going on. This is a part of leadership because I'm asking questions

and they are asking questions of me. We collaborate constantly to do what is best for

students.

I've done more collaboration in the past two years than I've ever done before. I guess because I'm growing. Before, I talked a lot just with my team members. Now I talk more with my vertical team or even with a Kinder or Pre-K teacher to see what type of things they are doing to prepare children to read. And then I tell them, hey, this is what we're doing in fourth grade. I have experienced more of an exchange between teachers at various grade levels this year than ever before. I like that. This is showing growth in a lot of teachers and teams. We are communicating.

My stress within my practice comes with resistance from teammates and finding time to complete all my work. Being a teacher leader can make it hard to work with some colleagues. Last year I worked with a type of personality that I have never come across before. I was pulling my hair out and I was like, uh, what do I do. I read books, we had meetings, and I tried things her way. I decided it didn't matter what I did. I can't change the person. I learned that I will always have colleagues that don't think the way I do and that is fine. Personalities are different but what is important is the big picture and that is working with kids.

In saying that I cannot change colleagues, I can grow myself. I can improve my work as a teacher leadership. That involves studying and collaborating with my colleagues. This work of teacher leadership is studying the craft of teaching, sharing ideas, and trying different things. Teaching is on the job training, it is trial and error, and it is creative.

Brenda's story captures her growth in becoming a teacher leader, and knowing that she can make change by becoming more knowledgeable herself and sharing with others. Improving student achievement begins at the school level with teacher

development (Harris, 2002). Brenda's growth occurred when she decided herself to go back to school and further her education. Brenda also shared that her growth happens when she assumes teacher leader roles such as team leader on campus. Teacher leadership to Brenda is about her work as a teacher and her ability to teach her subject area well in order to improve teaching and learning. In Brenda's journey, she figured out her ability to lead in the area of education and was put in positions to do so by her principals. When Brenda is leading her team or her Professional Learning Community (PLC), she realizes she has met leadership expectations of her principal. Brenda felt that she wanted to do more in education so she went back to school and she continues to step up to lead her team and PLC. Brenda shared that through action, you can make a difference with colleagues and students. Teacher leadership is a means of sustaining teacher learning about their practices and affecting change in a learning community (Hobson & Moss, 2010-2011).

Cara's Journey

I don't really know how teacher leadership was bestowed upon me. I guess I was selected because I have been on my team the longest. Or, I am outspoken and I just take control of situations, that might be it, I don't really know. I think someone told me I was a teacher leader. I feel pretty good about it because I just want to make sure our teacher responsibilities get done, we figure things out, and help out where help is needed.

This is my third year of teaching so my journey is somewhat short in becoming a teacher leader compared to some of the others. I was selected Teacher of the Year so that has been a huge influential moment for me in my journey. I really know that my fellow teachers are recognizing my work. Other people think so highly of you and they

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think that you are a great teacher. I never imagined receiving such an honor and it caught me off guard.

Being a teacher leader is hard sometimes because of different responsibilities and because of students. My students are my ground and I am here for them, but I realize I have to grow as a teacher through professional development. It is sometimes hard to find good professional development or opportunities for new learning that's meaningful for me. Professional development is teacher leadership and it goes hand in hand. If I am presenting professional development, it is kind of like I am an expert in whatever I am doing. I have to take that role of teacher leadership and teach others the knowledge or skill. I take pride in that because I am working with my fellow teachers to teach others what I know.

When I think about leadership in general, I think back to when I was working in a hotel. I was just a regular staff clerk and I was placed to be an assistant manager. I was very young but I think I was a problem solver and I could work well with other staff. That is what is happening to me now in becoming a better teacher and leader. I can put out fires and I know more about what needs to be done with teaching and students. I think that is why I have been placed in this role. I am quick on my feet and I go forward. An easygoing personality and being approachable and friendly also come to mind when I think about myself and what I do with students and teachers.

My teacher leader practice is collaboration with my fellow teachers. The job I do in the classroom and even when the kids go home is my practice. I study my lessons with my team and talk about different strategies. The coach and administrators are helpful in that too. I just really want to get things done so my students are successful. Even when

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school life is frustrating, collaboration in the PLC helps a lot because we talk about the
stressful situations we all have.

Cara is at the beginning of her teacher leader journey but she has accomplished so much in a short time. In her third year of teaching, she was elected Teacher of the Year and this accomplishment has motivated her to continue to collaborate with her colleagues. This accomplishment is a key moment in her journey and being nominated amongst her peers was shocking yet motivational. "When I become a better teacher, I become a better leader" (Lambert, 2003).

Cara voiced very clearly her will to step up to the plate and take action. She recognizes her strength of assertiveness and is clear in expressing her views about taking action so that things will get done. So that Cara can continue to grow and work with other teachers effectively, she wants to improve her practice even more with collaboration among colleagues and professional development. When we begin with what teachers know, they are more inclined to want to know what others know and how they can help (Lieberman & Pointer Mace, 2009, p. 469). Cara recognizes that she must continue to grow as a teacher so she can grow in leadership with her team.

Teacher Leadership Practice

Themes

Teacher leaders in this study revealed a willingness to share their experiences about teacher leader practice. Teacher leadership themes emerged from the different data sources of journal writing, journey maps, and focus group and individual interviews. I focused heavily on searching the data for themes and patterns (Glesne, 2011). Themes

were derived from the work called data coding (Glesne, 2011). I explored the teacher leader stories for categories or thematic ideas represented by the codes (Patton, 2002).

I used the "Dimensions of Teacher Leadership" (Snell & Swanson, 2000) as a lens for the overall themes to begin coding. Using teacher leader themes that were related to the "Dimensions of Teacher Leadership", I was able to understand the stories of teacher leader practice and code the data. Patterns related to all five themes were evidenced in the data. These themes are: empowerment, expertise, reflection, collaboration, and flexibility.

The process began with reading the interview transcripts, the journals, and analyzing the journey maps that were collected in the study. I jotted down notes, comments, and observations in the margins and color-coded data for "The Five Dimensions".

1. purple – Empowerment

2. light green – Expertise

3. blue – Reflection

4. dark green – Collaboration

5. orange - Flexibility

The themes derived from "The Dimensions of Teacher Leadership" are a meaningful organizational schematic that encompass the work of teacher leadership. This process of reading the transcripts and documents and jotting down notes also left me open to anything that could arise outside of "The Five Dimensions" (Merriam, 2009). The following table shows major themes, categories, and codes used to interpret the data.

Table 4

Teacher Leadership Coding

Empowerment	Expertise	Reflection	Collaboration	Flexibility
mentoring, leadership, informal and formal roles, principal relationship	professional development, graduate school, self-actualization, achievement, goals	goals, student achievement, desire to make a difference, questioning	professional development, PLCs, shared knowledge, communication, teacher learning	Time, behavior management, vertical planning, contributions, action

Triangulation of the data occurred with interviews, journey map documentation, journals, and the review of interview transcripts by the participants. Teacher leadership themes and categories are explained in the "Dimensions of Teacher Leadership."

Teacher Leadership Practice Definitions

Teacher leadership practice had different meanings among the participants. Cara stated, "Teacher leadership is always thinking about others, how others can benefit from your knowledge, and sharing skills and strategies." On the other hand, Brenda talked about teacher leadership practice being about stepping up to informal or formal positions. She also shared that teacher leadership is an expectation and obligation. Brenda stated, Teacher leadership is in your daily work, in your presentation, and is about action." Ann also believed that teacher leadership is about sharing with others. Ann stated, "Teacher leadership is collaborating with my team, sharing strategies, and supporting my team." One of the most vivid descriptions of teacher leadership practice came from Brenda:

I see this definition kind of forming on another definition. Teacher leadership is about someone who sees something and does some action. We move. We don't

wait. We're not waiting. We're researching it or we're studying or we're trying

to give helping a hand. We're going in and saying, "hey, have you tried this?"

We're not just sitting back and waiting. We're stepping in and learning from

others, but turning around and giving back to others and addressing those issues.

These understandings of teacher leader practice reflect the passion that the work of

teacher leaders provides. Teacher leadership involves the proactive involvement of

teachers impacting, enhancing, and preparing the community for improvement in

education (Hobson & Moss, 2010-2011). The teacher leaders value the work they do

with each other and their students.

In defining teacher leadership practice, the data showed communication being

important for teacher leadership practice. All three participants shared that

communication between colleagues, teacher leader and principal, and teacher leader and

parents is key to the work of teacher leadership. Cara felt that communication between

teachers and between teacher and principal was important to her work. Teacher leaders

communicate to experiment with new instructional strategies and communication with

the principal is important to the implementation of new strategies. Teachers develop new

strategies, implement them, and reflect on the implementation and impact on student

learning (Fairman & Mackenzie, 2014). Brenda stated, "I really enjoy the relationship

that has developed between myself and the other reading teachers. We really talk about

how we will align ourselves with strategies so we can improve student learning." Cara

shared a similar feeling. She shared that her biweekly reading scores were improving

because of the increased communication between the 3rd-5th grade reading teachers. The

teachers talked informally in the hallway and even in their Professional Learning

Community meetings. "I feel good about my teaching when I see improvement in my students because I worked so hard with my colleagues" (Cara).

Communication with the principal was a part of the teacher leader's definition of teacher leader practice. Ann felt that constant two-way communication with the principal helped her lead her team and Professional Learning Community. She stated, "I don't know what I would do without the debriefs with my principal and coach. I can help myself and my team to do better because they give advice and set high expectations for what we should be doing as teachers." Ann says communication between the principals is very clear and teachers know how to get in contact with the principal. Improving schools have clear communication systems and communication between teachers and principal is transparent (Harris, 2002). The three teacher leaders shared that their practice works because of the open communication about improving teaching and learning.

Supports

Support systems are needed to sustain the work of teacher leaders. The teacher leaders in this study described support systems differently with examples, but the needs of support were similar. The ideas of supporting teacher leaders can be placed into three categories: 1) encouragement, 2) being involved in a professional learning community, and 3) opportunities to learn and grow.

In the area of encouragement, the three teacher leaders said the support of the principal was key in their work. Ann stated, "My principals are supportive if I need anything like resources, support for higher learning and professional development, and any type of change that I see would benefit the school or district." Brenda shared it is important for principals and the leadership team to give opportunities and provide

resources for teaching and learning. The teacher leaders said that seeing good leadership encourages teachers to step into teacher leader roles whether they are aware they have or not. Cara stated, "Leading by example is supportive because I get ideas about how to work with my team and PLC."

Each of the teacher leaders was not only a part of a PLC (Professional Learning Community) but also the leader. Ann stated, "I believe I was chosen to lead a PLC on my campus because I'm team leader and I was interested in the data collection and next steps for my students." All three teacher leaders were asked by the principal to attend a summer PLC conference in order to learn about the foundations of PLCs. The focus of each PLC on campus is using data to drive instruction and having space to collaborate about improving teaching and learning within the school. In a study of elementary schools, Lieberman and Pointer Mace (2009) found that teachers participating in some form of learning community were the single most important variable in predicting increased student achievement. The schools data show that there was an increase in 3rd-5th Grade Reading from 62% to 69% in 2012-2013 to 2013-2014. The increased collaboration of teacher leaders during PLCs is making a difference in the school community to impact student achievement. Each of the teacher leaders in this study articulated that the PLC was a positive way to discuss students and teacher practice, and they felt relationships among teachers have improved because of weekly meetings. There are positive outcomes such as increased student achievement, powerful effects on the culture of the school, and a teacher's self-efficacy (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001). Brenda stated, "We finally have a space to look at student data with a team of people and I can get feedback from my peers when something I am teaching is not working."

Sharing among colleagues through professional development within the PLCs was validation of the teacher leader's work and a means to obtain new information such as campus news or different strategies for instruction.

Obstacles

Time was the most frequent constraint to teacher leadership mentioned by the teacher leaders. Teacher leadership took a lot of time to practice effectively and meaningfully. It was evident that the schedules did not always allow for time to teach, lead, and develop as often as they would like. Teacher leaders in this study talked about the district not being realistic with duties, pacing calendars, and time for professional development. All three participants shared that they spend most of their day with students and there is not enough time to teach all of the required skills on a daily basis. They talked of having to stay after to school to tutor some students who do not grasp the concepts quickly enough because there is not enough time to review everything. Brenda stated, "This year there seems so be a struggle just to have time to review student work…There's no time built in to say, okay, we're doing this, let's take a few minutes and go over this." Even though finding time is hard, Brenda shared that their team is positive about finding ways to get to everything.

Katzenmeyer and Moller (2001) state teachers who believe that adopting strategies to find more time for teacher learning and duties, create a positive influence in school culture. Cara shared that pulling students to catch them up was very hard to manage. There are many students in her class who need small group instruction to reinforce skills that have been taught. Cara worked with her team to schedule some students with another class and stayed after school to spend time with some students. She

stated, "Pulling groups this year has been extremely hard and I'm like, why is this hard this year? And I don't know, seems like we're just so busy." Among the teacher leaders, time to lead, plan, teach, and collaborate made the work of teacher leadership difficult. Crowther et al. (2009) stated that a barrier to teacher leadership is lack of time for development. A suggestion to overcome the barrier of lack of time is to highlight professional development opportunities in daily operations (Crowther et al., 2009).

Negativity was another constraint mentioned by Ann. She talked about teachers being negative about teaching, teaching in isolation, and gossip that goes around campus. Ann shared:

Teachers working in isolation are a very big thing and it's such a hard thing to break because even I want to work in isolation because I feel I'm not getting support from my team. I just want to go ahead and do it. When we as teachers have a negative behavior, we aren't sharing and this isn't good.

Within the school, the teacher leaders felt that negativity and teaching in isolation made it hard to do the work of teacher leaders. It was hard for them to bring some of their teammates along with teaching strategies and looking at student data.

Another obstacle of teacher leadership practice was the title of "teacher leader" as viewed by colleagues in the school. Ann talked about not always liking the idea of teacher leadership because of the duty of running meetings. "I don't like having a leadership role all the time, although it looks like you're over them because you have to constantly go after them for data and information" (Ann). The teacher leaders shared that how some teachers reacted to their leadership efforts and responsibilities will inhibit them from successfully leading their PLC or other professional development. Teacher leaders

did not know if their colleagues necessarily put the label of teacher leadership on their efforts, but their attitudes during meetings or wanting to work in isolation made leadership uncomfortable to them. The uncomfortable feeling of the teacher leader title sometimes made facilitating meetings difficult because not all teachers had the best attitude. Even with some resistance from some teachers, it was evident from the teacher leaders that their school was a place where teacher leadership could be practice with a distributed leadership approach.

Dimensions of Teacher Leadership

The five "Dimensions of Teacher Leadership" (Snell & Swanson, 2000) were a foundation for the interviews, focus group discussions, journals, and journey maps, serving as a conceptual lens to inform construction of the research design and the data analysis. The teacher leaders used first hand experiences to reflect upon the phenomenon of teacher leadership. The five "Dimensions of Teacher Leadership" were used to capture the picture and story of a teacher leader's understanding of teacher leadership. The themes presented in the data were coded to form the categories of these dimensions. Interviews, focus groups, journals, and journey maps were used to capture the stories of the participants and see how participants interpret the world around them (Merriam, 2009).

Teacher leaders are stimulated by the desire to improve and in turn ensure learning for all students. The teacher leaders in this study are motivated and supported among themselves and their principal to improve teaching and learning in their school. Because of the significance of teacher quality, both teacher education and school reform efforts stress improving teacher learning (Hunzicker, 2012). The teacher leaders in this study all

shared the vision that their work and growth in being a teacher has great impact in the school community. Cara stated that teachers work with the community and support student achievement by participating in events like science fair or McTeacher Night. "It is good to see the community engaged in celebrating student success" (Cara). These events promote professional development and collaboration focused on working with the community to support student achievement on the campus. Brenda stated, "We had to study and learn the state test so we could clearly explain expectations to parents. I reviewed the state test for reading in and out with my team and presented my findings with other teachers and parents." Within the school reform movement, these efforts focus on professional development, collaboration, and developing teacher leadership improve student achievement (Ross & et al., 2011). The following is a table summarizing the "Dimensions of Teacher Leadership" by teacher leader, and then analysis of the results of each dimension.

Table 5

Summary of Dimensions of Teacher Leadership

Dimension	Ann	Brenda	Cara
Empowerment	Encouragement from principal, empowerment and support with colleagues, felt empowered to lead others	Positive reinforcement from principal and coaches, felt encouraged to step forward	Encouragement from principal, felt motivated to lead others, motivation between colleagues
Expertise	Wants and needs to study to improve practice	Being knowledgeable about your practice improves student learning	Higher learning and professional development are part of leadership, students give motivation to keep learning

Dimension	Ann	Brenda	Cara
Reflection	Improvement in practice comes with reflection, reflection with questioning, reflection with colleagues improves practice	Reflection changes what you do and how you teach, reflect in the moment, reflect with colleagues	Reflection happens all the time, learn from mistakes and share with others
Collaboration	Sharing instructional strategies in PLC, collaborative dialogue leads to reflection	Informal check-ins with colleagues, collective decision making in PLCs, collaboration and dialogue become informal professional development	Informal dialogue on a daily basis improves teaching and learning, data analysis in PLC
Flexibility	Reassessing situations and devising a different option, being understanding in difficult situations with colleagues	Taking the time to mentor colleagues, adjust to the pacing of the curriculum	Adjusting plans and teaching strategies for students, being understanding

Empowerment

Encouraging others through empowerment and motivation was a theme that

emerged and I coded for it in all the data sourced. Empowerment from the teacher

leaders in the study came in different forms. They all felt positive reinforcement and

encouraging words were necessary to teacher leader growth and development. Principals

who want to see their schools develop as learning communities must empower their

teachers in meaningful ways (Crowther et al., 2009). The teacher leaders felt encouraged

by their principal to step forward and take on different roles and responsibilities within

the school. The three teacher leaders all accepted the role of PLC facilitator from the

principal for the new school year. Improving schools have principals who build relationships with teachers and other stakeholders and trust that others in the school will make good decisions (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001). Empowerment from the teacher leaders was seen as being supported from the principal and also how the teacher leaders empowered each other and their colleagues.

Being empowered by the principal was an important aspect of the teacher leader's work. Brenda talked about after observing her team leader for a year, the principal encouraged her to take on the role of team leader the following year. She stated, "I had the opportunity to observe for a year and I didn't know I was observing, but my principal knew. After my teammate did not return, my principal encouraged me to step up …she said I've done a great job…I felt good and wanted the challenge." Ann also acknowledged that encouragement from the principal was influential. "I did a good job in my classroom, and in her eyes I was a good teacher so I felt good about moving forward with teaching the kids."

The teacher leaders all discussed empowerment being a part of what they do as teacher leaders. Many teachers are driven to experiment, take risks, collaborate, seek feedback and question their own and others' practices (Fairman & Mackenzie, 2014). The teacher leaders mentioned that encouraging each other and their colleagues was a part of their daily work.   Brenda stated, "I've been a listening ear and I've encouraged her because she's trying to pass the bilingual test…I said hey, you've only got 10 points to go. Stay the course; it's going to come together." Brenda also used questions as a form of empowerment and a way to help her colleagues stay motivated. She asks

questions like, "How can I help? What do you need me to do? How can we get this work done?" to help with conversations about teaching and learning as a team.

When there are problems within teams, the teacher leaders talked about how they empowered their colleagues. A vivid example from Ann stated,

> If there is strife in the relationship I have to like back off a little bit and then try to pull those people in and see what barriers are blocking the flow of teaching, or the flow of the relationship, or the flow of student learning.

The teacher leaders felt empowered to investigate what the barriers are and find out who can help improve the situation. Cara explained that encouraging each other on a daily basis helps her improve her work and share things with other teachers.

Brenda encountered a situation with a teacher and her instruction. The teacher was frustrated with a strategy so Brenda found a way to encourage her colleague.

> I took a few minutes out of my planning time and just popped into a 3rd grade classroom because I'm trying to let myself be known to 3rd grade students. I saw a student in the corner so I checked in with the teacher to see if I could join in and support. They were working on a strategy but not consistently…so I talked about what we did in 4th grade. Students were engaged as I shared a text evidence strategy…Later I talked with the teacher and I think by giving her a little release of seeing how someone else does it she was like, oh, that's what you do. We talked about the importance of trying something different for some students.

The leadership among teacher leaders here showed that motivating each other to improve or change what was happening in the classroom. Cara explained, "I think you want to

grow in your profession… 'cause I think about what do I do throughout the day… I just

think about the role modeling and sharing of information, trying to lead by example."

The Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) on campus were a platform that

allowed the teacher leaders to experience empowerment. All three teacher leaders are the

leaders of their PLC and were asked to assume this role by the principal. Ann is leading

the Early Childhood PLC and Cara and Brenda co-lead the Intermediate PLC.

Motivating their colleagues within the PLC was a part of the role. Brenda stated that

because of the PLC they are doing more talking and encouraging others to share

strategies. The teacher leaders "can deconstruct their practice, explain it to others, and in

the process learn how to facilitate learning for (and with) their peers" (Leiberman &

Pointer Mace, 2009, p. 460). This learning is happening horizontally and vertically

throughout the school.

Improving student learning was a thought shared by the teacher leaders. They felt

empowered to lead their teams and improve teaching and learning. Cara stated, "I feel I

do leadership to better the team…I see students falling through the cracks so I step up to

take that leadership role of sharing strategies with the team. I know that I can make a

difference." Ann felt empowered when her students challenged her to improve her

practice. "Professional development must impact student achievement and be designed

to target needs of the teacher and school" (Hobson & Moss, 2010-2011, p. 34). She

stated, "In my classroom I have the most influence because if I need to do something

different, I go and do it, because it is for my students." Teacher leader practice in regards

to empowerment meant encouraging each other to experiment, take risks, and collaborate

about improving teaching and learning at the school.

Expertise

Teacher leaders have experience in teaching and are aware of what they are doing and can easily talk about their practice (Lieberman & Pointer Mace, 2009). Teaching a strategy to others helps teacher leaders learn not only about what others are doing but also how to organize a learning community (Lieberman & Pointer Mace, 2009). All three teacher leaders expressed their interest in sharing best practices with colleagues. Teacher leaders serve simultaneously as teachers and leaders. They are in a unique position that allows them to use their teacher knowledge in combination with their relationships with other teachers "to improve practice, curriculum, and long-held beliefs about teaching and learning" (Margolis & Huggins, 2012, p. 956).

The teacher leaders expressed that they enjoy thinking about teaching and sharing their knowledge with others. They also know that being knowledgeable about their practice improves their teaching. Ann wrote that she knows she constantly has to study to learn new ways to work with her students. The teacher leaders find ways to examine their professional practice and articulate what they know to their colleagues. Margolis and Huggins (2012) found that the primary function of teacher leadership is shifting to instructional leadership, in which teacher leaders "utilize their own teaching practice to support other teachers' learning, enhancing their ability to obtain new knowledge in practice and knowledge of practice" (p. 957). Cara stated, "higher learning and professional development lend to my leadership…and my leadership goes to the classroom for my students…they push me, they challenge me to learn more and share with other teachers."

As a part of defining teacher leadership, according to the teacher leaders seeking professional development to improve practice and share with others was a part of their work. They believed that leading is doing and learning more from professional development. Within their PLCs, the teacher leaders are able to share their expertise, but also learn from their colleagues. Ann wrote, "being grade level team leader, PLC facilitator, and professional development unit leader help me grow as a teacher leader…my teammates trust me as a leader and believe that I do have the leadership qualities because they have said it openly in meetings."

Teachers become experts and knowledgeable about their practice when they perform teacher leaders duties, share with other teachers, and reflect about improving their practice. Margolis and Duel (2009) found that teacher leaders describe themselves as "leaders who continuously research and learn, and willingly share their teaching ideas and practice with other teachers" (p. 277). The teacher leaders in this study revealed expertise to be continuous learning and professional development, and sharing teacher practice with their colleagues to improve teaching and learning.

Reflection

The most reflective piece of teacher leader stories came from the focus group interviews. The teacher leaders were together and able to reflect on their own practice and their practice as colleagues. Harris (2002) established that "Collaboration in dialogue and action can provide sources of feedback and comparison that prompt teachers to reflect on their own practice" (p. 103). Consequently, over a period of six weeks, the teacher leaders also reflected in a journal. The day to day experiences of the teacher leaders were given in written form. The teacher leaders described many classroom and

collaborative experiences about their practice. "The reflective teacher is one who turns attention to the immediate reality of classroom practice" (Harris, 2002, p. 103). Two of the teacher leaders wrote longhand in a journal and the third kept an electronic journal. Cara stated, "I reflect a lot…every hour on the hour it seems like."

All three participants spoke of the importance of being a reflective teacher. Ann stated, "You know, you could only improve your practice by reflecting on what you've done…could I have done this better, where can I go to get answers if I need it, and what am I going to do about it?" Successful schools allow teachers the opportunity to inquire about teacher practice that improves behaviors and attitudes. Changes in attitude and behaviors can have a direct impact on instruction and result in improved learning outcomes for students (Harris, 2002).

Ann and Cara shared the view that reflection happens when a teacher is challenged. The challenges can be about students, parents, colleagues, and resources. They spoke about not getting through to students, not getting through to colleagues or having a strain in the relationship, and not having what they need to teach a lesson. Reflection happened with Ann in the form of questions.

1. What could I have done differently?

2. How could I have handled that?

3. Where can I go to get answers?

4. How can I plan the lesson better?

5. Did the lesson run smoothly?

When teacher leaders reflect on the day, they know more about themselves and the work they do on a daily basis. "You can pick yourself up from those experiences or learn from

some of your mistakes" (Cara). Lieberman and Pointer Mace (2009) found that teachers "build knowledge about their practice and become articulate about their knowledge of teaching and learning; and with the feedback from peers they have an opportunity to rethink, revise, and adapt their practice" (p. 461). Reflective teaching involves critical analysis of teaching and the teaching of colleagues.

A commonality among the teacher leaders was reflection with colleagues. They all found that when they talk with each other, they learn the most about their teaching. Ross et al. (2011) found that "teachers are reflective professionals who are able to move beyond existing teaching routines to transform practice" (p. 1214). Ann wrote about a day with students and how she tried different things to keep teaching in her class.

> At the start of the school day, I had severe behavior problems which I thought would ruin my instructional day. Nonetheless, the outcome was fruitful. One student did not get his way so he started throwing chairs…this started a domino effect with other students. I had to stop and think right there how to get back on track and I remembered a strategy that my colleague shared with me the other day. I managed to calm the student by letting him debrief his behavior on the computer and continue his learning through another mode. The class was able to complete my planned math experiment. This experience reassured me that regardless of unanticipated interruptions in the classroom, teachers should always be pliable and ready to think of a solution to the problem.

The teacher leaders in this study shared that reflection with each other improves their planning about instruction because they have the chance to debrief about what has worked and what instructional strategies need improvements. The PLC structure of the

school where teachers reflect around student data has helped the teachers gather and reflect on their practice. Brenda stated,

> through the PLC, we've come together more to look at data and I think we are working hard to be aligned and share strategies…we walk each other's rooms and think about how we can implement different things in our classrooms…PLCs are making a difference, a better difference.

The reflective practice of using data in PLCs drives the teacher leaders to think about what is happening with their teaching and their students.

As reflective teachers, they found ways to enjoy thinking about their teaching. The teacher leaders in study reflect individually and together in written form and in conversation with one another. Harris (2002) found that schools need to allocate time for personal reflection so that teachers have the opportunity to talk and share about teaching and learning. Reflection with other teachers provided a foundation for thinking and leading others in improving teacher leader practice.

Collaboration

Sharing ideas with one another to improve teaching and learning was a common theme with the three teacher leaders. By working collaboratively, teachers are able to see different ways in which subject-matter can be taught (Harris, 2002). The need to share ideas was an important part of each teacher leader's learning as well as the learning of their colleagues. Through varied collaborations, teachers experience the variety of perspectives required for teachers to question and understand more deeply their own beliefs (Ross et al, 2011). Ann, Brenda, and Cara all talked about collaborating, sharing, and working with others as a part of teacher leadership practice. This collaborative

emphasis is consistent with principles of high quality professional development and workplace learning (Ross et al., 2011).

Collaboration has helped these teacher leaders improve their learning and given them ideas to change instructional practices in the classroom. Brenda shared that informal check-ins with colleagues in the hallway has given her ideas about strategies for her classroom. Cara stated, "You meet someone in the hallway and they may say something like I have this student I just can't seem to reach…it's just a short talk but it's collaboration." Through collaboration and dialogue at one particular moment, Ann wrote:

> We talked about how we know that we demonstrate leadership in the classroom and in our school. It is imperative that teachers meet to dialogue and share ideas. It adds to our tool bag of teaching and learning. I cannot believe how much we shared through collaborating and dialoging about phonemic awareness and phonics instruction…this has truly been a learning experience.

The teacher leaders in this study realized that informal collaboration helps them on a daily basis because they are able to share ideas quick and on the spot. Collaboration increases teachers' opportunities to learn from one another between classrooms and grade levels within the school.

The PLCs on campus were a major opportunity for the teacher leaders to dialogue with their colleagues. Schools that are improving develop learning communities that generate the capacity and capability to sustain that improvement (Harris, 2002). The collaboration in PLCs meant discussing teaching strategies, student data, getting one another's opinions, and collective decision making. Within the PLCs they also

participated in informal professional development. Brenda realized that when dialoguing

with colleagues "you have to listen and say this is a team, it's collaboration and there are

other ideas and other ways, not just one way." The PLCs on campus have provided more

collaboration among teacher leaders this past year than ever before. Cara shared that they

come together more and there is more vertical alignment and discussion among the teams

of teachers. Brenda stated, "we're just talking more this year than ever before and I feel

better…I feel comfortable…aware of my teaching and my leading." The real time

teacher talk has spurred reflection, collaboration, and dialogue with a purpose of

improving the quality of student learning.

Flexibility

I found flexibility to be a small but important part of teacher leader practice.

Teacher leaders have a lot on their plate, but have the mindset that they need to be

available at any time for different reasons. Flexibility for this study meant bending for

the unexpected in regards to students, colleagues, and teacher growth.

Being flexible for students meant knowing what students needed and providing

instruction for different situations. Teacher leaders know their content and students so

that their students are achieving at high levels. The teacher leaders spoke of challenges

arising when students did not quite understand a lesson that was planned. They had to

flexible in the moment and modify lessons. Cara expressed,

> I noticed my students acting out after a lesson I taught. They were supposed to be
>
> working independently but they weren't. I stopped to think about why they were
>
> acting out and it turns out they didn't understand the assignment. I had to

rearrange my plans and come up with a different reading strategy so that they

could complete their work…and I could see if they would master the assignment.

Teacher leaders learn to react accordingly to the situation at hand. In many cases for the

teacher leaders in this study, being flexible for student situations meant reassessing the

situation and devising a different option continue student learning.

Flexibility in regards to colleagues and teacher growth meant being understanding

in specific situations and then having the flexibility to continue to grow after the

situation. Cara shared that you have to show your principal and your colleagues that you

are flexible. Flexibility comes into play while working in your team and this builds

teacher leadership. Cara stated, "you have to be flexible, compassionate, able to

communicate, understanding, and you have to have empathy…you have to learn to work

well with others."   She feels these characteristics of teacher leadership help her bend so

that she is there for others and can improve teaching and learning.

Leadership is varied and you have to change your practice when there is a need

for change. "The notion that leadership is as varied as the range of practicing leaders and

the contexts in which they operate is well-ingrained in educational leadership thought"

(Crowther et al., 2009, p. 39). Teacher leaders are able to change their style and be

flexible in line with what is required to achieve the outcome of the given situation.

Brenda wrote, "I had to stop what I was thinking at this point in time…I had to guide my

team to alter the plan…we needed to be successful." Teacher leaders in this study

experienced flexibility in the form of being able to adjust to situations with students and

colleagues.

Summary

In Chapter 4, I presented teacher leader stories in their own words followed by analysis of their journey. I have also presented an in depth analysis of the teacher leader interviews, focus group discussions, and journals. The data analysis revealed the "Domains of Teacher Leadership" and how these domains encompassed teacher leader stories. Teacher leaders collaborated in Professional Learning Communities and with their teams to discuss and reflect on student data, and to identify areas of teacher and student growth. Teacher leader expertise was utilized in a capacity to share teacher knowledge but also to reflect about how teacher leaders continue to develop their practice. Flexibility to the teacher leaders meant that they could bend for the given situation and modify their teaching and sharing in order to improve student achievement. The teacher leaders in this study felt empowered by their principal and empowered and motivated others to work together to improve teaching and learning on the campus. Through the process of data analysis, teacher leadership stories about practice evolve through collaboration, expertise, reflection, flexibility, and empowerment.

Chapter 5 provides further insight into teacher leader practice as well as my personal thoughts. I will share my thoughts on framing the research questions, journey maps, and my experiences that came to life through the course of this study.

V: CONCLUSION

Interpretation of Results

This study was designed to examine how teacher leaders see themselves as such, develop, stories of teacher leader practice, and contribute to the professional literature regarding teacher leadership. For this study, I had the opportunity to work with three teacher leaders at one Title I elementary school for an extended amount of time. In qualitative research, "a single case, or small, nonrandom, purposeful sample is selected precisely because the researcher wishes to understand the particular in depth, not to find out what is generally true of the many" (Glesne, 2009, p. 224). In this case, I wanted to understand the story of three teacher leaders through the lens of the themes of "The Dimensions of Teacher Leadership" (Snell & Swanson, 2000). I used the methodology of narrative inquiry along with the methods of individual and focus group interviews, journaling, and journey mapping, to document the individual and collective stories of teacher leaders and their journeys. With three teacher leaders, I conducted three individual interviews, four focus group interviews, and collected journals and journey map documentation. I focused on the relationship between teacher leader's life stories and the quality of their life experiences (Chase, 2011). This study was done to address my wonderings and questions, and investigate about teacher leader stories and their practice.

The primary research question guiding this study was: How is teacher leadership practiced in an elementary school community? Secondary research questions were also used to further examine the stories of teacher leaders: What are the key moments in a teacher leader's journey that helped them see themselves as a teacher leader? How do

these teacher leaders do the work of teacher leadership? What supports their practice of

teacher leadership and what obstacles impede their practice of teacher leadership?

In this study, I provided insight into the journeys of three teacher leaders. These

journeys could be used as an effective resource for improving schools and learning

communities through the practice of high quality teacher leadership. This chapter will

provide a summary of the research findings of the three teacher leader stories in relation

to the research questions, my reflection on the three teacher leader's interpretations, and

limitations and implications for further research. I will address the findings of the

research questions individually.

Summary of Findings

I understand that teacher leaders open themselves up to the improvement of

teaching and learning through reflection into their own practice. Reflecting about teacher

leader experiences from the day is a "key aspect to developing leadership skills" and

enhances teacher leader growth to improve teaching and learning on campus (Gabriel,

2005, p. 55). The dimension of reflection revealed itself heavily as a form of teacher

leader practice. Teacher leaders reflect as a part of learning for themselves and their

colleagues. Brenda stated, "Teacher leadership practice is my work with colleagues and

those daily conversations about teaching and learning." The most significant part of

teacher leadership that was shared by the three teacher leaders was collaboration among

teachers about teaching and learning. Teacher leaders grow and learn by "building

relationships and collaboration" (York-Barr & Duke, 2004, p. 265). This is where the

dimensions of collaboration and reflection intermixed as the teacher leaders told their

stories about their practice. Collaboration, reflection, and professional development were

ways in which they practiced teacher leadership. The teacher leaders shared how they do the work of teacher leadership and how they think their practice is improving teaching and learning at their school. The following is a summary of the findings of the research questions.

How Is Teacher Leadership Practiced In an Elementary School Community?

The primary question for this study explores the teacher leader's understanding of how they do their work on the campus. Teacher leadership in this study meant how teacher leaders work with students and colleagues. "Teacher leadership is practiced through a variety of formal and informal positions, roles, and channels of communication in the daily work of schools" (York-Barr & Duke, 2004, p. 263). The teacher leaders' understanding of teacher leadership practice put a focus on how they were involved with teacher and student learning. Katzenmeyer and Moller (2001) define teacher leaders as teachers who "identify with and contribute to a community of teacher learners and leaders, and influence others towards improved educational practice" (p. 14). After the fourth focus group interview, Brenda discovered that they had their own definition of teacher leadership forming. She summarized the conversation about teacher leader practice to be about someone who sees something and does something about it. The word she used was "action." The teacher leaders agreed that teacher leadership practice was working together to address issues and giving back to other teachers and students. Muijs and Harris (2003) found that teacher leadership has been important in achieving both school and classroom improvement. Teacher leadership practice for the teacher leaders in this study was collaborating to assess the situation and providing some sort of action to improve the situation.

In this elementary school setting, teacher leaders practiced most frequently in their classrooms and within their Professional Learning Communities (PLCs). Ann and Cara realized that they felt most influence in regards to their classroom. In the classroom, teacher leadership work was about leading students by teaching with instruction that would improve their achievement. They felt good about working with each other to improve teaching and learning with their own classes and other classes on campus. Muijs and Harris (2003) state empowering teacher leaders to take on leadership roles enhances work satisfaction, which in turn leads to higher levels of student performance. The teacher leaders worked with students and sought ways to improve teaching and learning in their classrooms. They dimensions of collaboration and empowerment were prevalent as they practiced communication and collaboration among themselves, and they were able to discuss what they do with their students and share experiences about teaching and learning.

The teacher leader stories told me that teacher leadership practice was a part of the PLCs on campus. The teacher leader who comes to mind as most vividly telling this story is Cara. Teacher leaders used the forum of PLCs to share and vent about "school life." Professional learning communities lead to strong, collaborative work, and create and support sustainable improvements that last over time because they build the professional capacity to keep the school progressing (Muijs & Harris, 2003). Cara expressed that when things are frustrating, collaboration and conversations in the PLC helps to talk about stressful situations that they all have. Lambert (2003) states, "conversations that are dialogues are the most powerful means for evoking our thoughts and feelings about issues and self" (p. 426). Ann, Brenda, and Cara all identified the

PLC as a place where they practiced teacher leadership and reflected about their work.

The following table summarizes the teacher leader's commonalities and differences

within the findings of the "Dimensions of Teacher Leadership" (Snell & Swanson, 2000).

Table 6

Comparisons of the Dimensions of Teacher Leadership

Dimension	Similarities	Differences
Empowerment	Encouragement from principal, empowerment and support with colleagues, felt empowered to lead others, felt encouraged to step forward, felt motivated to lead others, felt empowered to accept leadership roles	Cara: self-motivated Brenda: felt empowered from positive reinforcement from principal and coaches Ann: felt motivated to learn more and share with others
Expertise	Want and need to study to improve practice, Being knowledgeable about your practice improves student learning	Ann: studies to improve instructional practice Cara: Higher learning and professional development are part of leadership
Reflection	Improvement in practice comes with reflection, reflection with questioning, reflection with colleagues improves practice, Reflection changes what you do and how you teach	Brenda: reflection with questioning guides her practice Ann: daily reflection allows you the opportunity to learn from mistakes and share with others Cara: reflection in the moment
Collaboration	Share instructional strategies with colleagues during PLC, dialogue between colleagues is informal professional development, collaboration and dialogue become informal professional development, Informal dialogue on a daily basis improves teaching and learning	Brenda: collective decision making in PLCs Cara: data analysis discussions help improve teacher practice

Dimension	Similarities	Differences
Flexibility	Being understanding in difficult situations with colleagues, adjust to the pacing of the curriculum, Adjusting plans and teaching strategies for students	Ann: reassessing situations and devising a different option Brenda: taking the time to mentor colleagues

What Are the Key Moments in a Teacher Leader's Journey That Helped Them See Themselves As a Teacher Leader?

This question was designed for teacher leaders to tell the story of moments where they identified themselves as teacher leaders. This question was also addressed through the journey maps. Each of the teacher leaders had a defining moment about being a teacher leader as they reflected in their interviews and journey maps.

Ann. The key moment for Ann happened when she received her first teacher job. She described this moment as "divine intervention" because God prepared for her to go into teaching and then lead others to develop as teachers. She felt prepared to accept this new challenge and was given the opportunity to walk by faith. Teaching is a second career for Ann so the leadership skills and desires followed her from her former profession. Ann tells us that she is still on her journey. Ann's story told me that success and obstacles happen regularly but the support of the principal and other teacher leaders helps her to continue to lead. "Principals nurture and support teacher leadership because they know how crucial it is to establish improvements in teaching and learning at the classroom level" (Ackerman & Mackenzie, 2006, p. 66). Ann's teacher leadership is her classroom of students, collaboration, and learning she has with other teachers.

Brenda. In Brenda's story, a key moment happened in her second year of teaching because she became the leader of her team when the team leader became ill.

She describes this experience that was bestowed upon her as a moment where she had to step up to leadership. She links the beginning of her story to this moment because in her first year of teaching she was trying to figure everything out, digest the curriculum and what being a teacher was about. Brenda realized in that second year that someone had to be team leader so she said, "why not me." The principal supported her stepping into the team leader role. Muijs and Harris (2003) state principals "need to support and validate the concept of teacher leadership" (p. 442). Her story told me that this step into leadership naturally came to her as she oversaw certain responsibilities and moved her team forward. When her teammate returned, Brenda told me her teammate said, "I'm going to step back and let you lead because you need to grow…this is your moment." Ackerman and Mackenzie (2006) assert that sometimes teacher leaders learn hard lessons about the difficulty of taking on leadership roles and mentoring teachers at the same time. Brenda realized that she needed to grow as a teacher and this was a natural push and opportunity to understand and practice teacher leadership. She shared that she could do this with the help of her team and principal who had faith in her leadership abilities.

Cara. Being selected as Teacher of the Year by her colleagues has been a key moment for Cara. She described the moment as an honor and wants to continue to work with other teachers. Through this experience, Cara realized that other teachers look up to her and think highly of her teaching. Cara also says that communication with colleagues is beneficial for her growth as a teacher. Cara is in her third year of teaching, so she doesn't always see herself as a leader because she still feels new to teaching. Sometimes, when teacher leaders are able to view their work as a part of the culture of the school, the term leadership becomes participating in "learning work with my colleagues" (Lambert,

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2003, p. 424). Her learning work is helping her grow as a teacher and lead others to improving teaching and learning on the campus. Conversations about how to teach students, sharing strategies, and providing informal professional development are moments that help her see herself as a leader among her colleagues.

The moments for the teacher leaders developed after they thought critically about who they are, what they do as teacher leaders, how they do their work, and who else is involved in teacher leadership. As teacher leaders, sometimes we forget to reflect and evaluate ourselves and even encourage our colleagues to do so because of time and innumerable responsibilities (Gabriel, 2005). The domain of reflection played a key part in helping the teachers define their practice. Reflection begins with the willingness to critically examine your own practice with questioning and evaluating choices and making adjustments about your practice (Snell & Swanson, 2000). These reflective thoughts pinpoint how the teacher leaders can improve their work with teachers and students on campus.

How Do These Teacher Leaders Do the Work of Teacher Leadership?

It became clear that these teacher leaders do not like to work in isolation. Collaboration and communication are key components to teacher leader practice for the teacher leaders in this study. Sharing and collaborating forges relationships and can improve the professional climate in schools (Fairman & Mackenzie, 2014). Brenda and Ann agreed that it was difficult to work with teachers who did not see collaboration and communication like they did. This sometimes caused friction but the teacher leaders used each other to vent and move forward to improve teaching and learning.

The teacher leaders collaborated about students, teaching strategies, data, and parents. This collaboration was a form of support for the teacher leaders. The PLC was a forum for how they were able to practice leadership. Muijs and Harris (2003) state teacher leaders work with colleagues to shape school improvement efforts and take some lead in working with and guiding teachers towards a collective goal. In the PLC they were able to specifically look at data, reflect about students and teaching strategies, and develop ways to involve others in the improvement of student achievement for the campus.

What Supports Their Practice of Teacher Leadership and What Obstacles Impede Their Practice of Teacher Leadership?

The teacher leaders in this study felt supported by their principal and by each other. Support from the principal was needed and a key component to their work. In a study of eighty-four teachers in a distributed leadership study, Spillane (2006) found that 83.3% of the teachers identified the principal as an "influential leader for their teaching practice" (p. 47). Ann felt that she needed to feel supported by the principal to lead her PLC effectively, to know she could get the resources she needed in her classroom, and to attend the professional development she needed to improve her teaching. Leading by example was also seen as a support to teacher leadership. The teacher leaders felt that it was important to see good leadership from the principal and the leadership team in order for them to learn to lead effectively.

In regards to obstacles, the findings in this study mirrored some of the research of York Barr & Duke (2004) in that challenges to teacher leadership were "existing physical structures that perpetuate isolation and autonomy among teachers and insufficient time to do teacher leader work" (p. 276). The teacher leaders in the study dealt with motivating

teachers to collaborate and work together versus working in isolation. The implementation of PLCs on campus helped some with teacher isolation, but the teacher leaders expressed that it is still present. Negativity from colleagues was found to be bothersome to the teacher leaders. I found that negativity and isolation went together because the teacher leaders expressed that they saw this the most within the implementation and development of PLCs on campus.

My Reflection

As a teacher leader myself, this process was eye opening to my work as a researcher and an educator. As I complete this research experience, I have come to understand of myself that to sustain teacher leadership, I have to collaborate, coach, mentor, and reflect with other teacher leaders both formally and informally. As I shared in Chapter 2, teacher leadership can mean so many things, but for the teacher leaders in this study, teacher leadership is collaboratively improving the work of teaching and learning.

For the research process, throughout the interviews I used open-ended questioning that allowed the teacher leaders to determine the way in which their story was told. I also restated comments from the teacher leaders in order to prompt them for further explanation. This seemed effective with some of the interviews because the teacher leaders elaborated on the stories and showed more emotion and personal reactions. The teacher leaders had aha moments, even saying things like "wow" or "I never looked at it quite like that" or "I didn't realize that about myself."

The stories of teacher leadership were told in narrative form using the interviews, journey maps, and journaling. Teacher leader narratives with interviews coupled with

journey maps and presentation of journey maps to the group was an important part of this study. The triangulation of data formed stories of the lives of teacher leader experiences. The teacher leaders expressed their experiences through story in the context of their lived experiences. I was able to document the personal narratives of teacher leader practice using the methods of journals and journey maps and blend this information with the interviews.

During the process of learning about Ann, Brenda, and Cara I learned more about myself as a teacher leader, educator, and scholar. The experiences of conducting research with the three ladies have exceeded my expectations and understanding of teacher leader practice. Their stories have added to what we know about teacher leaders and the work they do in schools. In conducting research, analyzing data, and writing the narratives, I came to personally experience and understand the teacher leader phenomenon on a deeper level.

In my own journey through teacher leadership, I feel that the support of the principal who uses the distributed leadership approach has helped me to grow as a teacher leader, and motivates me to collaborate and support other teacher leaders to improve student learning. Spillane (2006) states distributed leadership is practice that involves more than one person and the leadership activities connect directly with teachers and students.

I did not choose this topic; I believe it chose me. I believe teacher leadership was bestowed upon me by one of my principals who to this day always says, "I expect great things from you." My journey consists of setting goals for myself such as professional development, additional certifications, and additional roles on my campus. Sometimes I

was asked to take on additional campus responsibilities, but then I also felt the need to learn more for myself and help other teachers along on their own journey. Many people helped me learn how to reflect and grow as a teacher and I want to continue to do the same with my colleagues. I have found that teachers do in fact lead, and principals cannot effectively do this work of leadership alone. School leadership practice "typically involves more than one person, if not by design, then by default and necessity…expecting one person to singlehandedly lead efforts to improve instruction in a complex organization such as a school is impractical" (Spillane, 2006, p. 26).

I would say that I was told I was a teacher leader by taking on specific roles on my campus over the years. When I accomplished one task, I was asked to complete another. I became very good at multi-tasking, supporting my colleagues, working with students, and collaborating with my principal to accomplish campus goals. The teacher leaders in this study shared these characteristics. Looking back on the past five years, I cannot recall being asked about my journey and how it has affected me with what I am doing today to improve schools. I was curious about sharing teacher leader stories with others and learning more about what teachers do above and beyond working with students. I hope that this study helps teachers and leaders better understand the practice of teacher leadership.

Working With Journey Maps: Methodological Implications

My experience working with journey maps was a journey within itself. I had an idea based on prior research of how the introduction and presentation of journey maps would go, but the process went in a different direction. Snell and Swanson (2000) worked with teachers for three days about reflective practice and the teachers created

some form of journey map over this time. As the researcher, I went back and forth about how to approach presenting information about journey maps to the teacher leaders. The two ideas were as follows:

1. After reviewing the research of Snell and Swanson (2000), I wanted a better understanding of the process the teachers would complete so I took about a week and created my own journey map. I created my own journey map and wrote a narrative about my journey through teacher leadership prior to the data collection process for this study. This process was very reflective and eye opening for me as a teacher leader, educator, and researcher. Option number one and also my initial thought, was to share this process of journey mapping by presenting my own journey map and the research on reflective practice in the first focus group meeting. I would also model how the teacher leaders would present the journey maps in future focus group meetings.

2. After reviewing the research of Snell and Swanson (2000) about journey maps and reflective practice, in option number two, I gathered information about journey mapping and some generic examples of what a completed journey map would look like. In the first focus group interview, I would share with the teacher leaders information about reflective practice and examples of journey maps.

After completing the Institutional Review Board (IRB) process, I chose option two which was to present generic journey map examples during the first focus group meeting. With the help of my committee, I decided to choose generic examples of what journey mapping could look like and the teacher leaders chose their own way to present their

stories in visual form. I made the final decision not to share my own journey map

because I did not want to influence their thinking and skew the data.

After the first teacher leader shared her journey map during the focus group

interview, I was disappointed. It was not what I thought she would come up with. It did

not look anything like mine, and it did not reflect the depth of the examples. At this

point, I regretted my decision of not sharing my own journey map with the teacher

leaders. I did not want their journey maps to look exactly like mine, but I did want more

of a visual representation of the journey. I thought I had been clear about ways they

could visually represent their teacher leader journeys. So, I had to reflect and think about

what to do moving forward with data collection. After the end of the second focus group

interview, I took out my journey map and showed the teacher leaders what I had come up

with, shared my key moments, and what some of the supports and obstacles had been for

me. There were some "wows" and "ohs" from the teacher leaders, and then they agreed

that they needed to make adjustments. Brenda and Ann both made timeline like charts on

the computer (see Figure 5. 1). I have included Brenda's (Participant B) journey map to

show an example of some of the key moments in her teacher leader journey that shows no

elaboration or personal touch that illuminates her experiences. Brenda accompanied hers

with a PowerPoint and Ann accompanied hers with a narrative. Cara's journey map was

a complete bulleted narrative with a picture at the end. Cara did not change her journey

map at all.

Journey mapping is indeed a reflective tool that is a process that takes time. I feel

that this could have been done as a group over several periods so that the teacher leaders

could reflect individually and collectively. The teacher leaders could communicate to

understand what they know and are able to do for themselves and each other (Snell & Swanson (2000). I could have created time where the teacher leaders worked together to create their own journey maps and reflect about the process while they were in the moment. The dimension of collaboration was evident and clear from the teacher leaders so this may have provided an opportunity for more vivid journey maps.

Journey maps for this study were used to promote inquiry and reflection and I believe they did that, just not the way "visually" like I anticipated. Journey mapping has a number of benefits and features that allow researchers to provide a level of detailed interactions from a person's viewpoint (Hamer, 2012). The journey maps allowed us to see what events in their lives helped them along their journey and the people they interacted with along the way. The journey map process outlined specific events chosen by the teacher leader beginning from a specific moment. All of the teacher leaders in this study chose the starting moment as the point in which they began their teaching career. The teacher leader's journey maps added specific moments of important events in their journeys in a linear fashion. I was able to see stepping stones to particular moments in their career paths. The journey maps did help me see "what they went through every step of the way" according to how they reflected on the moment (Hamer, 2012, p. 11).

The method of journey mapping for this study gave me rich data, but I initially thought I would get more of a visual representation from the teacher leaders. If I were to do this with another group of teacher leaders in the future I would consider three things about this data collection process:

1. Create journey maps together as a group
2. Allow teacher leaders the opportunity to reflect individually and collectively

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3. Present my own journey map as well as other examples

4. Allow more time for teachers leaders to create their journey maps

With these points taken into consideration, maybe journey maps will be more of a visual

with specifics on individual moments on the journey maps. Both Ann and Brenda's

journey maps were very concrete and linear and were visually represented like a timeline

that reflected on meaningful events up to the current moments of this study. The

following is Brenda's journey map.

Radio news reporter and journalist in Louisville, Kentucky. Studied Spanish at the University of Louisville. First thoughts of becoming a teacher.

Moved to Texas in 2005

Received alternative education certification through Region 13 in 2007

Hired to work at Lincoln Elementary school during the 2006-2007 school year as a 3rd grade bilingual teacher. I held this position for three years until my relocation.

Took on teacher leadership role in second year as the team leader fell ill. Oversaw lesson planning & classroom instruction. (2007)

Moved to Charlotte, North Carolina in 2009.

Matriculated & received M.S. Ed. In Reading & Literacy at Capella University; 2012

Rehired at Lincoln Elementary School in 2012 to teach 4th grade ESL. This is my current position. I also serve as team leader, cooperative teacher to other colleagues, and a consultant to parents on how to help their children's learning at home. My journey as a teacher leader continues.
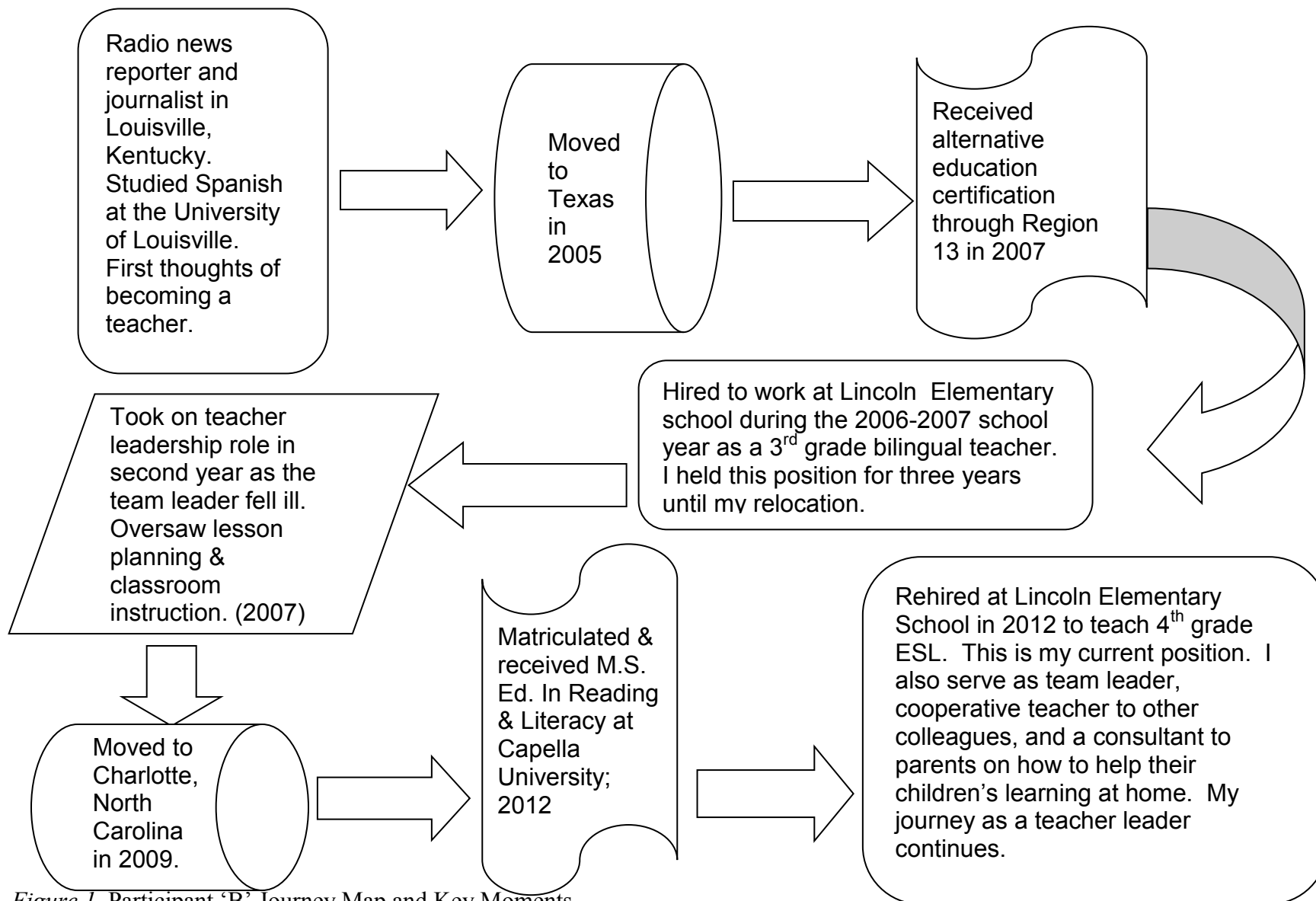
Figure 1. Participant 'B' Journey Map and Key Moments

A Sixth Dimension: Community

Through open coding, I was also able to review the data for information outside of "The Dimensions of Teacher Leadership". While doing this, I also found information that was "potentially relevant for answering the research questions" (Merriam, 2009, p. 178). As I reviewed the interview transcripts and documents about teacher leaders, my notes in the margins about mentoring, professional development, student achievement, data collection, shared knowledge, communication, and planning began to form a sixth category which I will call the dimension of community. The dimension of community addresses the idea that teacher leaders have a sense and feeling of community in order to work with teachers, students, principals, and parents.

Teacher leaders in this study had the opportunity to work together in a supportive community to improve teaching and learning at their school. All of the teacher leaders had the willingness to come together to collaborate and share for the good of the school. The need for community and working with a mindset for community, helped the teacher leaders do their work and impact each other and their students. I found that the teacher leaders stated that when they are doing work for the community, they are all involved with the students and parents. Brenda stated, "When we talk, reflect, and plan together, everyone benefits from all of us working together." Teachers empowered each other to plan vertically and become aligned with instruction to reach all students. They realized their teacher leadership happens with community type efforts for themselves, colleagues, principals, students, and parents. Reaching out to each other was a part of their teacher leader practice.

I also found that teacher leaders named a structure in which they practice within the six dimensions. Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) are the structure that facilitate, enhance, and support the community of teaching and learning. It is the teacher leader's understanding that their practice happens within their school community clearly during the forum of PLCs. Vescio, Ross, and Adams (2008) state PLCs are learning communities where teachers reflect and collaborate "with a goal of meeting the educational needs of their students through examining their everyday practice" (p. 81). The PLCs that the teacher leaders discussed in this study helped them do their work as they met and reflected about teaching and learning. Cara states, "If it wasn't for the PLC, I wouldn't have that set time to look over my student work and discuss instructional strategies with my team." The dimension of PLCs put teacher leader practice into a frame where Ann, Brenda, and Cara thought about student and teacher learning, and how to collaboratively improve student achievement on campus.

The development of strong PLCs has been introduced as one way to build teacher capacity and improve teaching and learning in schools (Rasberry & Mahan, 2008). Principals in schools with a distributed approach to leadership distribute roles and responsibilities to teachers, and teacher leaders feel empowered to practice teacher leadership among themselves in their PLCs. The principal gave autonomy to teacher leaders to make decisions regarding the PLC process and instructional decisions (Dufour, 2004). The teacher leaders in this study shared that the opportunity to lead or facilitate the PLCs opened their eyes to working with colleagues in a different way to improve teaching and learning on campus. PLCs on campus gave them the opportunity to have a focus for meeting. Teachers worked with their colleagues in PLCs to collect and analyze

classroom data, share best teaching practices, make instructional decisions, and provide support to the team.

Vescio, Ross, and Adams (2008) reviewed the research of eleven studies of the impact of PLCs on teaching practices and student learning. They reported positive impacts of collaboration and school paradigm shifts of community professional development and teacher learning. Vescio, Ross, and Adams also discussed essential characteristics of PLCs:

1. Shared values and norms established for the community

2. Clear and consistent focus on student learning

3. Reflective dialogue

4. Focus on instructional practice

5. Collaboration

The teacher leaders in this study spoke of a clear focus on student learning, reflective dialogue, focus on instructional practice, and collaboration as characteristics of the PLCs that are operating on their campus. With these characteristics as a guideline for functioning, they are working together to have meaningful shared discussions about student learning (DuFour, 2004). As a structure that facilitates teacher leadership, the notion of PLCs provides a structure that can systematically and sustainably support the development of teacher leadership practice that is empowering, reflective, grounded in expertise, collaborative, and flexible (Snell & Swanson, 2000).

Ethical Considerations and Limitations of the Study

I followed ethical standards in all aspects of this research study. Internal validity was addressed using triangulation, checking interpretations with individuals, and asking

the teacher leaders to comment on emerging findings (Merriam, 2009). I have described

in detail how the study was conducted and how the findings were derived from the data

(Patton, 2002). The teacher leaders were informed of their rights, risks, benefits,

protection of confidentiality, and their ability to withdraw from the study at any time they

felt necessary using informed consent. Glesne (2011) indicates "Ethical considerations

should accompany plans, thoughts, and discussions about each aspect of qualitative

research" (p. 162). The principal selected teacher leaders and they signed a consent form

prior to data collection. The Institutional Review Board guided the procedures and data

collection methods. In regards to myself, I made a strong effort to consistently check

biases, keep my opinions from tainting the results, and ensure valid and reliable results

from data collection and analysis.

As I reflect on the data collected in this study, a limitation could have been the

sample size of teacher leaders. The exploration of additional interviews of several

teacher leaders in more schools could add another layer to this study. This narrative

study could be replicated at multiple school sites in order to develop generalizability of

its findings. At the same time, the in depth and context bound understandings gained

through this qualitative study provide complex perspectives on the practice of teacher

leadership that are transferable to understanding, developing, and improving effective

teacher leadership at other sites (Merriam, 2009). Another limitation could have been the

amount of individual interviews for the teacher leaders. The stories of the teacher leaders

could have been enhanced with multiple individual interviews for each teacher leaders.

The length of study was already extensive and for this reason I selected one individual

interview per teacher leader.

Implications for Further Research and Practice

When I began this research journey, I had perceptions and ideas based on my own experiences of my teacher leadership journey. I had no idea what I would find in practice based on the conceptual lens of "The Dimensions of Teacher Leadership" (Snell & Swanson, 2000), but my perceptions, ideas and the "The Dimensions of Teacher Leadership" were a road map to guide the teacher leaders in sharing their stories. As I come to an end with this portion of research, I have more ideas and wonderings about where the phenomena of teacher leadership can go in terms of benefiting meaningful teaching and learning in K-12 schools.

In regards to this study, there are implications for further research and practice about teacher leadership in relation to: 1) school improvement, 2) school learning communities, and 3) teacher leader development. Teacher leadership is not a new concept, yet when we look in different areas we discover something new (Lambert, 2003). Teacher leadership, both its definition and practice, is still a discoverable idea. Teacher leaders have a story and there is something to be learned from each one of their experiences. The following recommendations emerged from the narrative that could be beneficial for schools today.

Teacher Leadership and School Improvement. Schools can benefit from additional research that captures the roles of teacher leaders that directly impact student achievement. Successful schools rely on multiple sources of leadership (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009). Researchers could provide further investigation on teacher leadership and student achievement. This could explore the relationship between high performing and low performing schools and teacher leadership. Researchers could ask questions like:

What is teacher leader practice in these schools? How active are teacher leaders in these schools? What activities do teacher leaders perform to directly impact student achievement? In schools that foster teacher leadership that assumes significant and continuous improvement happens when leaders, both administrative and instructional work collaboratively for school change (Childs-Bowen, Moller, & Scrivner, 2000). In order to help refine ideas for schools, teacher leader roles and responsibilities that are situated within a framework for school improvement are important for further research.

My recommendation for practice in regards to school improvement is for principals to develop a distributed leadership framework with teacher leaders, and model how to explicitly track schoolwide performance in shared situations. The teacher leaders in this study felt empowered by their principal and had opportunities to lead and work with the principal to discuss and improve student achievement on the campus. When teacher leaders and principals work together to improve teaching and learning, the network of collaboration is distributed across the school.

Teacher Leadership and School Communities. Further research on how to develop structures in schools that are learner-centered communities where everyone, including the principal is expected to function as a co-learner could be studied. Leadership within learning communities is a process that involves skillful participation. Lambert (2003) posits that leadership among teachers is a process that includes problem solving, skillful participation, task enactment, conversations, and stories.

My recommendation for practice in regards to school learning communities is to clearly define roles/activities for teacher leaders, give teachers the opportunity to lead, and embed the activities within the learning community. The teacher leaders in this study

were all leaders of their PLC and wanted to improve teaching and learning through the forum of the PLC. The data showed that the teacher leaders valued the structure of PLCs on campus because it gave them an opportunity to collaborate and reflect about teaching and learning on campus.

Empowerment, collaboration, and expertise are ways that teachers can continue conversations about teaching and learning in a community structure. Schools can find ways to make collaboration that is systematic rather than informal (Fairman & Mackenzie, 2014). Further research on how teachers empower themselves and the community, the systems used for collaboration, and how teacher leaders continue their development with limited time could add to the body of knowledge about sustaining teacher leadership in learning communities.

Teacher Leadership and Teacher Leader Development. The findings of this study indicate the importance of continued development for teacher leaders. The teacher leaders in this study voiced the need for development of their leadership skills and the lack of professional development that improves instructional practice. Teacher leadership academies are a good idea for school districts to support teacher leaders with further development (Gordon, 2011). Ann, Brenda, and Cara also identified lack of time for professional development as something that impeded their practice. They wanted to grow as teachers, but little time after school or in their PLCs did not provide them with enough professional development.

My recommendation for practice in regards to teacher leadership development suggest that school leaders pay careful attention to how teacher leaders are identified, recognized, and supported. Mentoring into teacher leadership could help support and

coach teacher leaders. Through mentoring and coaching, principals and other teacher leaders can provide feedback, modeling, training, and motivation to explore areas outside of the classroom and school. The question remains of when can we find time to complete these activities. Further research about how teacher leaders incorporate teacher leader development into their practice could add to the body of knowledge of the teacher leadership phenomena.

Summary

The main purpose of teacher leadership is enhancing student learning and achievement (Crowther et al., 2009). Ann tells us "the bottom line or the outcome is the success of students and the success of the school." For this study, I worked to give voice to the experiences of teacher leaders who do the work of teacher leadership with the hope that their understandings would give guidance to educators and schools.

In Chapter 1, I review the current state of schools with a focus on teacher leadership and distributed leadership. Chapter 1 introduced the questions and problem, and then defines some key words used throughout the study. In Chapter 2, I gather and review the research about teacher leadership, distributed leadership, school improvement, narrative inquiry, and the five "Dimensions of Teacher Leadership" (Snell & Swanson, 2000). Chapter 3 provides the methodology, methods, and research process. In Chapter 4, I analyze the data and provide teacher stories. I wrap up this process with Chapter 5 to summarize the research process and findings, and give recommendations to further research the teacher leadership phenomenon.

In addressing these research questions, I hope to have laid a framework for other researchers to ask more questions and continue this work, as there is still so much to learn

and document about teacher leader voice and practice. My own experiences of teacher leadership have been positive and encouraging. Teaching and leading together is an area where you gel teacher learning and student learning together.

My Journey

My narrative begins with the self-reflection and review of my own journey map. A theme present in my own narrative is *chance*. When I use the word *chance* in my narrative it means a situation with some sort of purpose or an opportunity. Maybe even a risk. One very important principal in my first six years of teaching gave me a *chance* to figure out that I could do this work. She gave me the *chance* to be good, to figure out this work of teaching and understanding how to navigate the system of education, and the high needs of students learning within the system: The *chance* to be great, the *chance* to make a mistake, and the *chance* to lead. The opportunities that I have had have led me here with a *chance* to tell this story of being a teacher leader.

There are many ways teachers can show leadership roles and responsibilities. In the beginning, no one really told me I was a teacher leader, my principal just asked me to be on certain committees and participate in different activities. After reviewing the literature, I see that some principals just see certain qualities and characteristics within teachers and share responsibilities with a team of people in the school. In my third year of teaching I was asked to co-chair the gifted and talented committee. I did not really know what I was doing, but I listened, took notes, participated, and stayed organized. The next year, my co-chair left and I organized all of the screening and testing on my own. I was given a *chance*. I can remember feeling frustrated, scared, intimidated, and even empowered throughout the year. It was clear that my principal trusted me to do this

work and there was support if I needed help. I wanted to do a good job and learn as much as could about the students, and how to provide services to them and teachers. I felt more comfortable about speaking in front of other teachers to share information and reporting back to my principal after I attended staff development for gifted and talented.

My first five years of teaching have revealed three distinct patterns to me. I loved professional development and growing and learning as a teacher, I felt supported from my principals, and I liked to help and support other teachers in their work with students. I have always been one to question what is going on around me, and I always want to know more. Attending professional development was never a problem for me. When my principal asked me to go, I went and tried to make strategies and techniques my own so that I could use them with my students to improve their learning. My professional development activities were for me but also for my students. My thought was that if I improved my skills, I would be a better teacher, and then I would better understand how to impact student learning. I began to learn how to teach other teachers how to develop their practice as well.

During my fourth year of teaching, my principal encouraged me to apply for a teacher leadership program offered in my school district. I applied and was accepted. Again, I was given the *chance* to grow as a learner and collaborate with other teacher leaders across the district. I do not really think I realized at the time how much of an impact I was making on my campus with other teachers, but I formed a writing professional learning community and worked on a writing plan for the entire school to increase writing achievement.

The teacher leadership opportunity has led to many other assignments and professional development that have allowed me to develop as a teacher leader. I have been able to present to new teachers in the district and mentor teachers on my campus. I also was given the *chance* to be an Instructional Coach. When I left the classroom to primarily work with teachers, I was able to collaborate with them more and focus on improving teaching and learning.

The key moment in my journey was becoming National Board certified and being chosen Distinguished Teacher of the Year for the district. This moment meant my learning and working with teachers was helping me develop as a teacher leader. I feel as though the chances I was given and the chances I was taking have been significant in this journey of mine. I do not see an end to the journey because teacher leadership is a part of me. Teacher leadership is my passion. This topic chose me because my passion for teacher leading and learning drives my practice. The chances give me faith; I continue to hope for more chances to do this work of teaching and learning that I love.

For we walk by faith, not by sight. - 2 Corinthians 5:7

Figure 2. My Journey Map
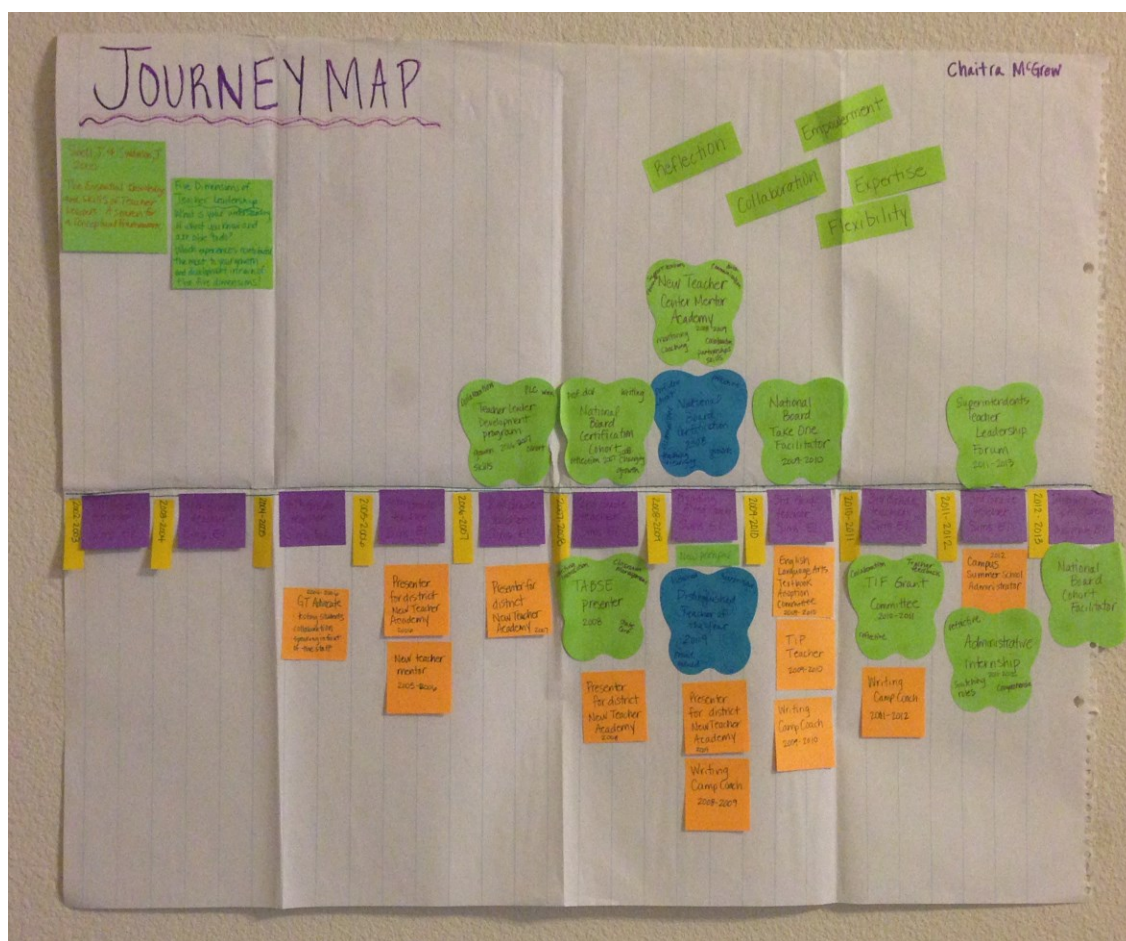
APPENDIX SECTION

APPENDIX A: PRINCIPAL QUESTIONNAIRE

Dear Principal:

Thank you for participating in my research as a part of my doctoral studies at Texas State University-San Marcos. The title of my project is Teacher Leader Stories of Experience: A Narrative Inquiry. This research requires the identification of three teacher leaders. I want to know how teacher leaders identify themselves and better understand their experiences within their journey through teacher leadership. The purpose of this study is to add to the growing depth of knowledge of teacher leadership as it is identified and practiced in schools. By identifying factors that can be used to cultivate the knowledge and skills of teacher leadership, this study will help teachers and principals understand the influences and experiences that help develop the practice of teacher leadership. Please consider the following attributes and characteristics from the literature when identifying teacher leaders from your campus:

- competent, credible, and approachable (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001)
- optimism, enthusiasm, confidence, and the willingness to take risks as characteristics of teacher leaders (Danielson, 2006)
- excellent professional teaching skills, a clear and well-developed personal philosophy of education, being in a career state that enables one to give to others, having an interest in adult development, and being in a personal life stage that allows one time and energy to assume a position of leadership (York-Barr & Duke, 2004)
- providing influence beyond one's own classroom, mobilizing and energizing others, engaging in complex work with others, and having passion for the core mission of the school (Gabriel, 2005)

Please refer your top three teacher leaders and one alternate. For each teacher leader please provide the following information:
1. Name
2. Years of teaching experience and years at the campus
3. 3-4 sentences about why you identify them as a teacher leader

Thank you,
Chaitra S. McGrew

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Principal:

Teacher Leader:

Years of teaching experience:

Years at the campus:

Why is this teacher a teacher leader:

APPENDIX B: TEACHER LEADER INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Teacher Leader Interview Questions

Biographical information:

1. What is your current teaching assignment?

2. How long have you been teaching? At your present school?

3. What are your present leadership responsibilities?

4. When do you perform these responsibilities?

5. What have been your past leadership responsibilities?

Thematic questions:

1. How do you define teacher leadership?

2. Who selects teacher leaders?

3. How did you become a teacher leader?

4. How do you know that you are a teacher leader?

5. Why do teachers accept leadership positions or roles?

6. Why have you accepted leadership positions or roles?

7. What activities involve teacher leaders?

8. What skills are needed to be a teacher leader?

9. Regarding your journey map, what kinds of professional experiences influenced your leadership development?

10. Tell me when your professional leadership journey began. Describe this moment.

11. What have been your most influential professional experiences?

12. Which of your leadership responsibilities gives you the most satisfaction? Least

satisfaction? Why?

13. In what ways does teacher leadership improve professional practice?

14. What factors support the practice of teacher leadership?

15. What factors constrain the practice of teacher leadership?

16. What areas of your work do you have the most influence? Why?

Thank you for your time.

APPENDIX C: FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

1. Describe key moments in your journey map that help you see yourself as a teacher leader?

2. Regarding your journey map, what kinds of professional experiences influenced your leadership development?

3. How do teachers work together to do the work of teacher leadership?

4. What helps teachers do the work of teacher leadership?

5. What are the obstacles of teacher leadership?

6. Reflecting on this journey map, how and why do people become teacher leaders?

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