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Teacher and Administrator Perspectives from Experiences in the Teacher Leadership Initiative

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Teacher and Administrator Perspectives from Experiences in the Teacher Leadership Initiative

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ABSTRACT

Teacher leadership, has been defined by many researchers as the answer to school improvement through the use of teacher leaders leading the effort in schools and districts. This qualitative dissertation takes a deep look into the experiences of teachers and administrators that participated in a nation-wide teacher leadership pilot, the Teacher Leadership Initiative (TLI), and the effects that this year-long event had on leadership, school improvement and teacher and administrator professional practices. Unifying outcomes from the participants as a result of their involvement in this initiative included changes in thinking about leadership that directly improved professional efficacy, collaborative and leadership skills, and a new sense of identification as a leader that was not experienced before the TLI. Additionally, teachers reported that being given the opportunity to lead outside the classroom in a project chosen by them to improve their schools and districts, allowed them to experience professional growth as they had not experienced in their careers as educators.

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the teachers that participated in this study and to all the teachers in schools and districts that have led or aspire to lead beyond their classroom walls. You are the change that we need to see in the world of education. You are the future of education and educational improvement and what it means to be an effective educator. My hope is that is after reading this work, it will inspire you to step outside the classroom walls and lead.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This qualitative study used a descriptive multiple case study approach to examine the reported effects of the Teacher Leadership Initiative (TLI) on leadership, school improvement and teacher and administrator professional practices through the constructed perceptions of teachers' and administrators' experiences that participated in the Teacher Leadership Initiative (TLI) pilot. The participants in this study are teachers and administrators who took part in the year-long initiative to increase leadership for teachers.

The Teacher Leadership Initiative used teacher leadership competencies to develop knowledge and skills that could produce leadership in teachers and indicated that teacher leadership looks different depending on the context or role the teacher is engaged in. The TLI competencies that defined the parameters of teacher leadership in the TLI, were assessed in a rubric format of emerging, developing, performing and transforming in each area and served as a pathway and guide for which teacher leaders could impact educational improvement. The competencies included these frames of leadership: Instructional Leadership, Policy Leadership, and Association Leadership. An additional competency, the Overarching Competencies served to connect the three frames together (NEA, 2016, f).

The TLI pilot began in 2013 with a partnership between the National Education Association (NEA), the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) and the Center for Teaching Quality (CTQ). TLI was borne out of a shared vision of a teacher-led profession and focused on:

1) Developing the competencies and standards defining teacher leadership; 2) Creating relevant training and supports to prepare teachers for leadership; and 3) Recognizing at least 1,000 teachers who will lead a transformed teaching profession centered on student learning as a result of their participation in this process (NEA, 2016a).

In the initial pilot year, 150 active NEA certified teachers in six states-Arizona, Colorado, Iowa, Massachusetts, Michigan, and Mississippi-volunteered to participate in a year-long teacher leadership experience with a formative capstone project that focused on these frames of teacher leadership:

1) Instructional leadership which placed teachers at the center of supporting and improving teaching and learning in their schools and districts; 2) Policy leadership which ensured that experienced and accomplished teachers inform and influence policymaking decisions at the local, state and national levels; and 3) Association leadership which was preparation of current and future association leaders to include advancing the profession of teaching and the professional interests of the members into the union advocacy agenda (NEA, 2016b).

In 2014, 300 additional teachers participated in the Year Two TLI pilot and was open again to NEA certified teachers in Arizona, Colorado, Hawaii, Iowa, Massachusetts, Michigan, Montana, Utah, Mississippi, Minnesota, as well as Prince George's County in Maryland and Columbus, Ohio. The third-year pilot began in spring 2015 and concluded in August 2016 with NEA certified teachers as participants (NEA, 2016c).

During the first phase of the year-long TLI experience teachers worked to develop innovative leadership skills through improving teacher knowledge, dispositions and abilities directed toward leadership. Teachers worked in collaborative activities that informed them about teacher leadership. They worked as a group to create ideas about transforming teaching and learning for the teaching profession as a whole (NEA, 2016d). Teachers then chose one content strand to explore further in a Capstone performance project and included these components:

1) Common Core in which participants learned strategies for Common Core implementation and leading their colleagues in this endeavor; 2) School redesign in which teachers developed the knowledge and skills to co-lead the design of new schools with an emphasis on teaching excellence, 21st century skills for college and careers, and teacher-powered approaches; 3) Social Justice in which teachers were equipped with resources to effectively engage with teaching colleagues, policymakers and community members on social justice and related topics; and 4) Teacher Evaluation in which teachers were equipped with resources and skills to effectively engage with teaching colleagues, policymakers and community members on teacher evaluation and related issues of policy, research and technology (NEA, 2016e).

Accounts of teacher leadership in improving teaching and learning within the classroom are well-documented based on the review of literature in chapter two of this proposal. The Teacher Leadership Initiative (TLI) set out to create a cadre of teacher leaders that could and would lead not just inside the classroom, but outside of the classroom and impact school improvement while improving leadership in schools and districts.

Problem Statement

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the reported effects of the participation in the Teacher Leadership Initiative (TLI) on leadership, school improvement and teacher and administrator professional practices through the constructed perceptions of the teachers' and administrators' experiences that participated in the Teacher Leadership Initiative. This study took a deep look into the leadership and school improvement strategies formed as a result of the Teacher Leadership Initiative, and provided important information to the National Education Association, the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards and the Center for Teaching Quality for their continued work to support teacher leadership strategies in their organizations. The knowledge gained from this study can also give guidance to teachers and administrators as they participate and utilize teacher leadership to systematically improve student and teacher learning in schools

Problem of Practice

Beginning with A Nation at Risk in 1983, schools and districts entered an era of educational reform like no other in the history of the American educational system (United States Department of Education, 2008). School districts throughout the country were looking for the reform effort that would solve the achievement gaps present in the student populations in the United States compared with student populations around the world.

After A Nation at Risk, the mandates of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001, left teachers, schools and districts feverishly trying to meet the accountability requirements associated with this sweeping legislation across all fifty states. One accountability report after another put schools and districts in designated categories revealing that they needed to improve student learning. NCLB mandated schools and districts to improve student academic proficiencies and placed specific interventions and sanctions on schools and districts. These sanctions involved changing the leadership at the school or district level and/or requiring that schools or districts hire outside educational consultants to impose change initiatives within districts or schools such as "Turnaround" strategies. NCLB legislation provided federal support through School Improvement Grants (SIG) to schools and districts in need of support to meet the ever-rising accountability expectations.

The requirements of the NCLB Act of 2001 were seemingly an impossible feat for schools and districts to overcome with the reality of bringing every student regardless of prior background knowledge, socioeconomic status, and level of English language proficiency up to the expectations that were dictated by the law each year. During the years following the legislation and especially for schools with limited resources before the revision of the law in 2015, schools and districts were seeking out any and all solutions to the problems of students not

meeting proficiency levels. Interventions and strategies for improving student proficiencies for

schools and districts, began to focus more on meeting the requirements of the law and not about

improving student learning and realizing academic success for schools. As the principal of one

of these schools not meeting proficiency levels, I found myself looking toward the mandates of

the law instead of focusing intently on improving student learning for all students within my

school and district. Accountability measures were imposed on district leaders as well, solidifying

these leaders efforts toward meeting the expectations of the law for the district and my school

instead of creating a sustainable plan for system-wide improvement. Developing and

implementing strategies for school improvement requires time, resources and consistency.

Smaller school districts lack in resources and retention of highly skilled personnel to support the

changes needed to improve student learning district-wide.

As Katzenmayer and Moller (2009) relate:

Massive reports on how to improve schools influenced policy makers to pass legislation to put
pressure on educators to provide quality education for all students. Few disagree with this goal.
Many would argue, though that the goals cannot be accomplished by simply raising standards,
creating and implementing more outcome measures, and holding students, teachers, and
administrators ever more accountable for test scores (p.2).

Research on the impact of the accountability movement (Darling-Hammond & Prince,

2007; Wechler et al., 2007) helped us understand that investing in teachers and their learning,

rather than creating more tests is a better investment for improving student outcomes.

Around my fourth year of teaching, I began to desire more substance in my work as a

teacher outside of the classroom. I wanted more influence on education and educational

practices than just at the classroom level, so I started a master's program in Educational

Leadership to become a school principal. At this time, and especially in the rural community

that I worked in, the only path to developing leadership skills was through obtaining a master's degree and certification as a school administrator. After achieving National Board Certification, I was afforded opportunities to work at a state and national level to improve teacher quality as a teacher leader. These experiences affirmed my decision to lead outside the classroom. National Board Certification, as I reflect on now, was not only a catalyst for improving my teaching practice and impacting learning for the students that I taught, but also a springboard into thinking about leadership while still in the role of a teacher.

In my teaching experiences with small school districts in Oklahoma, teacher leadership opportunities were not accessible for teachers who wanted to lead outside the classroom. Danielson (2006) asserts that teachers should be made aware of opportunities available to engage in leadership activities. Opportunities for teacher leadership exist in the form of "school improvement teams, teacher instructional support groups and teacher-led advisory councils" (Smylie & Brownlee-Conyers, 1992, p. 150). These roles for teachers propose that leadership involvement include all participants in the school community (Spillane, Halverson & Diamond, 2001). In addition, literature associated with education change abounds with evidence that supports the pivotal role that school principals play in the process toward adoption of new practices and innovation in schools including shared leadership between teachers and principals (Bossertm Dwyer, Rowan, & Lee, 1982; Deal, Peterson, 1990; Fullan, 1991; Leithwood & Montgomery, 1982). As asserted by Smylie and Brownlee-Conyers (1992) and contextualized by Berry, Smylie and Ekert (2016), literature suggests that new working relationships between teachers and principals exist and can provide the components needed for changing educational practices and improving schools. These relationships are complex and require many different factors for success and involve the social and normative dimensions of schools including

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organizational structures and contexts that promote leadership outside of traditional school leadership and involves teachers leading outside the classroom.

Teacher leadership was a pivotal reform effort that emerged from the era of educational reform beginning with A Nation at Risk and exaggerated by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 as an answer to educational improvement. York-Barr and Duke (2004) in their iconic look at teacher leadership, state that the purpose of teacher leadership as the improvement of teaching and learning and increasing student achievement for all our nation's students. York-Barr and Duke (2004) add that, "Expanded teacher leadership roles range from assisting with the management of schools to evaluating educational initiatives and facilitating professional learning communities" (p. 235), describing that teacher leadership involves teachers leading at all levels not just from the classroom. In their article about teacher leadership, Coggins and McGovern (2014) relate, "Effective teacher leadership improves teaching and learning outcomes and gives teachers a voice at policy making at all levels" (p. 15). This statement from Coggins and McGovern communicates that teacher leadership can be utilized at all levels of service outside of classroom and instructional practices.

Teach Plus, an organization designed to empower excellent experienced teachers as effective change agents to improve student learning through teacher leadership believes that, teacher leadership gives leadership opportunities to teachers and has a "measureable, positive effect on students, schools and the teaching profession" (Coggins & McGovern, p. 16). The goals reflected in Coggins and McGovern's (2014) work about Teach Plus reveal the underlying premise of this study of teacher leadership and are:

> 1) Improve student outcomes; 2) Improve the access of high-need students to effective teachers; 3) Extend the careers of teachers looking for growth opportunities; 4) Expand

the influence of effective teachers on their peers; and 5) Ensure a role for teachers as leaders in policy decisions affecting their practice (p. 16).

When complete, this study may reveal that when teachers are given the opportunity to participate in leadership opportunities, teachers may increase their knowledge about their teaching practices and positively impact student learning. Opportunities to lead may provide the leadership outlet needed to keep the highly effective teachers in the classroom and serve as a catalyst for an expansion of ideas about teaching and learning that will improve schools in culture and achievement. Finally, leadership opportunities could inform the practices of schools of teacher and administration preparation to include teacher leadership in their core constructs.

Research Questions

1. How do participants experience and understand teaching and learning differently after participating in the Teacher Leadership Initiative?

2. How do participants experience and understand leadership differently after participating in the Teacher Leadership Initiative?

3. How has constructed understanding about what it means to be effective as an educator changed after the Teacher Leadership Initiative?

Overview of Research Method

This study was a descriptive multiple case study of the reported perceptions of the teachers' and administrators' experiences that participated in the Teacher Leadership Initiative (TLI). Participants in the sample included teachers and administrators from the First-Year Pilot, Second-Year Pilot or Third-Year Pilot of the Teacher Leadership Initiative. The gatekeepers, the National Education Association, provided access to the participants and the total number of

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participants will vary according to the gatekeepers' discretion not exceeding twelve participants. All teachers and administrators volunteered to participate in the research for the purpose of understanding what the perceived effects of the Teacher Leadership Initiative (TLI) were on leadership and school improvement. Semi-structured interviews were utilized for data collection with teachers and administrators that participated in the Teacher Leadership Initiative pilot and allowed the researcher to "organize and guide the interview, but also to include specific, tailored follow-up questions within and across interviews" (Ratvich and Carl, p, 154). Interviews were conducted through the use of technological resources in a video chat format or through recorded voice interviews due to geographical constraints between the researcher and the participants. Qualitative documents such as personal documents, official documents and popular culture documents produced by the study participants were used in this study and gave a useful window into the thought processes of the individual making a connection to: the research questions; provided context to the study; and served as a way to explore meaning from the participants (Ratvich and Carl, 2016). These qualitative documents along with any other additional qualitative documents unknown to the researcher were included for review as the study unfolded. Teacher participants of TLI were required to complete a Capstone requirement that generated personal documents including multimedia. For example, one teacher participant included documents from her capstone project and a newspaper article after her interview. These documents added to the validity of the study and to the participants' lived experiences by establishing a much clearer connection between the research questions and the constructed responses of the participants.

The interviews were transcribed using a transcription service and then coded with Initial and Second Cycle Coding procedures. Initial Coding also known as "open coding" permitted me

to divide the qualitative data into separate parts so that comparisons could be made (Strass & Corbin, 1998). Second Cycle Coding allowed for more advanced ways of reorganizing and reanalyzing the data coded through first cycle coding (Saldana, 2016). Once all information in the study was transcribed and coded, all data including the qualitative documents were triangulated. Triangulation of the data allowed for the combination of multiple perspectives taken from individuals, building a coherent justification for emerging themes and theoretical perspectives increasing the validity of the study (Creswell, 2014).

Positionality

"Positionality refers to the researcher's role in social location/identity in relationship to the context and setting of the research" (Ratvich & Carl, p. 6, 2016). When I began working on this study, I had completed twenty-one years of service in public education as a teacher for fourteen years, a school administrator for seven years and worked in five school districts in Oklahoma and Arkansas. Two districts were large and urban serving 10,000-14,000 students and the remaining three districts were small and rural serving 300-600 students.

As a teacher in the small rural districts, there were no opportunities available within the district for teacher leadership opportunities. Teachers were happy with landing a job and did not seek out prospects of doing anything else but teaching the students in their classrooms. Grade level and district committees did exist but assignments were given to teachers only as a compliance measure dictated from the state department of education for meeting the mandates of NCLB and not for the purpose of improving teaching and learning. As a teacher in the two large districts, there were opportunities for teachers to advance to differentiated roles as instructional coaches within the schools in the districts to support teaching and learning for teachers, students

and schools and were not just measures of compliance for the state education agencies and NCLB.

Around my fifth year of teaching, I begin to need something more than just teaching the students in my classroom and the only thing available to me was National Board Certification. I certified as a National Board Certified Teacher (NBCT) in year six of teaching and that's when the opportunities for leadership began to happen for me. Did I think I was a teacher leader? No, I did not, but now as I reflect on the premise of this study, I see my career path was highly influenced because of the opportunities for me to participate in leadership outside of the classroom. The opportunities came and I took them to satisfy the need I had for more than just classroom instruction.

Researcher's Role

The problem of practice in this study involved: determining how a teacher leadership initiative affected leadership in schools; how a teacher leadership initiative improved schools; and how teacher leadership experiences informed the practices of both teacher and administrator preparation programs as well as professional development for schools. My relationship with the problem of practice in this study included the perspectives and experiences of both a teacher and a school administrator for more than twenty years combined. While in the classroom, I was that teacher who wanted to promote the leadership of teachers as individuals and as an entity within the school context. When writing my first research proposal in my master's program, the subject was, "teacher empowerment." Since certifying for National Board and moving into a position of leadership in the school setting, I have participated in many leadership opportunities which helped to shape my thinking about leadership in general and the role that teachers play to support the success of the school. After almost two decades, I am still a National Board Certified

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Teacher and heavily involved with the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) program at the local, state and national level. My role in this proposed study was the instrument of data collection from the teachers and administrators that agreed to participate.

Assumptions

As stated previously, I acknowledge my history with teacher leadership experiences both at a personal level, in my work as a building administrator and with NBPTS. This history served as a reminder of the importance and integrity of my role as the instrument as I collected data from the interviews of the participants of the Teacher Leadership Initiative. Thinking critically about positionality as a researcher of teacher leadership within the context of being a building leader yet still with a teacher mindset, for this study, I looked intently for solutions that would keep the profession of K-12 teaching effective and sustainable through the avenue of teacher leadership.

Organization of the Dissertation

This dissertation is organized into five chapters. In Chapter 1, the problem statement was established through the context of the problem of practice and the research questions for the study were revealed. Chapter 2 in this study provided a comprehensive view of teacher leadership from existing literature juxtaposed with my personal leadership experiences both in and outside of the classroom and theoretical connections, which created the basis for the conceptual framework. Chapter 3 disclosed the research design and included the data collection methods and analysis of the data collected from the participants and revealed the connection between the problem of practice, the research questions and the methodology. Chapter 4 reported the findings from the data collected including the coding strategies utilized to categorize the responses from the interviews into themes that allowed for the findings to emerge. Chapter 5

combined the results collected from the study with the information in Chapter 1 and Chapter 2 and revealed the evidence that supported what was expected from the research questions, problem of practice and the literature using the methods that were chosen for data collection. The evidence reported from the study also disclosed implications for future studies as well as the impact on future practices of teacher as leaders and administrators as supporters of teacher leaders to improve teaching and learning.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the reported effects of the participation in the Teacher Leadership Initiative (TLI) on leadership, school improvement and teacher and principal professional practices through the constructed perceptions of the teachers' and administrators' experiences that participated in the pilot. The purpose of this study was achieved through an intentional research design that included: the careful review of the research on teacher leadership over time including current initiatives; semi-structured interviews of teachers and administrators that participated in the TLI; and data collection and analysis methods that answered the research questions presented in chapter 1 of this study.

To fully extend the possibilities of the answering the research questions with fidelity, the following questions emerged after the review of literature on teacher leadership and served as a guide for the questions in the semi-structured interviews of the participants:

Did teacher leadership increase teacher professional capacities as teacher leaders in schools and as leaders in the larger learning community of school districts?

Did teacher leadership deepen or innovate the pedagogical practices of teachers? Does teacher leadership provide for differentiated roles for teacher leaders within an organization?

Did leadership opportunities for teachers and training in supporting teacher leadership for administrators increase the likelihood of teacher leadership in schools and districts?

Did participating in a teacher leadership initiative provide a sustainable approach to leadership within schools and districts?

The review of literature on teacher leadership in this study is both substantive and informative and illuminated the concepts associated with teacher leadership and the implications that emerged from the study.

Overview

"The work of teaching can be the work of leading and the act of learning to teach can be the act of learning to lead" (Berry, Smylie & Ekert, 2016, p. 16). Current trends for improving schools and improving the quality of educational practices often involved Teacher Leadership. Teacher leadership is not a new concept for teachers as they lead learning daily in their work to improve student academic abilities and encourage student success. What many teachers have not been exposed to or experienced is leadership outside the classroom in which they may lead initiatives to improve professional learning for their peers, create events that target specific strategies for improving teaching and learning for groups of students, and lead plans for advocacy of teacher quality and advancing school improvement.

The literature encompassing the concepts of teacher leadership has grown in substance since the 1980's with the emergence of standards and accountability in educational circles (Lai & Cheung, 2015). Leiberman and Friedrich (2010) and York-Barr and Duke (2004) reported that, over the past two decades, expectations for teachers have changed to include a role in improving education at the school level not just at the classroom level.

York-Barr and Duke (2004) described teacher leadership as:

> 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. Such leadership involves three intentional development foci: individual development, collaboration or team development and organizational development (p. 288).

York-Barr and Duke (2004) explained that the "collective literature about the effects of teacher leadership remained largely focused on formal teacher leadership positions" rather than informal positions and is "still explanatory and robust with argument and rationale for promoting teacher leadership instead of known effects on students, teachers, classroom practice and school communities" (p. 287). In addition, York-Barr and Duke (2004) discussed that new parameters of teacher leadership that have emerged. The most consistently documented positive effects of teacher leadership are on the teacher leaders themselves, supporting the belief that leading and learning are interrelated. Teacher leaders grow in their understanding of instructional, professional, and organizational practice as they lead. Less empirical evidence supports student, collegial, and school-level effects. York-Barr and Duke (2004) added that teacher leadership is, "Work that is focused at the classroom level of practice (e.g., implementing instructional strategies) is likely to show student effects more readily than work focused at the organizational level (e.g., participating in site-based decision making)" (p. 288).

Definitions, Examples and Benefits of Teacher Leadership

Teacher Leaders as defined by Katzenmeyer & Moller (2009) represent: "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 towards improved educational practice" (p. 5). Teachers who assume positions of leadership within schools and districts are often categorized into formal and informal positions of leadership. Formal positions are often designated from the building or district leadership and include lead teachers, department heads, and subject area coordinators or facilitators. Informal positions of leadership for teachers as described by Lai and Cheung (2015), are those that are created by teachers for the specific

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purpose of improving the instructional and cultural environments through collaborative environments to strengthen teaching and learning practices.

Muijs and Harris (2007) described teacher leadership as "increased teacher participation in decision-making, and opportunities for teachers to take initiative and lead school improvement" (p. 113). Hunziker (2012) described teacher leadership as working collaboratively in a professional community, learning and growing professionally, and revealing the elements of professionalism. Utilizing teachers as leaders in the quest for educational improvement is a natural solution as without teachers facilitating instructional practice in schools, learning would be greatly impaired. Incorporating a systematic approach to solving school and district problems is often unique to the districts that are pursuing teacher leadership initiatives. As revealed by York-Barr and Duke (2004), professional norms of isolation, individualism, and egalitarianism challenge the emergence of teacher leadership. Teacher leaders often feel conflict as their relationships with their peers shift from horizontal to hierarchical. Lai and Cheung (2015) add that teachers who are in formal roles of teacher leadership such as department chairs or team leaders gain respect through these assigned roles. Finally, informal teacher leaders receive their respect from students and colleagues by through their knowledge and expertise (York-Barr & Duke 2004).

Examples of school districts that have initiated teacher leadership strategies included the District of Columbia (D.C), where schools attempted to recruit and retain talented individuals while Denver Public Schools focused on building teacher capacity to increase leadership in teachers (Curtis, 2013). D. C. Public Schools implemented a Teacher Leadership Innovation pilot with the purpose of the development of new teacher leader roles using the strengths of the most effective teachers. For this new role, teachers worked with principals and designed specific

roles for the teacher leaders geared toward the needs of the school. D.C school administrators had already improved their teacher evaluation system, which included a career pathway for high-performing teachers with increased recognition and compensation so the teacher leadership initiative was a natural event following those changes. Denver Public Schools used their system of collaborative culture that was already in place to implement the Differentiated Roles pilot program where Team Leads spent one-quarter to one-half of their time as teachers outside the classroom to observe, coach and manage teams of teachers. Administrators were consulted when deciding to implement the initiative to give schools the opportunity to use this pilot to best serve each individual schools' needs (Aspen Institute, 2014). Universities across the country including Mount Holyoke in Massachusetts created paths to teacher leadership at the master's level by offering a master's degree in teacher leadership. At Mount Holyoke, students enter a twenty-four month program to attain a Master of Arts in Teacher Leadership. In this program, the Teacher Leader Model Standards are utilized along with the teacher leader's personal plan for leadership from the classroom school, community or beyond (Mount Holyoke College, 2016).

Taylor, Goeke, Klein Onore, & Giest (2011) report that Greenlee (2007), Mujis and Harris (2006), and Taylor, Yates, Meyer and Kinsella (2011) described that teacher leadership has been referenced to be the answer to the improvement of schools, retention, the democratization of schools. Curtis (2013) related that, "Teacher leadership recognizes the talents of the most effective teachers and deploys them in service of student learning, adult learning and collaboration, and school and system improvement" (p. 4). Additionally, Curtis (2013) listed reasons that school districts may pursue teacher leadership initiatives:

- Further developing top talent;
- Helping other teachers improve;
- More effectively implementing key priorities, like Common Core;

- Building a pipeline to the principalship;
- Distributing leadership in schools;
- Increasing highly effective teachers' impact on student learning;
- Making principals' span of supervision manageable (p. 4).

Ryan (1999) suggested, that teachers that participated in leadership experiences exhibited more confidence in their abilities, worked more toward helping their peers and were more apt to provide challenge to students that they taught which correlates with Bandura's concept of self-efficacy and building the human capacity of individuals. Building capacity in people in any profession requires that individuals develop a belief in themselves, and that belief helps them to actualize their dreams and goals. An example of this is looking at Gredler's (2009) account of Bandura's (1977) concept of Self-Efficacy, which involved the individual's personal beliefs in their capabilities to complete goals or tasks successfully. In addition, performance and motivation are determined by what people believe they can achieve. These insights are derived from Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory that "seeks to explain learning in the naturalistic setting" (Gredler, 2009, p. 351). Explained by Gredler (2009), Bandura (1986, 1995) stated that mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and physiological and emotional states contribute to self-efficacy.

School Reform, School Improvement and Teacher Leadership

Are teacher leaders a pivotal and sustainable reform strategy for improving schools? Can teachers leading in schools and districts bring about organizational change and innovate learning practices? As stated by York-Barr and Duke (2004) teacher leaders are both teachers and leaders, having qualities of significant experience, excellent teaching practices and respect from peers. Harris (2013) related that when looking at how to improve schools "the issue isn't one of increasing the numbers of leaders but rather one of increasing leadership quality and capability"

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(p. 551). Wilhelm (2013) stated, "the voice and expertise of teachers are essential to improve

teaching and learning (p. 66). As teachers become involved in leadership activities, they become

aware of the influence that they have on teaching and learning.

Horning and Loeb (2010) reported that traditional instructional leadership emphasizes

building administrators practicing the work as "instructional leaders" of the building and

describe a new emerging leader prototype (p.66). The new prototype noted by Horning and

Loeb (2010) was outstanding teachers that use their exceptional knowledge of teaching to impact

student learning and improve schools. In their work, Lai and Cheung (2015) described:

> A shift of emphasis from teacher leadership within the classroom to teacher leadership
> beyond the classroom suggests that teacher leadership roles are no longer confined within
> classroom walls, and that teacher expertise has been increasingly recognized as an
> important part of schools' collective power that should be more fully capitalized on to
> bring about educational improvement (p. 674).

Additional findings in the study by Lai and Cheung (2015) revealed that teacher leaders

extended their influence even beyond their schools as they networked with teachers from other

schools engaging in inquiry to find solutions to curricular and pedagogical problems. As

teachers worked together in a collective manner with common situations, they were able to

exchange ideas and resources relevant to their needs increasing their capacity for improvement

of classroom practices.

Barnett Berry founder and CEO of the Center for Teaching Quality spoke of a bold new

teacher: Teacher + Entrepreneur = Teacherpreneur (Berry, Byrd & Wieder, 2013). In this hybrid

role, teachers assumed leadership positions without leaving the classroom. School districts

provided for teachers to assume these hybrid roles to increase teacher knowledge and capacity,

impact student learning and improve schools (Berry, Byrd & Wieder, 2013). Teacherpreneurism

was not just about growing classroom experts, but about finding solutions to problems that can redesign archaic educational systems (Berry, Bryd & Weider, 2013). Friend and colleague, Jessica Cuthbertson revealed how this hybrid role advanced her leadership beyond the classroom:

> Identifying as a teacher leader and developing leadership skills through collaboration and involvement with organizations like the Center for Teaching Quality and the National Writing Project has broadened and transformed the way I think about the teaching profession and my role within it. I see teaching as not only the work that happens inside of our classrooms and schools, but our advocacy work outside of school walls as well. My own teacher leadership journey has helped me take risks with students and my own professional growth. I became a National Board Certified Teacher as a result of interacting with other teacher leaders and NBCTs and now I work to encourage and support other candidates and emerging teacher leaders in my district. Teaching in the 21st century demands that we not only be skilled practitioners who accelerate student learning behind closed doors, but also that we share our practices with external stakeholders in order to elevate the profession and advocate for an equitable public education for all students (personal communication, October 12, 2015)

Lai and Cheung (2015) added, "At the core of teacher influence is the recognition that teachers' intellectual and personal resources have a unique position in the development of school capacity" (p. 690). Lai and Cheung (2015) extended their position stating that as teachers use their talents for leadership this in turn helps develop the schools' ability to innovate practices.

Democratic Practices in Schools and Teacher Leadership

Transforming teaching practices and improving teacher competency requires that teacher leaders be empowered to develop change efforts. Empowerment of teachers to transform and maximize the learning in the school community is recognized by Bolin (1989) who stated that, a democratic and cooperative environment is essential and begins with the administrator who understands that success of the school and depends on teachers and other school personnel for

implementation. In addition, Bolin (1989) asserted that, "teachers need to be able to exercise their craft within an organization that they have helped to shape" (p. 8).

York-Barr and Duke (2004) disclosed recent models of school leadership as instructional, participative, distributive, and parallel. They added that these models are more inclusive of the concept of teacher leadership and must emerge from many individuals within an organization and not simply a handful of formally recognized leaders. Hallinger and Murphy (2013) related that a pivotal step to change from a single leader to shared leadership is formally sharing responsibilities between administrators and teachers. This sharing of leading learning allowed a "powerful approach to changing the normative environment in which instructional leadership is enacted" (p. 16).

Sharing leadership roles and responsibilities can increase the capacity development in an organization. Kotter (1996) stated that a key change factor for organizations is building capacity through a shared vision, common goals and language, team structures and uniformity of teaching practices. York-Barr and Duke (2004) suggested that the probability of a successful teacher leader is greatly enhanced if the roles and expectations of the teacher leader are developed with the teacher leader, their peers and the principal with instructional improvement as the goal. Leithwood and Day (2008) summarized evidence concerning successful school leadership as they revealed that:

> School leadership has a greater influence on schools and pupils when it is widely distributed; leaders improve teaching and learning indirectly and most powerfully through their influence on staff motivation and working conditions; and school leadership is second only to classroom instruction as an influence on pupil learning (p. 2).

Sharing leadership roles with teachers within a school or school district is perhaps more easily facilitated through a distributive process. Spillane and Coldren (2011) encouraged a distributed

perspective where leadership practice is the unit of interest and attends to both teachers as leaders and administrators as leaders simultaneously. Barth (1990) related the significance of sharing leadership (Spillane et al. 2007) so as to engage others in formal and informal leadership roles to reframe instructional leadership where administrators and teachers develop a joint identity sharing duties of the organization. A shared leadership structure within the school and district can promote teacher and staff efficacy and yet needs to be fostered through professional learning initiatives. Wilhelm (2013) described building and district leaders as staff developers and that role required them to model professional learning for teachers and staff so that eventually teacher leaders could assume these leadership roles. A change in thinking shared by a teacher leader from Wilhelm (2013) described the requirement of a fundamental shift in the role of teacher leader to a shared role. Sharing leadership roles within a school requires that organizational trust be cultivated. According to Demir (2015), "There is a significant effect of organizational trust on the formation of a culture conducive to realization of teacher leadership" (p. 632).

Harris (2013) described distributive leadership as "actively, brokering, facilitating and supporting the leadership of others" (p. 546). In addition, Harris (2013) added that distributed leadership (Leithwood, 2009) gives the organization a more updated way for change to occur. Oduro (2004) suggests that distributive leadership is "dispersed rather than concentrated" and states that leadership role typologies are not given out based on position within the organization (p. 24). In addition, Oduro (2004), found that a risk-taking trusting atmosphere between all members of the learning community and a willingness to share and implement common goals was found to be critical to the success of distributive leadership. As York-Barr and Duke (2004) related, developing trusting relationships is the key way that teacher leaders influence their peers.

Although the scholars of distributive leadership encourage the leadership of the organization be distributed to gain a collective focus for improvement, Harris (2013) stated, "this purposeful or planned distribution however cannot take place without the involvement of the head or principal" (p. 549). As described by York-Barr and Duke (2004), principals play a pivotal role in the success of teacher leadership by "actively supporting the development of teachers, maintaining open channels of communication, and aligning structures and resources to support the leadership work of teachers" (p.288). Intentional and systematic efforts to support the capacity of teachers and principals to share in aspects of school leadership appeared to be severely lacking (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Also lacking was the skill level of teachers required for shared leadership roles in schools. Wilhelm (2013) stated that most teacher preparation programs do not provide teachers with the skills to implement shared leadership which included; leading other teachers in analyzing student achievement and facilitating and locating research-based strategies to improve instructional practices and increase student learning.

Collaborative Cultures and Teacher Leadership

Collaborative environments within school or district teacher teams are a work in progress that must be consistently facilitated and nurtured by building or district leaders. York-Barr and Duke (2004) suggested that it is possible to have a social context in schools where teachers worked together collegially (Smylie 1992), but this culture did not promote leadership for teachers. In a recent study, Kilinc (2014) reported finding, that "school climate is a significant predictor of teacher leadership" (p. 1729). Demir (2015) revealed that school administrators are responsible for creating an environment that builds trusting relationships and at every opportunity and encourages teachers to collaborate and try new ideas to support innovative

leadership. Building strong cultures that support teacher leadership requires that school leaders participate in ongoing attempts are developing trusting relationships. Trusted relationships are created over time in grade level, schoolwide, and district team meetings and activities that require teachers and administrators to work together to achieve goals that are developed together toward improved schools and student learning. As stated by York-Barr and Duke (2008), teacher leaders are accomplished in their teaching and have the respect of their colleagues which allows them to extend their knowledge and skills to others in their school environments.

Kilinc (2014), reminds us that teachers did not move into leadership roles when restrictive school environments were present hindering the quality of the interactions between the school community members. "One of the marks of an effective leader is not only the impact that they have on the bottom line of student achievement but also equally how many good leaders they leave behind," (Fullan & Quinn, 2016, p. 134). In his book on highly effective teams, Kirtman (2014) relates that, "effective school leaders build teams in their schools and develop trust and confidence with their staff to achieve results. They tend to use trust and motivation instead of discipline, rules, and punitive approaches to get results" (p. 6).

Consistent with building strong cultures that support a collaborative environment and teacher leadership within the school or district is the idea of utilizing Professional Learning Communities (PLC's) to garner leadership within the school to improve the organization and foster innovative practices.

The PLC concept as revealed through Dufour and Eaker's (1998) work, sets the standard for utilizing professional learning communities to improve teaching and learning in schools. Dufour and Eaker (1998) related the characteristics of a PLC as: "Shared mission, vision and values; collective inquiry; collaborative teams; action orientation and experimentation;

continuous improvement; and results orientation (p. 25). PLCs according to Dufour and Eaker (2008) function with a "persistent discomfort with the status quo and a constant search for a better way" (p. 28).

Lumpkin, Claxton and Wilson (2014) stated that teachers and staff that participate in PLC's need a supportive structure for time, constructive feedback and recognition of improved practices for successful implementation of PLC's. As with distributive leadership, PLC's must be guided by the building or district leader for sustainability. Providing teachers and staff members the autonomy to develop their own ideas about how to impact student learning through planned collaboration fosters collective thinking and can highly influence the organization toward meeting goals and initiatives. Building teacher and staff capacity creates collaborative cultures. As revealed by Hargreaves and Fullan (2012), "Schools with collaborative cultures are places of hard work, dedication, collective responsibility and pride in the school" (p. 113). When provided with the tenets that are required for a PLC environment, schools can thrive and masterfully create new and innovative paths toward improving learning for all members of the school community.

Professional Development and Teacher Leadership

Essential to the professional growth of teachers as presented in this literature are the components of pedagogical competency and collective efficacy and empowerment created through a shared and supportive environment allowing reflective practice and autonomy to thrive producing increased professional learning. In the context of Bandura's social-cultural theory, teachers work together in social environments that can either develop or hinder their self-efficacy. Environments that have a strong positive psychological influence assist in the

management of difficult situations and scenarios and creates the foundation for collective

efficacy and competence (Gredler, 2009).

Tsui's (2009) study stated that outstanding teachers engage in discovery and exploration

in teaching and learning, in problem solving, and in activities that expand their abilities. As

described by Lumpkin, et. al., (2014), teacher leaders act as transformative agents who

collectively share their specialized knowledge with colleagues, expertise and experience and help

broaden and sustain school improvement efforts. Silva (2000) suggested that teacher leaders

indulge in change efforts and improve their practices as they practice purposeful collaboration

with their peers, which stimulates positive professional relationships and encourages teacher

learning and growth by challenging the status quo. As teachers engage in collective inquiry with

other teachers in collaborative environments, a sense of transformative practice and deeper

understanding of the pedagogical practices of teaching can emerge. Harris, Lowery-Moore and

Farrow (2008) highlight Mezirow's (2000) transformative theory to describe teachers' learning

Processes. Mezirow's (2000) transformative theory focuses on rational thought and reflection in

a 10-step recursive process, which includes experiencing a situation, developing an action plan,

and realizes a new outlook on the situation.

Harris et al. (2008) related Brown's (2003) report that, teachers must be active facilitators

in the learning experience and take responsibility for student growth by looking at their own

attitudes and beliefs about life. Van den Berg (2002) stated that the professional development of

teachers is successful (Franke, Carpenter, Levi and Fennema 2001) when the teachers themselves

determine the problems and then create the solutions.

Teacher Leadership and Constructivist Theory

As described by Dewey (1955), the "idea of thinking is connected with a problem in the action with the tools that can be used to solve the problem" (p. 171). Sutinen (2007), discussed the work of John Dewey and George Herbert Mead as related to Constructivism and education, and described education as "the medium in which the creative and constructive actions of individuals come together in a social environment" (p.1). As discussed in Chapter I of this study, the Model of Scientific Action proposed by Dewey (1955) and Mead (1964) revealed thinking as a constructive action formulated in pragmatism and included a: problem; hypothesis; and an experiment based on the hypothesis.

Dewey and Mead's constructivist view of how people think through a problem related directly to the actions that teachers experience when they are given opportunities to lead beyond the classroom in leadership roles. Teacher leaders, as stated earlier in this literature review without question, are the teachers with the self-efficacy to seek out and answer the problems and situational events that occur in schools and districts. Through their innovative leadership skills, teacher leaders learn and create new ideas and incur knowledge as they engage with others in developing their craft. An idea according to Dewey (1955) "refers to qualities that can be separated from each other and joined together and further related to each other in such a way that meaning can be perceived" (p.168). Dewey (1955) asserted, "thinking is the process of inquiry, of looking into things, of investigating (p.176). As teacher leaders work in areas of leadership within their teams and schools, they are not only providing a model of self-efficacy to other members of the learning community, but also gaining in their own ability to think and construct meaning that will generate innovation, confidence and increased quality in pedagogical practices.

According to Van den Berg (2002) "an important condition for the successful development of teachers is the presence of transformational leadership" (p. 615). In addition, Van den Berg (2002) related that transformational leadership is effective (Bass, 1996) in business as well as in education. Fullan and Quinn (2015) revealed:

> The pathway to change is accelerated when teachers engage in meaningful dialogue about effective practice using the strategies that provide the most impact. Collaborative examination of practice increases this precision and causes teachers to raise their expectations for themselves and their students. This precision of pedagogical practice is essential as a foundation for deeper learning (p. 92).

Indicated in the research regarding teacher development are additional theories cited by Van den Berg (2002) and included discussion by Beijaar & Verloop (1996) on concepts of cognitive perspective which placed the teacher as an active perceiver and processor of information of practical knowledge and from Schön's (1981) work that depicted the teacher as a reflective practioner. Subsequently, Van den Berg (2002) reported on Ketchtermans (1996) subjective educational theory which is a knowledge base built on the processes of teaching and learning and also Ketchtermans'(1999) biographical perspective which denotes teachers' professional behavior is often determined by their early teaching experiences, and current experiences in their work along with their perception of the future. As Fullan & Quinn (2015) described, "It takes the group to change the group, and it takes many leaders to change the group. This is why developing leaders at all levels is essential" (p. 133).

Student Achievement and Teacher Leadership

Mujus and Harris (2007) reminded us that the quality of the classroom most definitely influences student motivation and academic achievement, yet the leadership of the organization is an essential component. Leithwood and Day (2008) reported that Hallinger and Heck (1996), Marzano et al. (2005) and Robinson (2007) uniformly stated that the differences in student

achievement in schools can be determined by the kinds of leadership that exists within the school. The Aspen Institute (2014) reported that early results from the Denver Differentiated Roles pilot program showed that Team Leads and the teachers on their teams had higher scores on Student Perception Surveys that were distributed to collect data on how students perceive the climate of their schools.

Berry (2015) related in Rosenholtz's (1991) landmark study she concluded that learning enriched schools were characterized by collective commitment of teachers in a collaborative environment toward student learning. In addition, work by Goddard, Goddard & Tschannen-Moren (2007), revealed that students achieved higher in math and reading in schools where teachers had higher levels of collaboration. Recently, Goddard, Miller, Larson, and Goddard (2010) concluded that principals that provided shared instructional leadership in their schools that encouraged teacher collaboration improved student achievement.

Gaps in the Research

Although studies previously discussed in this document show increased student achievement associated with teacher leadership, in York-Barr and Duke's (2004) research, they discussed only three studies that reveal that teacher leadership has had an effect on student learning and state these are only through "well reasoned assertions and data-based inferences and not through empirical evidence. The assertions and data-based inferences involved teacher leadership achieving democratic outcomes for students and links between shared decision making (Ryan, 1999) and teacher empowerment in improved efforts in teaching pedagogy (Marks & Louis, 1997), (p. 285). The other studies examined by York-Barr and Duke (2004) were not favorable to the impact of teacher leadership on student learning and involved teacher

leadership and student engagement (Leithwood & Jantzi, 1999-2000) and student attendance, achievement and behavior (Taylor & Bogotch, 1994).

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework is based on the extended findings from the review of literature on teacher leadership and my own personal experiences with leadership both in the classroom and beyond. The conceptual framework gives suggestions toward a theory of action for investigating the effects of teacher leadership on: teacher and principal leadership; school improvement; and teacher and principal professional growth in practice. As described in the literature review, theories and concepts that support the emergence of teacher leadership include transformational leadership, cognitive perspective, reflective practitioner, subjective educational theory (Van der Berg, 2002), Vygotsky's concept of the zone (Gordon, 2009) and constructivism. Embedded in the development of the teacher leader is the direct connection to constructivism. Constructivism allows for the individual to derive meaning from an experience through the close examination of the experience increasing the individuals' capacity to grow and learn yielding new thinking about teaching and learning in the context of the experience. The concept map in Figure 2.1 appropriately describes the ideas that led to the formulation of the research design of this study.

Figure 2.1 Concept Map
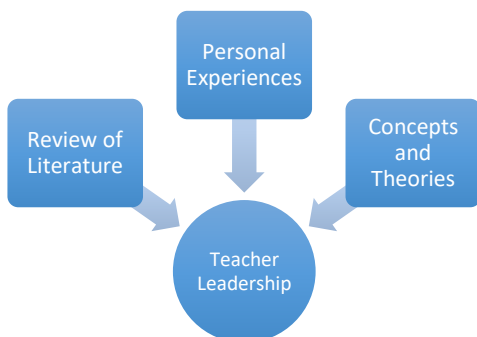
Chapter Summary

The immersion of formal teacher leadership into the K-12 educational system has given a new direction to the leadership of learning at the building, district and state levels. Many paths to leadership position for teachers now exist within schools, school districts, university programs, state and national initiatives and include new prototypes that put teachers in hybrid roles for teaching and leading. Engaging teachers in leadership roles has been described as the newest way to fix the educational problems that exist in schools today. Most teachers in leadership roles in schools and districts have formal leadership positions where they are the team leader, department chair, facilitator or specialist in an area of expertise. These formalized positions are often created by the building or district leadership and are strategically utilized to assist the administrator in facilitating school improvement strategies. While these teachers may be the "experts" in an area of content, teachers that move into leadership positions in an informal way are frequently more successful in making change in an organization, a grade level team or even an individual classroom (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). These informal leaders work within organizations, schools and teams to broaden the perspectives of the teachers that they work with and not outside their realm of influence.

As previously stated by York-Barr and Duke (2004), leadership roles for teachers are the most effective when they emerge informally, not through the guise of the building leader. When teachers are formally placed in leadership roles, teachers can feel conflict and isolation affecting their collegial relationships with their peers that can greatly affect the teacher's ability to lead others in learning situations and collective inquiry.

Working together in a collaborative environment in shared leadership roles, teachers can develop deep relational trust, build capacity and pedagogical competence, personal efficacy and

deepen professional practices. Dufour & Fullan (2013) described that "when the school is organized and targeted toward a few school goals, through a collaborative enterprise (learning with peers), teachers can improve student learning dramatically" (p. 83). Sharing leadership roles with administration requires that teachers be given the autonomy to not only create their own paths to leadership, but also have a voice in the decisions made that affect teaching and learning for the school, teachers and students. Using a distributive leadership strategy within a school or district through a shared context allows the teacher to become the lead learner of the organization and build capacity with others. Empowering teachers to create and implement their own learning environments helps them to form new instructional practices gaining collective ownership and inspiring innovation.

Several theories can be associated with teacher leadership and include: transformational leadership, cognitive perspective, reflective practitioner, subjective educational theory and biographical perspective with the most attention given to transformational leadership (Van den Berg, 2002). Nonetheless, embedded in the practice of the teacher leader is the connection to the theory of Constructivism. In its purest form, Constructivism focuses on the nature of knowledge without the influence of external factors (Gredler, 2009). Etmer and Newby (1993) relate Bednar et al. (1991) remarks stating, *Constructivism* is a theory that equates learning with creating meaning from experience, and to understand the learning that has taken place within an individual, the actual experience must be examined. In his research, Gordon (2009) suggests, "constructivist views are many, wide and diverse, and should not be a set of abstract ideas about knowledge and human existence but pragmatic and grounded in good teaching practices" (p. 40). Gordon (2009) further explains "descriptive and prescriptive educational theory: Descriptive theory containing epistemological (theory of knowledge) and ontological (nature of being)

assumptions with prescriptive theory containing both theoretical and pragmatic applications" (p, 40). According to Phillips' (1995) discussion of Dewey's pragmatic constructivism, he describes the learner not being a spectator but creating meaning through "doing an activity individuals not only become more proficient in doing it but also construct a deeper understanding of the rules, methods and goals of the activity" (p. 50). Vygotsky's (1978) concept of the zone reveals that "human learning, mental development and knowledge" are developed within the social context that the learner exists in. In other words, "cognition is more like a skill or capacity that can be learned with the help of others" (as cited in Gordon, 2009, p. 52). Teachers are members of learning communities with cultures that may greatly enhance or inhibit the teacher's ability to learn and grow in their teaching practices and their ability to lead outside the classroom. Experiences that are associated with a strong positive school culture such as a teacher leadership activity can effectively change perspectives and thinking toward improved schools and increased student achievement.

York-Barr and Duke (2004), suggested that research on the effects of teacher leadership on improved student academic achievement is lacking and is an area for future research. Most of the effects on student achievement are discussed in the context of improvement of collective commitment of teachers toward student learning or improvement of practices (Berry, 2015). In a study comparing leadership dimensions, results showed very few dimensions significantly affected student achievement (Shatzer, Caldarella, Hallam, & Brown, 2013). Possible reasons for the lack of teacher leadership effects on student achievement are the inconsistent and inconclusive measures for student assessment that are currently used in schools districts and states.

According to the research discussed in this literature review reveal areas impacted by teacher leadership are focused around building the capacity of the organization often by formal leadership positions working collaboratively to build trusting relationships and improve professional practices. What is not found frequently in the literature is the impact of teacher leadership experiences when teachers are not in formal roles on teams, schools and student learning. As stated by Jessica Cuthbertson, Teacherpreneur, moving into a hybrid role not only encouraged her to work toward a higher level of professional practice through pursuing National Board Certification, but also help to change her entire thinking about teaching and learning as she now shares that transformative process through her work in a leadership position with teachers in Denver Public Schools (personal communication, October 12, 2015).

The extent of innovation and positive change to build professional teaching and learning capacities within schools and systemic change in leadership within schools through teacher leadership is the focus of this study and supports the choice of the methodologies to be utilized in Chapter 3. Chapter 3 succinctly outlines the problem of the study, rationale behind the problem, the data collection methods and analysis along with the participants in the study.

CHAPTER 3

INQUIRY METHODS

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study using a descriptive multiple case study approach was to examine the reported effects of the participation in the Teacher Leadership Initiative (TLI) on leadership, school improvement and teacher and administrator professional practices through the constructed perceptions of the teachers and school administrators experiences that participated in the pilot. The Teacher Leadership Initiative was a three-year pilot promoting teacher leadership implemented through a partnership between the National Education Association, the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards and the Center for Teaching Quality. The participants in this study were a sample of teachers and school administrators that took part in an eleven month leadership initiative conducted in three phases comprising 1) the development of innovative leadership skills; 2) exploration of a content strand that matches an interest of the teachers; and 3) the planning and execution of a capstone project (National Education Association, 2015,f). The National Education Association (NEA) served as the gatekeeper for this study and provided access to the participants. Participants selected in this study were teachers and school administrators that were engaged in the TLI in years one, two or three of the pilot. The TLI model for leadership was built around the idea that teacher leadership looks different depending on the context or role the teacher is engaged in and was based upon the following competencies: "Instructional Leadership Competencies; Policy Leadership Competencies, Association Leadership Competencies, and the Overarching Competencies which helped to combine each of the competencies" (NEA, 2015).

Research Questions

1. How do participants experience and understand teaching and learning differently after participating in the Teacher Leadership Initiative?

2. How do participants experience and understand leadership differently after participating in the Teacher Leadership Initiative?

3. How has constructed understanding about what it means to be effective as an educator changed after the Teacher Leadership Initiative?

Rationale/Problem Setting Context

Increasingly, studies addressing the significance of teacher leadership in the improvement of teacher quality and in the advancement of schools are well documented. Since the beginning of the educational reform era of the 1980's, "Expanded teacher leadership roles range from assisting with the management of schools to evaluating educational initiatives and facilitating professional learning communities" (York-Barr & Duke, 2004, p. 235). In addition, York-Barr & Duke (2004) reiterate the purpose of teacher leadership initiatives as the improvement of teaching and learning with the result being increased student achievement for all our nation's students. Although studies of teacher leadership opportunities and initiatives in schools and districts are now more widely publicized and promoted, the issues surrounding the development of teacher leaders, support for the implementation of teacher leadership, as well as the support for school principals and other administrators to engage in this process, are insufficient to be a sustainable form of educational improvement. In a recent publication from Berry, Smylie and Ekert (2016), they establish criteria that will produce and sustain teacher leadership in our schools. The seven domains include:

vision and strategy;

supportive administration;

adequate resources;

enabling work structures;

strong collaborations;

blurred roles; and

inquiry risk-taking (p.22).

These domains reflect that vision for teacher leadership and a clear path with understanding of the tasks for accomplishment be defined. School administrators must have adequate training in the identification and the cultivation of teacher as leaders and the ability to restructure work systems and schedules to embed effective professional learning practices in teachers' daily work. The restructuring of school finances with allocations to ensure appropriate human, fiscal and physical resources along with strategies to assist school principals and other administrators to make informed decisions about where to place their funds for the most applicable improvement is critical for implementation and sustainability. In addition, policies and programs that promote the value of sharing expertise through collaborative venues and differentiated teacher roles is essential and characterized by relational trust and a collective commitment with common goals. Finally, a school and system-wide orientation of inquiry in which teachers and administrators collectively engage in and look at their current practices with transparency for deeper learning must exist (Berry, et al., 2016). The "enabling conditions" described by Berry et al. (2016, p. 23-24) provide the foundation to this research study and give justifiable substance to the use of teacher leadership to improve and inform current pedagogical practices for teachers and improve the practices of school administrators to advance achievement in schools and impact student learning.

Theoretical Perspective

After I made the decision to focus my study on the teachers and administrators that participated in the Teacher Leadership Initiative (TLI) pilot, phenomenology was my choice of methodology. I chose phenomenology because the TLI was a lived experience of the participants and using a phenomenological approach requires the researcher to study the lived experiences of a group of individuals. Creswell (2014) and Bloomberg and Volpe (2015) describe phenomenology as both a philosophy and methodology that permits the researcher to utilize qualitative strategies to identify the essence of the human experiences about a phenomenon. With phenomenological research, the researcher "analyzes the data by reducing the data to significant statements or quotes and combines these into categories" (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2015, p. 49). The research process for this study involved interviewing the participants, reducing the data into quotes and statements and then placing these quotes or statements into categories with similar ideas which aligns with phenomenological research methodology.

After completing the research process in this study and fully analyzing and reporting the results, I realized that my research methodology met the criteria for a descriptive multiple case study and not phenomenology. While the TLI was a lived experience of the participants in the study, case studies are bounded by a social phenomenon or event such as the participants experienced in this study. In case study work, the researcher utilizes multiple methods of data collection which can include interviews and qualitative documents as in this study and then triangulates the data for a more in-depth understanding of the phenomenon (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2015). For the purpose of adding to the validity of the study, member checks and peer reviews were utilized. In addition, the analytic strategy for this study was to provide detailed

descriptions of each case (interview) followed by thematic analysis across interviews which according to Bloomberg and Volpe (2015) meets the research guidelines for a case study.

The use of semi-structured interviews of teachers and administrators who participated in the Teacher Leadership Initiative allowed the phenomenon of the study to be articulated through rich detailed descriptions and provided the structure for a reflective analysis that effectively related the experience (Moustakas, 1994).

Constructivism guided the underlying principles of inquiry and the collective interpretation of the teachers' and administrators' experiences in the Teacher Leadership Initiative. von Glasersfeld (1984) relates three tenets of constructivism:

> 1. Knowledge is not passively accumulated, but rather, is the result of active cognizing by the individual; 2. Cognition is an adaptive process that functions to make an individual's behavior more viable given a particular environment; 3. Cognition organizes and makes sense of one's experience, and is not a process to render an accurate representation of reality

According to Gordon (2009), Constructivist theory has evolved from the work of "more than twenty theorists" (p. 40), including: Plato, Dewey, Freire, Piaget, Bruner, and Vygotsky. In addition, Gordon (2009) suggests that constructivist views are many, wide and diverse. He stated that constructivism should not be a "set of abstract ideas about knowledge and human existence but pragmatic and grounded in good teaching practices" (p. 40). Bednar et al.'s (1991) statement as described by Ertmer and Newby (2013), related that Constructivism is a theory that equates learning with meaning.

As teachers engaged in the TLI experiences, their pedagogical practices, their ability to collaborate and lead others, and their knowledge of advancing teaching as a profession was influenced in a way that impacted their learning individually, and often expanded to school teams, their administrative leaders and the local teacher union organization. Dewey (1995) and

Mead (1964) revealed thinking as a constructive action and proposed a Model of Thinking also

known as a Model of Scientific Action formulated in pragmatism:

> A problem in action;
>
> Hypothesis or concepts to solve a problem; An experiment that takes place on the basis of
> the hypothesis, a functional test to see if the hypothesis that have been constructed can
> produce a situation in which the problem through actions disappears (Dewey, p.171 &
> Mead, p. 192)

Sutinen (2008) added that Joas (1994) and Cook (1999) described another dimension to

the model by Dewey and Mead. They stated that participating in an intentional cognitive activity

can provide an opportunity for individuals to reach the actionable goals, which can expand

through experiences producing new things and new goals in the individual's thinking. Through

participation in the Teacher Leadership Initiative, teachers engaged in just such a change in goals

and thinking about improving leadership, schools and the educational profession like they had

not experienced before this initiative. Administrators in this study also realized an increased

awareness of how the Teacher Leadership Initiative improved the teacher's leadership skills and

gave a new outlook on how education can look for teachers beyond their classroom walls.

Research Sample and Data Sources

Participants interviewed in this study included 8 teachers and 4 administrators for a total

of 12 participants and were from the states of Ohio, Iowa, Mississippi and Montana from years

one through three of the Teacher Leadership Initiative Pilot. All teachers were active members

of the National Education Association teacher's union. Initial themes from the data revealed that

the teacher participants appeared to be from a select group of educators including state teachers

of the year, National Board Certified Teachers, and National Education Association local union

presidents. These teachers, individually and as a group were highly skilled in the craft of

teaching as depicted by their involvement with local, state and national initiatives yet they were seeking something beyond the classroom to fill their need to impact teaching and learning.

The Teacher Leadership Initiative originated as a joint venture between the National Education Association (NEA), the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) and the Center for Teaching Quality (CTQ) and involved individuals from six states: Arizona, Colorado, Mississippi, Michigan, Iowa and Massachusetts during the First-Year Pilot from fall 2013 through November 2014. The Second-Year Pilot added Columbus Ohio, Hawaii, Minnesota, Montana, Prince George's County, Maryland and Utah and was conducted between September 2014 and August 2015. A modified version was also piloted in Clark County, Nevada and began in February 2015 and ended in August 2015. The final Third-Year Pilot began in fall 2015 and concluded August 31, 2016 (National Education Association, 2015,a).

Teachers in the TLI voluntarily participated in the teacher leadership pilot after being contacted through NEA, NBPTS or CTQ. Except for the cohort from Clark County, Nevada, all participants in the Teacher Leadership Initiative participated in an eleven-month time frame in which they voluntarily took part in the Teacher Leadership Initiative. For this study, all teachers and administrators volunteered to participate in the research for the purpose of understanding the effects of the Teacher Leadership Initiative on leadership and school improvement.

Data Collection Methods

As revealed in the review of literature in this study, teacher leadership has been recognized as an avenue for improving the quality of teaching and learning in schools and districts, provided a benchmark for reform efforts for school improvement (York-Barr & Duke 2004) and helped escalate changes in policy to support leadership of teachers outside of the classroom. In addition, Darling-Hammond (2003), Hertling (2001), Johnson & Birkeland (2003)

and Whitaker (1996) reported, teacher leadership effects are also realized in improved instruction, a decrease in teacher attrition and an increase in student achievement while increases in student achievement are not as prevalent in the literature.

While most teachers can fully attend to positions of leadership within schools, the administrator's role in providing the structural components that allow teachers to not only move into leadership positions, but also to sustain this leadership within schools is critical. Berg et al (2005) stated that a principal's ability to develop and transmit a clear and high-quality vision for school improvement is an essential component needed for successful teacher leadership. Without a purposeful direction from the building leader for where the school is headed in the future, the teacher's role in leadership is difficult to ascertain (Barth, 2001). Using a collaborative format for developing a clear vision for improving schools with teachers and school administrators is now seen as a more effective solution for school improvement.

Semi-structured interviews were used for data collection conducted through the use of zoom.us, an online video chat recording service or through recorded voice interviews due to geographical constraints between the researcher and the participants. Qualitative documents such as personal documents produced by the study participants are included in this study and gave a useful window into the thought processes of the individual, made a connection to the research questions, provided context to the study, and served as a way to explore meaning from the participants (Ratvich and Carl, 2016). A *Capstone* project of a teacher participant along with a local newspaper review of the TLI added to the validity of the study and gave in-depth insight to the participant's lived experiences.

The use of a descriptive multiple case study approach allowed inquiry to be used to discover and then described through reporting the specific actions of people, their beliefs and

interests in this study (Ratvich & Carl 2016 & Erikson 2011), along with the criteria established

by Berry, Smylie and Ekert (2016) to note whether the criteria actually promoted teacher

leadership and the subsequent action of teacher leadership and its effect on teachers, students,

schools and school districts.

Research Instruments

The National Education Association purposefully connected this study to the teachers and

school administrators that participated in the Teacher Leadership Initiative Pilot. Interviews of

the participants were conducted using a semi-structured format and were iterative and evolved

after each interview at the teacher level and the administrative level to allow for the questions to

give a clearer and more in-depth understanding of the participant's experiences. Final interview

protocols for teacher and school administrator interviews are included as Appendix A and

Appendix B. Semi-structured interviews allowed for the specific questions outlined in Appendix

A and Appendix B to be utilized and also permitted follow–up questioning within and across the

interviews (Ratvich and Carl, 2016). The interviews were transcribed through trint.com, an

online transcription service, which allowed the upload of video and voice recording files. The

files of each of the 12 participants were revised through trint.com for accuracy of the wording

and conversation during each interview. Member checking was used with the participants after

the initial revisions to the transcription to ensure that the transcribed interviews reflected the

actual interview questions and responses.

The participants were encouraged to submit any qualitative documents or materials

including the Capstone project and multimedia adding to the validity of the study. The

documents and materials submitted from participants allowed for a much clearer connection

between the research questions to the constructed responses of the participants and added to the validity of the study.

Research Study Time Frame

The interviews, transcription and coding along with analysis of the interviews and the submitted materials were completed within a 12 month time frame:

May 2017:

- IRB Approval, Research Project Begins
- Gatekeepers were contacted for participant access.

June-September 2017:

- Participants were selected and contacted for interviews.

August-December 2017

- Interviews were conducted through zoom.us an online video chat recording service and voice recordings.
- Video and audio files were transcribed through a transcription service, trint.com.

January-March 2018

- After transcription, video and audio files were revised for accuracy of the wording of the interview conversation.
- Transcriptions were coded using initial and second cycle coding.
- Data sources were triangulated for interpretation of the research.
- Conclusions and implications were completed.

Data Analysis Methods

Data analysis was iterative and recursive using an integrative approach. As data was collected over the duration of the study from the participants, it was combined to incorporate criticality into the process (Ratvich and Carl, 2016). Continuous formative analysis as well as summative analysis utilizing the transcriptions from the semi-structured interviews, and field

notes from additional qualitative documents were used to review and refine the study. Specifically, as the data was reviewed during and after the interviews, certain questions were not as effective to answer core constructs and needed to be reworded to succinctly target the research questions in the study (Ratvich & Carl, 2016).

Data triangulation was utilized and allowed for the assimilation of information from a variety of sources including the semi-structured interviews with transcriptions and qualitative documents, which included multi-media providing evidence of the participant's lived experience with the Teacher Leadership Initiative. Data triangulation combined multiple perspectives taken from individuals and supported a coherent justification for emerging themes or theoretical perspectives increasing the validity of the study (Creswell, 2014).

Data was read and reread to determine the emerging themes that arose from the transcripts. The themes were categorized in a pre-coding fashion and included information that described whether they were emically or etically derived allowing for transparency and integrity acknowledging either cultural and contextually embedded behaviors or behaviors not organic to participants and additionally to exclude interpretive authority (Creswell, 2013; Ratvich & Carl, 2016).

Qualitative data analysis involves classifying things, events and their properties so first cycle *Initial Coding* strategies were employed which allowed for the data to be broken down into discrete parts that could be closely examined and compared for similarities and differences (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). During the Initial Coding process "deep reflection on the content and nuances" permitted meaningful interpretation of the data and first attempts at association with themes to occur which were "descriptive, conceptual or theoretical" (Saldana, 2016, p.116-119). Throughout the coding process, I used coding memos that I recorded on a voice recorder so that I

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could document my impressions of each interview as the data was processed and refined (Ratvich & Carl, 2016).

Once I completed first cycle coding, I used *Structured Coding* strategies, which allowed me to fully reorganize and categorize the data based on thematic, conceptual or theoretical relationships to develop smaller more manageable themes for interpretation (Saldana, 2016). Using the responses to the interview questions to guide my organization of the data along with the research questions, I was able to structure the data collected from the interview for clear interpretation to determine the findings. To do this, I utilized a strategy from Saldana (2016), a "Top 10 List" which extracted the ten "quotes or passages" that were most representative of the study utilizing the responses from the teachers and administrators to guide this coding process. The content of these passages were arranged in various order and included: "Chronological, hierarchically, telescopically, episodically, narratively from the expository to the climactic, from the mundane to the insightful, from the smallest detail to the biggest picture" (Saldana, 2016, p. 275). This strategy allowed me to identify the major themes associated in the study. After major themes were determined, I was able to merge the categories, data descriptions and research questions to refine and reorganize the study from this process (Ratvich & Carl, 2016).

Limitations

Technology was utilized to conduct initial interviews as well as follow up questioning through email. Limitations of this research study were that participants were not interviewed in a face-to- face method because of the geographical distance between the researcher and the participants. Also included in the limitations of interviews conducted through video chat and voice recording is the absence nuances, including body language in the context of the interview questions which can provide direction and affirmation to the conversation. In addition, the

ability to build rapport with the participants by the researcher limited the dialog and extension of ideas using an online environment. Another limitation is that when using technology, it can be challenging for the participants depending upon their access to the tools to be used for the interviews as well as the time constraints that technology can present. Finally, the participants in this study are limited to the Teacher Leadership Initiative (TLI) experience which could not give the depth and breadth of conducting research in other teacher leadership situations and experiences.

Delimitations

Delimitations of the research were the use of purposeful sampling, which was employed in the selection of the participants for this study through the gatekeepers to the study. The participants chosen from the outreach by the National Education Association were only a small sample of the teachers and administrators that took part in the Teacher Leadership Initiative and may not provide the data needed for the full inquiry focus of the study. In addition, because of the iterative process of qualitative research, as this study advanced, the triangulation of data sources changed as information was gathered and interpreted. In this respect, a second outreach by the gatekeepers was not needed to collect additional participants that fully addressed the questions in the research proposal.

Ethical Considerations

The research in my study included the use a gatekeeper from the National Education Association (NEA). As per conversation with a representative from the NEA, before applying for local IRB approval, I shared my research design with members of the NEA to gain feedback and insight and specific input on their stance of the proposal. Included in the proposal submitted for review by the NEA are the steps I used to gain Informed Consent and included:

1) An invitation to participate in interviews that were free of jargon over a designated period of time, a designated length of interview time and the knowledge that the interviews will be conducted through audio-tape or video-tape. The full identity of the researcher was disclosed to the interview participants including personal contact information. Participants were fully aware that their interview (recordings) might be shared before the publication of the study with sponsorships from outside agencies such as the NEA, the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards and the participants were informed of the risks, discomforts and vulnerabilities of taking part in the research;

2) Participants will be informed that their participation in the research is completely voluntary and that they will not coerced into participating if they choose not to;

3) Participants were informed that they have the right to drop out of the study at any time, during interview and within a specified time after the interviews are completed and before publication of the interview material;

4) Participants were informed that they have the right to request the material from their interviews and the right to review the interview material before it is published;

5) The participants were informed on how extensively their words will be used in the final report (Seidman, 2013, p. 63-67).

Particular issues that are associated with technology-media collection methods related to privacy were clearly delineated to the participants to avoid any problems from the onset of the study (Ratvich & Carl, 2016). As related by Seidman (2013), "Doing good work is a process in which the methodology and ethics of the work overlap. Researchers should treat interviewing as an exploration, not an attempt to prove something they have in mind. A researchers first responsibility is to the research participants" (p. 140-142).

Trustworthiness

To ensure the accuracy of the findings in this study, I employed the following strategies:

1) The data was triangulated from the different sources used in the study, which included: Interview transcripts, qualitative documents, and qualitative audio and visual materials;

2) Member checking was utilized to determine whether the participants in the study believe that the final report was an accurate description of the experience;

3) The use of thick description to reveal and detail the findings enabled the readers to know and experience the study providing a clear picture of the themes in a rich and thorough way;

4) Acknowledgement of the bias that may exist between the researcher's role as a now as a school administrator and previous role as an informal teacher leader, including the researcher's beliefs about teacher leadership and school administration;

5) The use of peer review throughout the study was used to strengthen the validity of the research beyond the researcher;

6) The researcher will check the accuracy of the transcripts to make sure that mistakes are revealed and corrected before coding occurs;

7) Qualitative generalization was ruled out to ensure that the study is not a new version of a previous study and provided a meaningful look at the phenomenon (Creswell, 2014).

Summary

Many studies exist that describe teacher leadership as a resolution for improving schools. What is not substantiated in the research is an in-depth look at how teacher leadership experiences impact teachers and administrators as individuals, as a team and as an organization directly related to leadership, school improvement and what it means to be an effective educator. Utilizing a qualitative descriptive multiple case study research design, and conducting semi-structured interviews, I was able to gain a deep understanding of the responses from teachers and principals that participated in the Teacher Leadership Initiative (TLI) through questioning and then relating those responses directly to the research questions. Transcripts were transcribed using a transcription service and analyzed along with the qualitative documents accrued from the participants. Using *Initial Coding* and *Structured Coding* strategies, I was able to compare similarities and differences from a wide variety of qualitative data ranging from descriptive, conceptual and theoretical constructs. Triangulation was utilized to allow me to look at multiple data sources to ascertain a more detailed and coherent justification of the themes generated from the data increasing the validity of the study. Finally, using a strategy for a "Top Ten List"

(Saldana 2016, p. 274) I was able to merge data themes with research questions and determine

findings, conclusions and considerations for future studies (Ratvich & Carl, 2016).

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

First and Second Cycle Coding

The purpose of this qualitative study using a descriptive multiple case study approach was to examine the reported effects of the participation in the Teacher Leadership Initiative (TLI) on leadership, school improvement and teacher and administrator professional practices through the constructed perceptions of the teacher and administrator experiences that who participated in the pilot. This chapter describes the coding process, themes that emerged and identification of the findings from the interviews of the participants to determine the effects of the Teacher Leadership Initiative. Research questions for this study were:

1. How do participants experience and understand teaching and learning differently after participating in the Teacher Leadership Initiative?

2. How do participants experience and understand leadership differently after participating in the Teacher Leadership Initiative?

3. How has constructed understanding about what it means to be effective as an educator changed after the Teacher Leadership Initiative?

Using the research questions to guide my organization of the data for a *first cycle coding* strategy, I sorted the data collected from the interviews by first developing Table 4.1. In Table 4.1, participants are categorized in demographic categories as teachers and administrators. This initial coding strategy helped me to gain insight into each individual participant as a professional educator and allowed me to understand their prior and current experiences with teacher

leadership. This method improved my ability to recognize the themes as they emerged from the data and how they were associated with these particular participants.

Table 4.1 TLI Participant Demographic Characteristics

Characteristic	Teacher	Administrator	Characteristic	Teacher	Administrator
Elementary	2		Other Professional		
Secondary	6	4	Accomplishments	8	2
0-5 Years	0	0	Work in other		
6-10 Years	2	2	Professions	3	1
11-19 Years	5	2	National Board		
20+ Years	1	2	Certification	3	
Master's Degree	7	4	Working on National		
Non-Traditional			Board Certification	1	
Certification		1			

The interview process was iterative. As I interviewed participants, my understanding of what I needed to know about the participant's experience in the TLI and how that affected their thoughts about teaching and learning, leadership and what it means to be an effective educator changed. Using a semi-structured format for the interviews, the questions became less generalized and more focused on the essence of this teacher leadership experience and how it impacted their lives as teacher leaders and administrators as well as their peers, their schools and their school district. To determine the consistent themes from the data, I read and reread the transcribed interviews, listened to my recorded reflection memos from each interview, utilized written notes from the interviews and reviewed field notes taken from additional questions sent via email to the participants post interviews.   Table 4.2 reveals additional demographic

haracteristics of the participants derived from the interviews as they progressed and helped to organize my thoughts in determining next steps in the coding process.

Table 4.2 Additional TLI Participant Demographic Characteristics

Characteristic	Teacher	Characteristic	Teacher	Administrator
TLI First		Minimal Support		
Teacher Leader		From Administrator		
Experience	4	in TLI	5	
Risk Taker	4	Administrator No		
Highly Involved		Knowledge of TLI	4	
with Union	8	Administrator No Longer		
Supported by		in School	2	
Administrator		Teacher Leader Before		
in TLI	3	Administrator		4

The use of *Structured Coding* as the second cycle coding strategy, allowed me to fully organize and categorize data based on thematic and conceptual relationships to develop smaller more manageable themes for interpretation. This coding strategy is particularly useful for multiple interview data sets using semi-structured formats for interviewing to gather topics or major categories or themes (Saldana, 2016).

The themes provide a connection to the foundational purpose of the Teacher Leadership Initiative delineated by the National Education Association (NEA) in a publication which NEA along with the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) and the Center for Teaching Quality (CTQ) state that TLI is a "product of our shared vision of teacher leadership

advancing the profession" (NEA, 2014, p. 2). The publication describes *advancing the teacher*

profession as this:

> A key attribute of a profession is that accomplished practitioners take responsibility for defining and governing its standards and practices. Increasingly, teachers are seeking new opportunities to advance their careers and the profession by taking on new leadership roles such as peer reviewers, instructional coaches, mentors, curriculum developers, and policy advocates (NEA, 2014, p. 2).

The publication from NEA continues with how TLI will provide this opportunity to teachers:

> Through the TLI, teacher will play more consequential roles in shaping the policies and practice that govern teaching and learning in the United States. The TLI is a comprehensive effort to recruit, prepare, activate and support the next generation of teachers to lead a transformed teaching profession. The long-term goals of the TLI are to: (1) define the foundational competencies of teacher leadership; (2) develop relevant experiences and supports to help teachers cultivate those competencies; and (3) activate teachers to be leaders for their profession as a result of their participation in this process (NEA, 2014, p. 2).

This initiative created by the NEA, NBPTS and CTQ gave teachers an opportunity to participate

in a field-based experience for teachers and allowed them to choose between three structures of

teacher leadership:

- Instructional Leadership-which placed teachers in the center of supporting and improving teaching and learning in their schools and districts;
- Policy Leadership-which ensured that experienced and accomplished teachers inform and influence policy making decisions at the local, state and national levels.
- Association Leadership-which prepared current and future association leaders to include advancing the profession of teaching and the professional interests of members into the union advocacy agenda (NEA, 2014, p. 2).

The teachers in this study were given, first the opportunity to use their leadership skills

outside of their classroom to participate in a leadership event, then supported by the NEA,

NBPTS and CTQ through local, state and national cohort meetings for professional learning

which targeted their development as TLI teachers. Additional support for implementation was

given through their individual school's leadership or school district's leadership as well as peers in their schools and with other teachers in TLI in other states.

Teachers in this initiative chose one area from the three structures and developed a capstone project much like a master's level thesis project. Findings from the interviews reveal the capstone project was not just a paper written to finish a degree completion, but described an actual change in their practices as classroom teachers. This experience took them to a different level of thinking about teaching and learning, leadership and what it means to be an effective educator because it was a project that they chose to improve teaching and learning and was unique to each individual teacher. It was not a task given to them by an administrator, it was truly the teacher seeing a need for improvement and then taking the opportunity along with the responsibilities and making it happen. The result was an improvement in teaching and learning in their schools and districts.

Each teacher's experience and their perspectives as well as the administrator's experience and perspectives with these teachers as they completed this journey is documented in the seven major themes that were extrapolated from the data. The organization of the findings is depicted through the themes with a summary of the findings from teachers and administrators followed by questions that directly relate to the theme and the responses from teachers and administrators. This use of *Thick Description* allows an accurate and thorough account of the contextual factors clearly describing the participants' experiences in the interviews to produce more complex interpretations and findings (Ratvich and Carl, 2016). Adding written field notes and memos from the interviews, post interview questions via email from the participants and recorded voice memos after each interview was completed ensured that the quality of this study was in-depth

enough for a reader to picture in their mind these participants' experiences in a teacher

leadership opportunity.

The questions allow a better understanding and connection of the importance of the

themes to the study. Some responses do not have a direct question but reflect the findings related

to the theme. Teachers and administrators were given pseudonyms for their responses in the

findings. *Member Checks* were utilized with all participants in this study as they were given the

opportunity to check the transcription of their interview and make changes to their transcript. No

substantial changes were made to the transcripts.

Major Themes and Findings

The major themes that transpired from the data collected were:

1. Participant Characteristics: Teachers and Administrators

2. Teacher Participation in TLI: Overall Purpose, Goals and Personal Goals

3. Preparation for Teacher Leadership: Teachers and Administrators

4. Support for Teachers in the Teacher Leadership Initiative (TLI)

5. Changes in Thinking about Teaching and Learning and Leadership: Teachers and

Administrators

6. Improvement: Teachers Efficacy and Confidence as Teacher Leader

7. Outcomes of TLI: Impact on Teaching and Learning and Leadership, Overall Impact

of TLI, New Opportunities, Professional Growth and Facilitating Teacher Leadership

Themes

Theme 1: Participant Characteristics: Teachers and Administrators

Theme 1 was the beginning and an essential part of gaining an understanding of the participant's lived experiences in this teacher leadership event. Theme 1 broadens the inherent characteristics of the participants to include: leadership inside and outside of the classroom, school and district; achievement and accomplishment in education; and personalities of participants. These findings give a holistic picture of the type of teachers and administrators that participated in the TLI.

Summary of findings from Teacher Responses: The teachers who participated in the TLI were at high levels of accomplishment in their careers. All but one teacher had master's degrees with some teachers holding more than one master's level degree. The single teacher who had not completed a master's degree had finished two bachelor's degrees and earned a teaching license as well. Three teachers were National Board Certified Teachers (NBCTs) and two of these teachers worked with teachers in candidacy support for national board certification. Two teachers were working toward national board certification during the interview process. One teacher, a thirty-six year veteran teacher was a state teacher of the year (TOY) in Iowa with multiple experiences outside the classroom working on committees, district level curriculum work and taught college level classes. Two teachers were currently working on their doctoral degrees and three teachers had worked in other occupations before becoming teachers. One teacher worked with the state of Montana education agency writing curriculum and one teacher worked at the national level writing curriculum for College Board. Teaching experience for these teachers ranged from seven years to thirty-six years. When asked if they would consider themselves a risk taker, only four teachers claimed to have this characteristic while all teachers

did report to be open to change, were always looking for new opportunities, and willing to take on additional roles to support students, schools and districts. Four teachers that participated in the TLI had not considered themselves as teacher leaders before this experience.

Question: Would you consider yourself as a risk taker?

> Kristi: Absolutely. When we started with this whole process of TLI, we went to our district administration and said, hey we want to take over our mentorship program and that was really risky because that was kind of their baby. And so for us to walk in and say what you're doing is not working we need to take it over and they were totally fine with that.

> Kari: I do step outside of the norm. I would say that a lot of teachers in my district are kind of complacent. I did TLI because I was looking for something else because I felt like it had to be more than you know just being in class which I love but it had to be more. So I guess I would consider myself a risk take because a lot of people they just sit back and they stay in that box.

> Craig: Yes. I am usually the one that's the quiet introverted one and had to force myself to do things and I know it's for the best. I know I want to progress in the career as a teacher. If I'm going to do the best for my students, I need to take those risks so you know I'll push myself.

> Brian: Absolutely. I am not afraid to ask questions and if I don't understand, I'm willing to seek help if I'm not comfortable with something, I'm not afraid to ask. When I came into this program and there was absolutely no curriculum. I just decided to go up to my

central office and have multiple meetings with them and make sure that things are taken

care of and meet with parents to bring a service delivery model that meets all the learners.

Summary of Findings from Administrator Responses: The four administrators in this

study included one holding a district level position, two principals and one assistant principal.

The years of educational experience ranged from 17 years to 35 years. All four administrators

considered themselves teacher leaders while in the teacher role and all were given opportunities

to try out leadership or given encouragement by an administrator before moving into an

administrative role. Two administrators taught at the secondary level, one at the elementary

level and one administrator had no formal training in administration except licensure but had

extensive experience in personnel management and with the teacher union.

Question: Would you consider yourself as a teacher leader before becoming a school

administrator?

> Randy: Yes. There were several councils that I was responsible for, several initiatives at
>
> the school level that I was responsible for implementing throughout the building. There
>
> are moving parts as are related to student organization groups, community outreach
>
> efforts and some of those I took the lead on.

> Peri: Yeah, I think so. I switched grade levels a lot. I think once I found my niche in
>
> those fifth grade and I was really confident with my teaching. So once I got really
>
> confident then I started really getting involved and then did some district curriculum
>
> stuff. I really tried to get my feet wet into everything and I was the liaison to our
>
> universities in our city. My boss was like, you should think about being an administrator.
>
> So I think just the whole just being able to have supportive principals encouraged me to

be more in the leadership position. I don't think I would have really gotten a feel for it being my niche if they wouldn't have allowed me to do things like run a committee and do the scheduling. I would have never gotten the taste of it so that I would know like oh my God, this is awesome.

Mary: Yes, I had a lot of leadership opportunities both at the local and state level. Early in my career I was a union president. I served two terms as president of the state Reading Council. I was the state membership director for the International Reading Association for a number of years. I attended a number of leadership trainings provided by the International Reading Association. I've been the president of two local non-profits which also provided opportunities to learn more about leadership.

Mary: My graduate work is not in administration. My graduate degree is in library information science and technology with an emphasis on Human Resource Management. I think it provided an opportunity to learn more about how to empower others to lead. So I worked at Yale in the Yale Libraries Personal Division. They have 40 libraries, so they had a large number of personnel and that was a great opportunity to learn about working with and leading people in a professional setting.

Aaron: I think probably because of that I became a little more aware of you know leadership bigger perspective building issues. I really became a close reader not only just because of my own content area but I got involved early on in reading anything and everything I could get the Ed Leadership of ASCD, NASSP.   And so I guess you know there was probably a lot of prep work in my own education and reading. I tried to get involved in as many different aspects of the committee work especially from a district

perspective. You know I always wanted that global view of what was going on within the school district.

Theme 2: Teacher Participation in TLI: Teacher's Overall Purpose and Goals and Personal Goals

Theme 2 allowed for the essence of why these teachers chose to participate in this teacher leadership event to surface. As previously stated, these teachers had high levels of accomplishment in their studies and/or achievement in education and were seeking a leadership opportunity so that they could use their expertise to improve teaching and learning for students, other teachers, schools and districts. As related in their responses, all eight teachers chose an area in their schools and districts that was needed for improvement. Participation was not for personal gratification, it was to improve teaching and learning and possibly provide a change mechanism for teachers to become leaders of the improvement effort without leaving the classroom. It was an opportunity that they had not been given before at this level.

Summary of Findings from Teacher Responses: All teacher participants were contacted through the teacher union either at the local or state level through a personal invitation or through attending a union leadership conference. Teachers all felt that they were selected because of their high level of accomplishments as educators and because of the three associations behind the initiative, the National Education Association, the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards and the Center for Teaching Quality. Teachers' perceptions of the overall goals for TLI included: creating teacher leadership opportunities; giving teachers leadership voices while allowing them to stay in the classroom; developing teacher leaders and formulating what teacher leadership looks like; empowering teachers as spokespersons for students; and learning opportunities for teachers to gain knowledge, skill and expertise to guide and facilitate teaching.

Teachers also had personal goals for the TLI and were chosen by the teacher as their focus for the year-long professional learning and leadership opportunity. Personal goals included: make difference at the district level; be a leader in the district; play a role in the local union; develop the union in the district; pursue research; empower teacher voice heard by administrators; develop as a teacher and teacher leader; the potential it could offer teachers; and bring about change in the district.

Question: Why did you participate in the TLI?

Sandi: "I saw something there leadership. That sounds really cool. That would be great. I said his is what I'm really interested in. I'm so excited."

> Patti: I think it largely happened because I was given opportunity. I think it was almost entirely the idea of a teacher leadership program designed for teachers that wanted to stay in the classroom.

> Deb: I thought it was a great opportunity, just that. And when your union president says you've been good at this and said okay, I'll step up and do it. I thought this is going to go so well with the national board and of course they are a part of the sponsorship.

> Brian: It was my union president that told me, hey I think you should do this. I actually wanted to do something meaningful for my district and I felt that this was a way for me to work collaboratively with fellow colleagues and to work closely with my state union to bring about a change within my local school district.

Question: What were the overall goals for the TLI?

Kristi: "I believe the overall goals for TLI was just to create leadership opportunities for teachers and districts and really give them an opportunity to make a big difference in their district."

Craig: "I think at that point it was to develop a teacher leader. That teachers can be empowered and enabled to be spokesmen for education for the students because we know what's going on."

Kim: We hoped for it to be a way to truly become a leader without becoming an administrator. We had all discussed that very purposefully because you know of course we have achieved different graduate degrees if we had wanted to go into administration and none of us had wanted to leave our classrooms and go into administration. So this was a way that you know that we could still continue what we were doing and become a leader, you know without leaving.

Deb: Well I felt that the big overarching goal is to just give teachers a venue to take on a leadership role sort of their own choosing. The ultimate goal was teachers can have leadership voices and still be in the classroom. I think that they wanted to make that happen.

Question: What were the goals that you wanted to accomplish in your TLI experience?

Sandi: "That I would somewhat be utilizing the school to empower other teachers to that ownership of leading."

Deb: So when I set out what I really wanted to do was I wanted to be able to make a difference at least at my district level. I felt like I make a difference at my building level so I feel a teacher that people come to it and you know ask questions and you know and take my advice seriously kind of thing and look to me for those professional

conversations. I felt like I already answered the state role being on the state facilitation for national board but then the whole district thing was missing. That was the missing part for me. You know that was my goal was let's find something that we can make a difference to working with the district to make the difference.

Kristi: Oh I had an overall goal to be more of a leader in my district. So when TLI popped up it was a way for me to gain some leadership within the district but also gave me an opportunity to work with some of our good teachers.

Patti: It was very novel and new to me to get to play a role within my association on an instructional level. And then again just the idea of taking a professional interest and using it almost as an excuse to get to pursue research...have some weight behind what I was doing like at the district level so that we had the opportunity to go present for instance to administrators. So that was another goal to get you know my voice heard on something I had initiated.

Kari: One thing, I wanted to learn more just seeing those three facets of leadership and finding where I fit was one big thing for me and then seeing how I could develop as a teacher and as a teacher leader.

Kim: Well early on as soon as we started talking about our capstone projects I immediately said that I want to have a teacher mentorship program but I wanted to have mentoring specific to special education. Two different times I had been in buildings where I was the single only special education teacher. And so you go into a building like that, you have no support, you have no peers, you have no team members. I don't know how we can ask them just stay.

Theme 3: Preparation for Teacher Leadership: Teachers and Administrators

Theme 3, Preparation for Teacher Leadership, according to the research reported in Chapter 2 of this study, it is needed for a successful and sustainable teacher leadership for both the teacher and the administrator. All eight of these teachers reported serving in informal roles in their schools and districts as teacher leaders and had some experiences with the teacher union. Nonetheless, preparation for most teachers for this experience was limited. The preparation was even more limited for administrators as only one administrator had training in utilizing teachers as leaders in schools and districts before this event.

Summary of findings from Teacher Responses: All eight teachers in the study responded based on their individual experiences in their buildings, district and their association with the teacher union. The more the teacher was involved with working with the union or the more experiences the teacher had prior to TLI outside of the classroom, the more comfortable they felt with stepping up to the role of teacher leader. Three teachers were National Board Certified Teachers (NBCTs) and had experiences leading other teachers in that process. All eight teachers had informal teacher leader roles with their peers in mentoring other teachers, acting as lead teacher in their grade level or content area and regularly volunteered for extra duties within their schools to support students and teaching and learning activities.

Question: When you stepped into leadership opportunities beyond the classroom, were you prepared for the roles that you stepped into?

Sandi: "Training beyond my job responsibilities made success happen. I found being in the TLI and teacher leadership as my doctoral major made it easier and applicable."

Brian: "I would say with any leadership role, nobody is ever prepared. The steps I took to prepare was talking with administration and fellow colleagues."

Kim: I felt prepared because I was a building representative first and observed our elected officers. Beginning as a building rep, I was able to watch and learn. I attended ESET2 and applied for TLI. Once I knew I wanted to be a teacher leader, I have done everything I could to continue on this path.

Kari: I don't think I was prepared to be a department chair because there was a lot about data that I didn't understand. I had not had any real training on how to read and use data to our advantage at school. I have a good working relationship with my coworkers but to lead them takes a different dynamic. I felt better prepared to take on the role of vice president of my local association.

Deb: I started looking into how I could help out with National Board. Working with the state union on this certification was the beginning of my leadership roles. I guess you could say that I was not prepared for the roles that I stepped into, but I'm not sure how you can prepare.

Summary of findings from Administrator Responses: One administrator out of the four in this study had preparation for utilizing teacher leaders within schools and districts in their leadership preparation programs in his Educational Specialist and current doctoral program. All administrators discussed how they encouraged teacher leaders in their schools and district through department head and committee positions and all were open to supporting teacher leader initiatives. They also gave accounts of how their districts had no formal route to teacher

leadership opportunities or positions and that in a general sense and that most teachers were not prepared to step into leadership positions.

Question: So in your professional opinion, do you believe that teachers are prepared for leadership roles in schools and districts?

> Peri: No I don't think so. I think that there are some natural people that just roll into that and are just really kind of caught onto that. In general, the new teachers that I'm seeing coming in are really good. They're really good, they're magic in the classroom, but I think they are very focused that way. I don't see a lot of volunteering to stretch out unless they're asked or you know given an opportunity. I don't know if it's comfort or confident or whatever.

> Randy: I can't say conclusively that they all are but I do believe some of them may be. I just think either you have those abilities or you don't have those abilities. I don't necessarily know if those abilities can be taught, the leadership ability. It's not corporate America, we do have to answer to a board. We do have to interact with parents and teachers and students. So some personalities I don't necessarily think know can handle that. But then I think some personalities that can handle that.

> Aaron: Probably not. I mean you have leaders that there's that. I think you know you have your natural leaders. Just personality whatever it is they just have it. But I don't know. You know when in like this for like teacher training programs and things like that. They don't I still don't know how much of a global perspective on being knowledgeable to lead big issues within your own building. So I think a lot of times that it takes some time to develop.

Aaron: Well I think a lot of people need, I think a lot of people need to see they need the experience to see what is going on. And then you know hopefully I encourage people enough to share those thoughts and ideas and take a risk to get out there in front and lead something.

Mary: Some are. Certainly not every teacher wants to be an administrator. Well I always encourage them to take advantage of opportunities at the district level. Whether it's a committee or task force it is good experience and helps teachers become known. I also encourage them to get involved as well at the state and regional level.

Question: Did they prepare you in your administrative program to utilize teacher leaders?

Randy: "Yes, I actually did in my Ed.S and currently in the doctoral program in my studies, that's exactly what we talk about."

Peri: I don't think other than you know preparing, you know empowering your teachers to make important decisions and entrusting them and that kind of stuff. But there wasn't anything specifically how to do that.

Question: So if you were to recommend some type of preparation program what do you think would help teachers to be prepared to step out like that?

Peri: Like just start working with it in the role with district leaders or people that are already principals. Like this program where they go out and reach out for people and kind of bring them in as speakers or panels or actually working in a class with teachers. What does it mean to be a teacher leader? What kind of skills do you need to be developing? Start looking at you know surveys about what are your strengths and kind of

building upon those and how you can know keep building your capacity as you go. You know first, second third year of teaching.

Aaron: You know people that are looking to as an example you know my staff members that are considering going into administration, I strongly, strongly we have a process for determining this and there's a rotation and everything else. But I strongly, strongly urge them to be department coordinators. I do want them to share you know some of those strategies and those things that come in that's really sort of what we're hoping to continue to foster in our PLC is that this is not just a directive from administration that you will do this but you know that the conversation of sitting there with your materials and saying you know, how my kids are not doing very well on this, how are you teaching this?

Theme 4: Support for Teachers in the Teacher Leadership Initiative (TLI)

Along with preparation at the teacher level and administrative levels for teacher leadership, Theme 4, supporting teachers in a teacher leadership initiative is critical for teacher leadership to actually take place in schools and districts. Support was built in through the NEA, NBPTS and CTQ for these teachers as they moved through this year-long experience but was unique to the teacher in their schools and districts, which may account for the lack of sustainability of the projects in this study and lack of increased capacity of teacher leaders stated in the conclusion.

Summary of findings from Teacher Responses: When the eight teacher participants of this study became involved in the TLI, they had varying degrees of support from building administrators, district administrators and local, state and national teachers' union support to help them with the expectations associated with the TLI initiative. All eight teachers reported that

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their building level administrator was aware of their participation in the TLI but support for them to participate and complete this process was unique to each teacher. Teachers were given time off from teaching and substitutes were paid for during their absence when attending support sessions and to work on TLI. Three teachers were given direct support from the building level administrators through offers of guidance or resources but only if they asked for it and one teacher was given no support. Teachers' peers were aware of the participants involvement in this initiative and provided support by covering their classes when they were at meetings for TLI.

All eight teachers were highly involved in the local teachers' union and had numerous support sessions at the local, state and national level. Each of the eight teachers' involvement with the TLI originated from the teacher's union. Teachers were asked personally or were sent invitations to participate in this teacher leadership initiative because of their association with the teacher union either at the local or state level. Support drawn from each union resource depended on the individual teacher's needs with teacher responses about support from these resources ranging from good to not so good. Local, state and national level union meetings were held through the use of technology and included TLI coaches to support them through this process.

Each teacher that participated in the TLI was given a monetary stipend from the union for support in the process as well. Teachers reported that the local and state support through the union was more helpful than the national support. Many of the teachers were very familiar with the local and state union representatives and felt that because they knew these people personally, they could ask for and be given additional support. District level support for these teachers was more prevalent with five teachers reporting that support was given to them more directly from

the district with three of these teachers stating that the support from the district also included guidance throughout the process.

Question: Can you describe supports that were in place for you during the TLI at the building level from other teachers, other certified staff or administrators during that process?

> Kristi: I'm fortunate to work with a principal who actually believes in teacher leaders and also a lot of delegation of power. I think it's extremely beneficial to work with someone that's willing to give teachers the opportunity to take those leadership roles. I went and had a conversation with him and said this is what I am doing and here's kind of what's going to happen and his first comment was, What do you need from me?

> Kari: I did to talk to them about them to let them know that I was doing it. And I'm trying to think of them and vaguely remember a conversation what else we were talking about. I think I would be out one day to go to one of those face to face meetings and I had to leave earlier or something like that. So I do remember, so he was aware but I just didn't really need him for much.

> Kristi: My department was very supportive. I now know that I'm away from the department, I realize how supportive they are and the people that I worked with were just, OK, Yeah you got something going on at 3 o'clock, We don't dismiss till 3:15. Do I need to come in the last 15 minutes of your 7th?

Question: So the involvement of your principal and the support of resources in your participation with the pilot was just allowing you to do the things you needed to do?

Craig: "Yeah and they really had no idea. I would just find out about it and say can I go to this meeting? Can I go to this conference and they would say, Okay."

Brian: "I guess the only way that I would say that they supplied support is if I ever wanted to gain advice from them, they were always available to me to answer my question."

Question: Can you describe supports that were in place at the district level by district level certified staff or district level administrators?

> Patti: At the district level I would say much more district level support than building level support. I think the district gave us you know a day or two here and there to work on stuff. So time out of the classroom which in my district is invaluable and not something that happens often. So you know it may sound simple but it was a big deal. And then access, I guess access to administrators to share our projects. A sense of you know they really validated what we were doing.

Brian: "We got support from the one that oversaw the project. She had that open door policy and was willing to listen to any kind of ideas that we brought forward. She was willing for us to try them out."

Question: What resources were available to you to help with the implementation of the TLI?

Patty: "Those were good and actually I would say that at the national level as well."

Brian: "Definitely the weekly meetings, online discussion threads that we went to."

> Deb: We had the support of our local union president. He was really very interested in what we're into in that he was interested not just our capstone, but in the leadership aspect of it. So he was supportive. Our state union was supportive of course that they provided us with face to face meetings with other people across the state. So we had good state support. You know we had coaches.

Kari: Those face to face meetings that we had digging into those three cornerstones and kind of listening to what other people were doing. We had a wide variety of capstone projects. Every face to face meeting focused on one of the pathways.

Summary of findings from Administrator Responses: Administrators were asked questions in the interviews that addressed their knowledge, involvement and support for teachers in the TLI. All four administrators were aware of their teacher(s) involvement in the TLI. When asked about their support for the teachers in the TLI, three administrators expressed that their teachers were the type of individuals that did not ask for support but that they would have provided support if asked. One administrator was involved with three teachers in the TLI supporting them throughout their work and capstone project. Most of the conversations with the administrators in support for teachers, revolved around how they support teacher leadership in a general sense, not specific to the TLI.

Questions: What knowledge do you have of the Teacher Leadership Initiative? What role did you play for the participants in the TLI? How were you involved with the teachers that participated in the TLI? Have you ever participated in a support role for teacher leadership opportunity before?

Peri: It was interesting because the teachers that participated in it were really involved in PLCs. So they were always kind of at the forefront and willing to take risks and do things. We do a lot of empowerment through that with the teachers through that process because you know they're all in charge and these teachers that it didn't surprise me that they were taking a leadership role. We had a tech teacher that was kind of the coach and she was kind of the initiator of the whole thing. So I know that she had come from downtown and just so I know she had a kind of a relationship down there. So I think that

they had support in there. They would meet and then they would work together on their skills and whatever they do you know their technology and integration.

Mary: Yes, and they approached me about taking a leadership role in our mentoring program. I thought it was great so I said okay let's give it some time and sit down and we'll talk about what you want that role to be. We had a few meetings where we talked about the program as it existed. Then we talked about what they could do if they became more actively involved. There were three teachers that were involved. They're a great group and we talked about what could their role be and what changes we would make. I was thrilled to have them. We mapped out what it would look like and they had really stepped up and took a leadership role. They had great ideas about what needed to be changed and their recommendations were well received. They participated in all the orientation trainings. In fact sometimes, they took lead and facilitated the orientation trainings. It was very collaborative. They had great ideas about changes that would make the mentoring program more effective.

Question: Have you ever participated in a support role for teacher leadership opportunity before?

Mary: Yes I certainly looked for opportunities for teachers to have leadership roles. Well we're pretty collaborative and so we involve teachers in everything. I mean that's just the way our district operates. We involve teachers in curriculum development as well as professional development. We involve in all aspects of the operation. It's just kind of a given for us.

Peri: Okay so when we started professional learning communities the district rolled it out in high schools only and so everybody at the school level had a point person when nobody had in my school had done much with it. I've jumped all over it. So, I kept working with principals and training them in ways to support their teachers and kind of move us forward in that direction.

Randy: The belief behind that is that you can't do this work by yourself. You're going to build the leaders to support to help students achieve. So absolutely, you have to reach outside to bring in extra hands to lighten the load. I think that's just my philosophy because it's just like Steve Jobs, it's about people and get out of the way and let them do it. That flexibility in the the work and that autonomy in the work, I think allows for great things to happen.

Aaron: I understand that I have to be the decision maker and I'm comfortable we now understand that I'm not the one with all the magic responses and answers and problem solving ability. I have a lot of really bright hardworking people around me. Why would you not use that foster that role.

Theme 5: Changes in Thinking about Teaching and Learning and Leadership: Teachers and Administrators

Theme 5 addresses all three research questions: How do participants experience and understand teaching and learning differently after participating in the Teacher Leadership Initiative?; how do participants experience and understand leadership differently after participating in the Teacher Leadership Initiative?; and how has constructed understanding of what is means to be an effective educator changed after the Teacher Leadership Initiative? As

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teachers stepped out of their individual classrooms and took on new roles through their capstone projects, they began to see themselves as agents of change in teaching and learning and innovative practices. They were able to engage in experiences that teacher usually don't have the opportunity to experience and look at things through the eyes of leadership which had a profound effect on their thinking about teaching and learning, ideas about leadership and what it means to be an effective educator. Administrators also experienced a change in thinking about the teachers that participated in the TLI. All four administrators reported how they set teachers up for leadership opportunities before the TLI in their schools and districts, but it was the TLI opportunity for teacher leadership that really opened their eyes to the changes that it made for these teachers in their ability to lead others in their schools and districts and also the possibilities for future leadership for these teachers.

Summary of findings from Teacher Responses: All the teachers in this study with the exception of one who already had administrative credentials, did not change their thoughts about leaving the classroom and becoming an administrator even after experiencing success in leading others outside the classroom. All but one teacher felt like doors were opened to them at the district level and respect was given to them by administration for their leadership and TLI capstone work that had not been given before TLI. One teacher that didn't receive support at the building level reported that the district did acknowledge her participation with TLI. Teachers reported other teachers that participated in the TLI moving into different positions in the union because they felt that participating in this gave teachers a larger perspective of education than just from the classroom. Teachers learned that there were other options of leading others in education besides becoming an administrator even though many of them have been told by others that they would make good administrators. All eight teachers experienced a change in

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their thinking about themselves as leaders and about how their leadership and growth through this process affected their students, affected other teachers and their schools and districts. Teachers' perceptions of themselves in a new role working with administrators to bring about positive change to their students, schools and districts was a novel idea that they had not experienced before even though these teachers were highly accomplished in their schooling, training and accolades and even if their building administrator was not supportive in the TLI.

> Kari: Going through TLI made me want to step up a little bit. I've been in my local already but I ran for vice president in my local after going through the TLI process. Before I mean it didn't really seem like there were any options. I wasn't aware of any options for teacher leadership outside of the classroom other than becoming a principal. TLI opened some things up for me through the NEA that I would not have seen myself doing.

> Deb: So I think I would say the district that I work in would tend to overlook the teacher leadership that was available. There wasn't really an easy was to work with the administration as a teacher. It never felt like they were asking for teacher input on a variety of things. There would be some committees that were made up of teachers and administrators but it was always on us and for whatever the administration decides to do they're going to decide to do. I think our district administration has changed somewhat and the union has helped play a part with the TLI and bringing forth people and so on more teacher leaders in our district now.

> Patti: It changed it because everything that I had done previous to that with teacher leadership could affect my students but most of it didn't directly impact my students. This was a targeted effort to look at my practices even differently much differently than

the national board but in a new way outside the box. National boards to me were much

more about what I was already doing and reflecting on it and making it better. Whereas

what I did with TLi was about doing something new and different I never thought of.

Question: So you had not thought about that before?

Patti: "No I hadn't. And it's not like I didn't think about it because of TLI but because of TLI

when I thought about it, it became, really gave me a way to explore it, and avenue I guess."

Kristi: "What we were willing to do in our profession and really what we were willing to do

outside of what our contract says we need to do. Yeah, other teachers don't do that."

Scott: So I got to talk to people all over the nation when we did our collaboratories and it

was good to have that. Expansiveness that I wouldn't have gotten otherwise.   They gave

it to you, was like oh my gosh, there's so much rich stuff here. There's so much really

cool stuff that I didn't even know about because I'm sitting here thirty years in the school

system.

Deb: Well I guess what I realized is there is a way to tie it all up together that you can do

both. You can teach and learn and be a leader all at the same time. And you don't have

to leave one behind the other.

Summary of findings of Administrator Responses: Administrators commented on the

difference that the TLI made on teacher participants' understanding of leadership, display of

leadership and how it increased motivation and improved the culture within buildings with their

peers. In addition, one administrator commented on the effect on teachers and their students.

Question: So do you think that the TLI did impact the professional learning of the teachers and others? Because you saw a change in attitude towards learning or change in attitude towards leadership?

Randy: "Oh absolutely. I think it was a change in her attitude toward leadership because I think sometimes teachers don't necessarily understand why we do what we do."

Peri: Oh yeah. I think the collaboration and stuff they did in that team was really good. So when you have those teachers that feel supported and are confident in that leadership, you can talk to them about this is what you know. What do you think about this?

Question: Do you think that TLI impacted the students that they taught?

Mary: "Well I hope so. It's supporting our beginning teachers. I hope it's making a difference in the classroom. I'd like to say yes."

Peri: Definitely I would say it made them better teachers and so I think that impacted their kids. I don't have any data on it but I would say just because I know what she did with the writing project and that has had a tremendous impact on our kids writing. She's shared that with the English teachers so I think them integrating technology and just pushing themselves into learning better pedagogy.

Theme 6: Improvement: Teacher Efficacy and Confidence as Teacher Leader

Theme 6 is an extension of Theme 5 in that it addresses the increase in teacher's leadership skills and collaborative skills and yet adds another dimension of the teacher leader. The responses from teachers and administrators delve deep into the teacher leader experience and how that experience created improvement in teacher efficacy and confidence. Improved

efficacy and confidence greatly affected these teachers' efforts to carry out their projects in their schools and districts and allowed them to gain the respect of their peers as a leader in their schools and districts.

Summary of findings from Teacher Responses: During the TLI, teachers' projects were utilized at the building and district levels to improve teaching and learning for students and teachers through collaboration in PLC work for instruction and assessment, union development among buildings and districts, mentoring programs for new teachers, teacher professional learning and student learning. Through their work on the capstone project, teachers reported gaining in professional efficacy, leadership skills and collaborative skills as they worked with other teacher TLI participants, their grade level or content area peers and building and district administrators and students in the classroom.

Questions: Did you enter the TLI experience with the desire to gain knowledge about leading others? Did your participation in TLI improve your ability to lead others from within the classroom or from outside the classroom?

Kristi: "From inside and outside for sure. Inside my classroom just leading my students, leading others within my department and then outside being a part of something at the district level."

> Deb: Yes, and it gave me an appreciation for how hard leadership roles really are. I mean they are hard and you've got to navigate the minefield somewhat. It was a confidence builder and made me want to get other people involved and yeah, you need to step up because we all need to step up. I was really grateful for that. I didn't even know I wanted that.

Patti: Well it certainly gave validity to what I was doing but I also think it gave me confidence to go beyond the norm. There's so much in education that's good that we always just do because it's always been done that way. And so it gave me that confidence to know that I can have original ideas and different ideas and novel ideas and that people will take an interest in them and see them as legitimate.

Question: Did the TLI experience help you to develop some of those leadership skills?

Brian: I would say it did. It improved my confidence level. I mean having that title. You know being able to say that you know I'm working on this project, this capstone, made teachers not just close their door to me, more open minded to meet with me. So it made me more confident to communicate with them and to guide them.

Summary of findings from Administrator Responses: Administrator responses revealed that TLI teacher participants grew in their knowledge about leadership skills and collaborative skills as they experienced leadership working with other teachers, school and districts through their various projects in the TLI. Administrators also stated that these teachers gained in self-efficacy and confidence as shown through their observation of them in meetings and roles that they occupied within schools and districts.

Randy: I think she got a taste of that so she could see exactly why we spoke the language that we spoke. Why we made some of the decisions that we made and she was to go back and support that person.

Peri: Two of them were pretty much leaders and like to be involved in stuff. But I think for one of them, it really helped her. She's fairly young and new. I think that really gave her the confidence because I do see a big difference between how she was in meetings

before and after as far as sharing, talking, adding her ideas. I think it really helped her to
be able to do that.

Mary: I think they are all more comfortable in a leadership role. I think one of them
always had leadership skills and knew it. She's got an administrative degree but this was
a way for all of them to step out and be in front of various audiences. TLI gave them
opportunities that they might not have had otherwise.

Theme 7: Outcomes of TLI: Impact on Teaching and Learning and Leadership, Overall Impact of TLI, New Opportunities, Professional Growth and Facilitating Teacher Leadership

Theme 7 provides a look at the impact that the TLI had on the participants in the study.
The impact on teaching and learning and leadership was visible in the teacher participants, other
teachers, students, schools and districts. Professional growth in the teacher participants was
clearly evident as well as opportunities to continue teacher leadership beyond the TLI.   In
addition, suggestions for future facilitation of teacher leadership opportunities were expressed by
participants.

Summary of findings from Teachers Responses: After participating in TLI teachers
reported: strengthened relationships and a sense of empowerment with their administrators;
knowledge of the importance of teacher leadership in schools and districts and the components
needed for teacher leadership along with the impairments to this; influence of a teacher
leadership experience on their peers; additional opportunities for leadership; teacher leadership
and professional growth; and teacher leadership as an avenue for change.

Impact on Teaching and Learning and Leadership

Question: Do you think that the TLI impacted the professional learning of other teachers?

> Patti: I do think that has you know bled over it through just conversation and through the presentations that I did. And I think it legitimized to some extent, I'd like to think anyway the idea of formative assessment. It was so new and people really didn't understand it very well. It was a prime place to help them understand that concept.

Question: Did you have any influence over them do you think on maybe thinking about doing something like this in the future?

> Deb: I have been on the committee as a grade level representative. I would say that the people on my team and my administrator saw me as a leader of the team. Should be a teacher voice for that and somebody's has got to start that. So I was hoping to not only to do the project that I wanted to work on by also to pave the way for other teachers to be able to have that leadership voice too. Well I did. I did get two teachers to do this the year after I did so I guess so.

> Kari: Oh I definitely think. One of the ladies from my district after she did her capstone project, I think she became a lead teacher. She stepped up in a leadership position as well. Some of my coworkers are more involved with the association because somebody is saying, hey there are other things we can do. You know it is not just about what we do inside the classroom, it is what we do outside to advance you know our profession too.

Question: Do you think that your involvement with TLI positively or negatively affected your students learning or other teacher's students?

Patti: "It positively did. Definitely, because it did as I said it certainly changed my approach to assessment."

Kristi: Oh absolutely. It was one of those things that helped me to realize if I was going to last in this profession for a long time, I would need to do some serious changing of what I do and how I relate with kids. I think it happened with the master's first but you know as I started to go through the TLI it really affirmed everything that I was thinking and researching and seeing and you know if I'm going to do anything that's to be of benefit to my kids this is what's going to have to happen.

Kari: I think it pushes me in because it pushes me to learn which is helping me to push them because leadership involves a lot of critical thinking and that's one thing I stress to my students. And sometimes it takes a while but I can see it's helping me to kind of I guess teach them how to think and sometimes I can see the light bulb coming on.

Craig: I think I always brought my kids along with me on all these journeys. The TLI things I did the CTQ things and NEA things, I would tell my students about this so that they knew what I was doing and they knew that they were part of it. So they were part of my journey. They were always involved and they were always concerned and they're always asking questions which is neat. I'd like to think that maybe those as I went through and trained those mentors on things that I thought were important. And they affected their beginning educators and maybe those beginning educators were more successful in the classroom.

Question: Did the TLI strengthen your relationship with your principal?

Craig: "It strengthened because I could see, because the principal, you usually think in your school and my traditional sort of thinking is your school leader. Now I realized that I too am a school leader."

> Brian: Our administrator, when she heard about this proposal, she greeted us with open arms. She was like whatever I can do to help you guys. She guided us the first year and then she sort of gave the reins to us and let us start taking over ourselves. That really empowered us to feel like she obviously see that we're leaders and she gave up the control and let us take the lead.

> Patti: I would say no. I do think it strengthened my relationship at the district level with our superintendent. He was fairly new and it gave me the opportunity. An opportunity early on to work with him that I wouldn't have otherwise.

Overall Impact of TLI

> Brian: The cool thing about it too was when we came back to our fellow teachers, the new teachers and the mentors, they were more open minded to it because it wasn't an administrator telling them this is what we're going to do. It was their fellow colleagues. So it's really opened our teachers that have been brought into the field for many years to reach out and actually support these brand new teachers coming into the district. We've recruited more mentors. We've had more positive feedback on our new teachers feeling supported during their first year of teaching.

> Patti: I guess I would summarize it with words that come to my mind so, opportunity. I would say eye opening. Both from again how I can be a leader but even ways to do it and... combining those two. The thinking outside the box in time and space. To pursue a

professional interest that was also a personal interest. And I think you know networking and working with other teacher leaders, in that environment and in that way was very unique. Because otherwise a lot of those opportunities were what you had talked about, they were the more formal leaders who knew whether they were effective or not just by definition of their title going up to do that stuff. Whereas these were people who were to some extent self identified and those more informal leaders that really can make stuff happen in their districts.

Craig: I was just happy to be a teacher with national board certification. I am making a difference that way. I bettered myself and I'm better for my students. This one, I can better the profession. I can help others to better themselves too. My experience has been a positive experience of growth and development in becoming and acknowledging my skills as a teacher leader.

Craig: Yeah, because it was a program that I created that met our school's needs and beginning educators needs rather than just sort of this prepackaged program from the state that is just basic instructions. Well this one was really addressing the needs that we have for our staff for or beginning teachers. We're personalized because we can build into the initiatives that our school has to build into it. But the way we do things, the culture we could build them into it.

Brian: The TLI was really the title and what we were being a part of and it was my president reaching out to administrators saying they're partaking in this teacher leadership initiative. And I think that's what really opened the door for us to get into the doors and start making a change. I mean you know they wanted to talk to us because our district leader was very proud with the TLI and what we were doing and was much more

receptive to meeting with us and seeing how we can help her in the district. I think is would have been different if we were just a group of teachers going in and saying, hey we have and idea you know.

Kari: I work with the recruitment and retention group that's the group that I facilitate. I got introduced to that because of my association with NEA after TLI and is helping me to step out of my room and reach out to the teachers who I see. We have a huge turnover in our district for the past few years and just think the association part of TLI experience pushed me to help good teachers more. Because it does get frustrating when we're at-risk high needs district. The things that I learned in TLI helped me to provide support.

New Opportunities

Craig: I got involved with NEA because of TLI right. CTQ because of TLI and things with teacher of the year where you meet people who are CTQ people and NEA people. So next month I will do a nine month teacher fellowship with NEA focus on the TLI program.

Deb: I've been working closely with our state union who runs our national board program through the state. So I'm a trainer for candidate support and for Jumpstart here and I am an ambassador so I go and recruit people for national board and give presentations. I been asked to do a lot of different things by our state union and I've been to a *Teach to Lead* seminar with someone from Louisiana and invited to ESET every year.

Kari: My principal, he just asked me after that year, our department chair was moving away and he said to me, do you think this is something that you would like to you know

step into? He said, I know that you've been doing other things. And I think it would be good you know as a leader for your department. So that was pretty much when that happened.

Kari: We members from the TLI and two or three other programs that the NEA had, they brought us to Washington, D.C. to work on some resources for ESSA and the Center for Teaching Quality for new educators. I've also worked on Microcredentials for classroom management which is the new thing that NEA is about to launch. I've gone to the national leadership summit, last year. I'm a facilitator for ED Communities. I do the teacher recruitment and retention group. For my local, I'm the vice president now.

Kari: I know it probably wouldn't have happened this way. The opportunities I've been given. I know they are a result of my participation in the program. The way our organization is growing and people are becoming more active as a result of that project. I was to me one of the best things that I could have done at the time that I did it. It was right on time.

Professional Growth

Craig: "My experience has been a positive experience of growth and development in becoming and acknowledging my skills as a teacher leader."

Deb: What it really felt the biggest thing for me that it was an opportunity for me to find my voice as a teacher leader and I didn't even know that opportunity was out there, didn't even know it existed. I just feel whenever you get that truly rich professional development and not the one day conference but the year-long things like national board where you are delving deep into your practices into your thought processes, into your

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projects-there's nothing better. There's nothing better than that kind of professional development. I mean it's just amazing. It's amazing how much I've learned. It's amazing how much I've grown. You know as a professional you know in the last few years with TLI and before with national board. So yeah.

Patti: I think you know if I hadn't done TLI I don't know for sure that I wouldn't have gotten to do this national work. But it certainly strengthened no only my practice to make me better at it. But it was that I became someone I identified as capable and willing to do this work. And you know I would even say to some extent that while I still think I would have done the national work or with some college board and A.P., I don't know that they you know, I wouldn't say that I'm getting to do those things because of something like TLI but I think it's made me a much stronger candidate or stronger leader than that has indirectly led to.

Sandi: It gave me the confidence and the ability and even the insight to use the curriculum that I was afraid to use before. I just didn't know how I was going to use that curriculum without offending anybody, you know by being politically correct.

Facilitating Teacher Leadership

Question: How can teacher leadership happen for teachers?

Kristi: I think you need an open and honest relationship with your administration. You need a building leader who is willing to listen. And one that is willing not to necessarily delegate but really let go of a little bit of the control. When your a principal of that size of a school, you have to be able to work with others in order for your school to run efficiently. I think it needs to be districts promoting it as well.

Patti: I feel like very often at least in my district but probably everywhere, a lot of

decisions are made at the district level and even the state level without consulting the

people who are still in the classroom. And it's very evident when a new initiative is

started or a new program is brought in. When someone has made the decision and not

asked anyone who is currently teaching to look at it. If I could give advice or kind of

sum up what all this has taught me: We have great resources in teacher leaders of all

kinds of leadership types that just is not being utilized.

Question: Perhaps because TLI was a union initiative that they allowed it and if it had been just

your initiative on your own it might not have happened?

Patti: "Oh definite. I can't imagine if I had an initiative on my own going and saying you know

even if I had a great proposal. TLI is what made it legitimate."

Summary of findings from Administrator Responses: Administrator responses were

geared toward the changes that occurred in the teachers themselves and the projects that the

teachers completed in the TLI. In addition, administrators addressed how the teachers were able

to make changes in the schools and districts and presented ideas of how teacher leadership

happens in their districts, can happen in general, how they might use this experience with these

teachers to improve their teacher leader path in their schools and districts and the impact on

students and other teachers.

Peri: Well I think that the overall experience was really, it was really good. I think it

was powerful for these teachers to be able to collaborate and start learning about and

talking about leadership within their ranks. And I think was probably beneficial for

everyone. And it was exciting to see them excited. I think that them taking on that role

without knowing that they have to do the principal job that they can do this stuff and still be effective in the classroom and still have that relationship with the kids and still do that but also influence their colleagues I think was really awesome. So I am constantly talking about not maybe TLI that program, but just that concept of utilizing teacher leader teams. That I really do think that our schools value our teachers that are participating in that I think the better we'll be because I feel like we are pretty open to that at all levels. Anytime that I am presenting to the principals or whatever in different sections of the PLC process that we're in, I always talk about the leadership team bouncing around ideas through the teams, that you not the one making the decision.

Randy: I think at some point in a professional's career you have to step outside the teacher role because you are interested in leadership or you are in a leadership role. I think sometimes teachers get bogged down in the teacher talk and they sometimes don't see the bigger picture. But I think she was able to step out of her four walls and she was able to see the bigger picture. She was able to see why leaders make some decisions that they make the call. She was able to make the decisions and understand the decisions through a different lens, if that makes sense.

Randy: She to me exhibited a positive attitude in everything that she did. When we were able to give her more opportunities to lead, it shot through the roof. I just think she is one that had leadership qualities anyway. I just think that the program brought it out. So I think time in the business and more time at the forefront of things before stepping out into a leadership role. I just think that the experience in the profession because the more experience you have the more you can pull from.

Question: Do you think that the TLI impact the professional learning of those teachers and others?

> Peri: Definitely I would say it made them better teachers and I think that impacted their kids. I would say just because I know that one teacher what she did with the writing project. I know that had a tremendous impact on our kids writing and she's shared that with our English teachers so yeah I think them being more integrating technology and just pushing themselves into learning better pedagogy, yeah I think it did.

> Aaron: "You know she is probably who I worked most closely with but I would say yes, for sure. Like I said, she's a go-getter. I think this just probably gave her a little bit more of a foundation. You know this is what I can do and I'm solid in what I am doing."

Question: Do you believe it might have improved the climate of the school?

Randy: "I would say yes. I think any professional growth knowledge gained has a positive impact on the climate of a building. I do know a lot of teachers wanted to mirror her interactions and some of her practices."

Conclusion

TLI teachers were highly accomplished practitioners and were the type of teachers that were not afraid of going above and beyond their roles as a classroom teacher. TLI was an opportunity for teachers to step up and step out of their comfort zone and learn about and practice leadership outside of their classrooms through individual or team projects named a "capstone project." TLI capstone projects developed by teachers were based on a need for students, schools or districts even though they were in areas that were designated by the NEA, the NBPTS and CTQ in the TLI. All of the projects developed by teachers were a pursuit of

their own personal quest to improve teaching and learning in their schools and districts. TLI

projects developed by teachers were utilized by schools and districts for improvement in

teaching and learning through: Planned and sustained mentoring programs for new teachers;

utilization of support from the teacher union for professional learning opportunities for teachers

at the building and the district level; and deepened pedagogical skills at the building and the state

level.

Capstone projects in this study included:

- Mentoring Programs for New Teachers District-wide

- Mentoring Program for New Special Education Teachers District-wide

- New Approach to Classroom Assessment in a Writing Project Utilizing Technology

- Local Union Association Development at the School and District Level

- Development and Support for Teacher Leaders at the School Level

Included in the findings is an example of a project by a TLI participant which is in

addition to the transcribed interview materials. The participant submitted to me her capstone

project from the Teacher Leadership Initiative (TLI), an agenda from a local NEA union support

group for the TLI, and an online newspaper article that detailed an event where seven

participants from one school district in the TLI, presented their projects to their district

leadership during a day long event. During this event, this participant outlined her capstone

project which was to create a special education teacher mentoring program. This participant's

capstone planning document which was submitted for this research, succinctly outlined her

project and the steps needed for it to become a reality in her school and district. It revealed how

and what supports she needed to take her in-depth classroom skills as a special education teacher

and move them to a bigger arena outside her classroom walls to support novice special education

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teachers in their formative years of teaching. Her extensive classroom experience overtime with these novice teachers had proven to her that the need was critical not only for the novice teacher but also for the students they teach. The Billings Gazette (2014) article stated the idea behind the TLI project was to improve teaching through collaboration and mentorship between teachers and school administrators.   Another teacher interviewed in this study from the same school district revealed that this teacher leadership opportunity allowed teachers to take their leadership skills outside the classroom walls (Billings Gazette, 2014).

TLI allowed teachers to experience leadership outside the classroom without leaving the classroom. Most TLI teachers in this study did not consider themselves to be teacher leaders even though most had experienced leadership roles in their schools, districts and at the state and national level. Teachers in the study had experienced leadership outside of the classroom through national board support, teaching in higher education, or through district or building level designated committees. The findings revealed that the TLI opportunity was different in that they were able to take an original idea and bring it fruition. The following quote depicts just such a finding and is also revealed in Theme 7:

Patti: I guess I would summarize it with words that come to my mind so, opportunity. I would say eye opening. Both from again how I can be a leader but even ways to do it and... combining those two. The thinking outside the box in time and space. To pursue a professional interest that was also a personal interest. And I think you know networking and working with other teacher leaders, in that environment and in that way was very unique. Because otherwise a lot of those opportunities were what you had talked about, they were the more formal leaders who knew whether they were effective or not just by definition of their title going up to do that stuff. Whereas these were people who were to

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some extent self identified and those more informal leaders that really can make stuff happen in their districts.

Teachers in the TLI gained skills in leadership and skills in collaboration with others. Teachers in the TLI improved their leadership skills during the process of the TLI as they worked with other teachers and administrators to address a need for the building or the district to solve a local problem with teaching and learning.   TLI positively affected these teachers efficacy and confidence in themselves while gaining respect from their peers. Teachers reported that they gained respect from their peers because their peers knew that this initiative was developed by teachers for students, teachers, schools and districts to meet a current need and not a mandate from administration.

The TLI experience gave these teachers numerous opportunities for leadership post TLI. Teachers reported moving into leadership positions in the teacher's union and at the building level as lead teacher. Teachers were given leadership opportunities at the state and national levels working with the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, the National Education Association, the Center for Teaching Quality and College Board Advanced Placement. These teachers continue to be actively involved in the schools and districts with the projects they created and present at the local and state levels in their chosen area of expertise.

The administrators in this study all considered themselves teacher leaders before becoming administrators and had been given opportunities by administrative leaders beyond the classroom on committees and other special projects while working on leadership credentials. Three administrators all supported the TLI teachers with their projects in the TLI and supported their leadership in a general, traditional sense. These three administrators disclosed that the teachers in the study were self-sufficient and were the type of teachers that rarely asked for

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support and didn't really ask for help during the year-long initiative. The TLI teachers involved with these three administrators also reported the exact same thing about themselves needing support and the administrators providing it. One administrator made a conscious effort to make the capstone project of three teachers an ongoing project at the district level and provided not only support, guidance and needed materials but together they made a capstone project a sustainable positive change in the way the district mentors new teachers.

TLI administrators all believed that teacher leadership is essential for schools and districts for improvement and gave examples of how teachers could be more prepared for leadership roles in their schools and districts and in addition, gave examples of how they promoted teacher leadership in their schools and districts.   Only one administrators in this study experienced training in the use of teacher leaders and that training was in a Educational Specialist and doctoral program.

The themes that emerged and the findings related in the themes are significant to the experiences of the participants of the study and present a connection to the four questions in Chapter 2 of this dissertation which serve as the premise for the research questions:

1. *Did teacher leadership increase teacher professional capacities as teacher leaders in schools and as leaders in the larger learning community of school districts?*

The TLI teachers in this study all reported gaining in their ability as teacher leaders. Their capstone projects were recognized district-wide by other teachers and by district administration. TLI administrators reported that all teachers in this study improved their professional capacities as leaders in their schools and districts.

2. *Did teacher leadership deepen or innovate the pedagogical practices of teachers? Does*

teacher leadership provide for differentiated roles for teacher leaders within an organization?

Five out of the eight TLI teachers related that their involvement with TLI improved their ability to teach their students. These teachers cited a deeper connection to their student's learning because of their passion for their capstone projects and the effect the project had on their students and other students in their schools and districts. One teacher's capstone project had a profound effect on student writing ability at the secondary level. This effect was shown not just in the TLI teacher's classroom, but other classrooms of students in that high school.

The TLI teachers were given an opportunity to develop a project that put them in a leadership role outside their classrooms to support students and other teachers in their schools and districts. As stated by the teachers, the roles that they were given as teacher leaders because of TLI would not have happened without TLI. The differentiated roles as teacher leaders for these teachers were established by the opportunity to lead.

3. *Did leadership opportunities for teachers and training in supporting teacher leadership for administrators increase the likelihood of teacher leadership in schools and districts?*

As stated in question three, TLI gave these teachers the opportunity to lead and is best said from this quote:

Patti: "Oh definite. I can't imagine if I had an initiative on my own going and saying you know even if I had a great proposal. TLI is what made it legitimate."

Only one of the administrators in the study had training in utilizing teacher leaders in schools and that administrator was no longer working in a school district. It is not known whether this administrator had this training when still working in a school district with the TLI teacher. This administrator did report in his interview that:

In this day and time, it would be naïve of building level principals not to reach out to

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their leadership team with the administrative leadership role to help with some things. The world of education has changed so much over the years there's virtually more work than than one person that needs to be done. Many many districts afford several types of instructional coaches several types of additional personal and some of these districts don't have that capacity to do that. So we have to sometimes tap it to our teachers and let our teachers take the lead on a lot of things.

4. *Did participating in a teacher leadership initiative provide a sustainable approach to leadership within schools and districts?*

Table 4.3 TLI Teachers Post TLI Activities

New Leadership Opportunities	Assigned Formal Leader Role	Project Continued	Professional Accomplishments
6	1	5	8

Illustrated in Table 4.3 is the TLI Teachers Post TLI Activities. Six teachers were given new opportunities for leadership outside their classrooms, but not in their schools and districts. One teacher was given a formal role as lead teacher in her school. Five teachers reported that their capstone projects continued after TLI. Four of the capstones were district teacher mentoring projects and one capstone was local union development at the school and district level. These projects were supported during and after TLI by the district. All eight teachers continued to increase their professional accomplishments through doctoral work, working toward National Board Certification, supporting candidates for National Board and the local teacher union. TLI teachers also reported that other teachers in their buildings and districts participated in the TLI after their experiences. So, did the TLI provide a sustainable approach to leadership

in schools and districts? The results weigh heavily in support at the district level for

sustainability to occur.

CHAPTER 5:

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

This qualitative study using a descriptive multiple case study approach examined the reported effects of the Teacher Leadership Initiative (TLI) on leadership, school improvement and teacher and administrator professional practices through the constructed perceptions of teachers and administrators that participated in the Teacher Leadership Initiative (TLI) pilot. Included in Chapter 5 are: review of the study's purpose and data collection methods; connections between data collected and known research; implications for leadership, school improvement and professional practices; final thoughts for future practices; implications for future research; and conclusion.

Problem of Practice

The problem of practice originated with a strategic look into the era of accountability set forth by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 and the mandates that were placed on public schools and districts to improve student academic proficiencies. All public schools and districts regardless of the challenges they faced with their student populations were placed in categories of school improvement and often sanctioned when not achieving levels of proficiency according to the requirements of the legislation.

As reported in Chapter I of this study, teacher leadership emerged from this era of accountability as a response to a call for the improvement of teaching and learning in our nation's schools and districts. This study looked at the effects of teacher leadership through an actual teacher leadership event. The TLI designed and implemented by the National Education Association (NEA), the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) and the

Center for Teaching Quality (CTQ) gave teachers the opportunity to lead outside the classroom. The TLI used teacher leadership competencies to improve teacher's knowledge and leadership skills with the insight that teacher leadership looks differently depending on the context or role the teacher is engaged in (NEA, 2016, f). This study took a deep look into the experiences of teachers and administrators that participated in the TLI and the reported effects on leadership, school improvement and teacher and administrator professional practices.

Research Questions

The research questions that guided the study were developed based on the idea that when teachers participated in teacher leader roles, they saw and understood teaching and learning from a different perspective. Exposure to leadership roles effectively changed teacher's thoughts about how leadership supports schools and districts when they experienced this in a teacher leader role. Additionally, the changes in their thinking about teaching and learning along with changes in their understanding of leadership as they stepped outside the classroom in a leadership role profoundly affected their beliefs about educator effectiveness and the definitive role that teacher leaders play. Research questions for the study were:

1. How do participants experience and understand teaching and learning differently after participating in the Teacher Leadership Initiative?

2. How do participants experience and understand leadership differently after participating in the Teacher Leadership Initiative?

3. How has constructed understanding about what it means to be effective as an educator changed after the Teacher Leadership Initiative?

Data Collection

The data gathered in this study was collected through semi-structured interviews in a video-chat or voice recording format. Using semi-structured interviews allowed me to gather data I initially sought from the participants based on the interview protocol, but the flexibility of this approach also added much more insight into each participant's experience as the interviews unfolded. When I collected information during the interviews, I was able to inquire deeper into each participant's involvement in this teacher leadership experience. Through this deeper lens, I gained the essence of the impact that this year-long pilot had on their understanding, development and practices as teachers, administrators and leaders. Utilizing another method of data collection besides the use of semi-structured interviews, would have prohibited me from purposefully examining the phenomenon of a teacher leadership event at the level that was required to gain the full perspective of the participants. This research method allowed me to acquire the information necessary for more conclusive results to complete the study.

Data Collected and Connection to Known Research

The teachers that participated in the Teacher Leadership Initiative (TLI) were all accomplished practitioners in their disciplinary fields, had acquired high levels of schooling and were thought of by their peers as informal leaders, and by administrators as having leadership qualities. In addition, these teachers all possessed an elevated sense of efficacy and pedagogical competence as the accomplishments in their teaching careers suggested.

Although the TLI teachers demonstrated these traits through their professional skills and practices, the findings revealed that the TLI experience extended that confidence and efficacy to a new plateau. When the TLI teachers lead their projects, a new understanding of what teachers

can accomplish as leaders came to light. They saw themselves as leaders among others as never before, and as one teacher said, "I didn't even know I wanted that." A second teacher related,

Well it certainly gave validity to what I was doing but I also think it gave me the confidence to go beyond the norm. It also gave me confidence to know that I can have original ideas and different ideas and novel ideas and that people will take an interest in them and see them as legitimate.

Another teacher in the study revealed this:

Even when there were screw-ups and glitches, I didn't care. I thought, we were creating something right now on the ground level. We are truly the pioneers of this program. Whatever happens, it is positive. Here's what worked, what didn't work and here's what were going to do to change it. I thought wow, I'm part of this organic happening, wow.

These findings directly relate to the research of Curtis (2013) who reported that teacher leadership uses the skills and abilities of highly effective teachers in collaboration with others to improve teaching and learning in schools and districts. Reported in the findings were numerous examples of how these teachers were able to change the status quo at their respective schools and districts and improve teaching and learning through their capstone projects. One teacher gave this example:

This was a targeted effort to look at my practices even differently, much differently than the national board. Whereas, what I did with TLI was about doing something new and different I never thought of. My project was related to assessment reliability, formative, summative and standardized tests. But this epiphany, it started with writing, that if my students weren't putting their best effort into whatever we were working on, that the assessment itself wasn't very valid and reliable. I had never and even now there's very little out there to address students' efforts in assessment reliability in terms of how seriously they took the assessment.

This teacher's administrator related these comments about the impact on student and teacher learning because of this teacher's capstone project:

> I don't have any data on it, but I would just say what she did with the Montana writing project. I know that has had a tremendous impact on our kid's writing and she's shared that with the English teachers. I think them integrating more technology and just pushing themselves into learning better pedagogy, yeah I think it did.

Four out of eight teachers described the TLI as their first experience with leadership outside the classroom, while the other four teachers had experienced leadership events associated with the NEA, NBPTS and other outside educational entities. For all eight teachers, this was their first experience with teacher leadership in their own school or district. According to the findings in Chapter 4 of this dissertation, what made this experience different was that these teachers were given an opportunity to lead within their own district. Teachers were able to choose a problem that they knew inherently existed in their schools and districts and develop a solution to meet that problem through a *capstone project*. The project did not stem from the administration but from the teachers in the TLI. TLI teachers revealed in their responses that this component of this teacher leadership experience, created not only a heightened sense of respect from their peers and their administrators, but also allowed them to pursue their projects with a greater sense of purpose and fidelity.

As the teachers engaged with the project in their schools and districts they realized that they were indeed leaders, and most had not experienced those exact thoughts before TLI. This finding relates to the research from York-Barr and Duke (2004) which stated that most significant positive effects of teacher leadership directly influence the teachers that participate, supporting the belief that leading and learning are interrelated. As the teachers' responses indicate, they grew in their understanding of instructional, professional and organizational

practices as they lead their projects in their schools and districts (York-Barr and Duke, 2004). Administrators also indicated that, although they believed these teachers to possess leadership abilities, they saw a marked difference in the TLI teachers' understanding of what leadership involves when you move outside the classroom walls to the larger community of learners in the building or district. As they worked in collaboration with other teachers and district leadership on the their respective TLI projects, they gained respect from their peers and contributed to the learning of teachers effectively influencing and improving professional practices and teacher professionalism. This result aligns with the research from Katzenmoller & Moller (2009) and Hunziker (2007) who stated that teacher leaders "lead within and beyond the classroom, identify and contribute to a community of teacher learners and leaders, and influence others towards improved educational practice' (p.5).

Teacher leadership as related by Darling-Hammond & Prince (2007) and Wechler et al (2007) was an avenue for schools and districts to move away from traditional forms of improving schools and make an investment in the power and expertise of the teacher. For the teachers in this study, opportunities for teachers to lead outside the classroom were rarely seen and if they existed, were limited to school improvement teams and designated lead teacher assignments by administrators. Administrator involvement in giving teachers leadership opportunities by using a shared approach with leadership responsibilities in the work of improving schools was limited. All Administrators in this study did relate how they supported teachers through Professional Learning Communities, building and district committee work, and NEA opportunities.

Implications for Leadership, School Improvement and Professional Practices

As previously reported by Curtis (2013), teacher leadership allows for: "the further development of top talent; helping other teachers improve; more effectively implementing key priorities, like Common Core; building a pipeline to the principalship; distributing leadership in schools; increasing highly effective teachers' impact on student learning; and, making principals' span of supervision manageable" (p.4).

All of the TLI teachers in this study revealed gaining in their leadership skills and ability to lead others in their schools and districts. All TLI administrators in this study also reported that the TLI teachers gained in their leadership skills and ability to lead others in their schools and districts. TLI teachers reported elevated efficacy and pedagogical skills from this experience. They also revealed that the TLI had a positive impact on the learning of other teachers and their students through the implementation of their individual projects. Individual projects included three teacher mentoring programs; improving teacher leadership at the building level; expanding the development of the local teacher's union; and improving classroom assessment and writing using technology at the school and district level.

The TLI gave these teachers the formal opportunity to lead teachers, schools and districts in a project that was directed toward improving teaching and learning of their own choosing, not directed or influenced by administration. These teachers developed their projects, like most highly accomplished practitioners, toward impacting students and teachers, not toward personal gain. What they didn't foresee when they took on the TLI experience, was the changes that occurred in their own personal beliefs about leadership, improving schools and professional practices. As reported by the TLI teachers in this study, an awakening of their inner self as a "leader" not just a teacher emerged. A strengthened sense of self-efficacy and knowledge that

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their ideas and hard work were revered and appreciated by both colleagues and administrators came to the surface, as they created and implemented their projects. In one district, this acknowledgement was the result of the teachers presenting their projects to the district administration and then reported in the local newspaper. Support for the continuation of TLI projects at the district level after the initial year, also accounted for an increase in appreciation and acknowledgement for the TLI teachers.

As teachers were put directly in roles of leadership, they became cognizant of how their expertise could be utilized in a manner that impacted professional practices at both the school and district levels. Additionally, after TLI, many of these eight teachers were afforded leadership opportunities at the state and national level. TLI teachers stated that they believed the new opportunities were due to their advancement in leadership skills from the TLI experience. What was incredulous to me as the researcher was the fact that, only four of the TLI teachers considered themselves teacher leaders before this experience. One of the four that did not consider himself a teacher leader before the TLI, was a state teacher of the year and had thirty-six years of experience. This teacher had many opportunities to work on committees, be a department head, and taught at a local university. Until the TLI experience, he did not realize the effect that his expertise could have on improving teaching, learning and the promotion of leadership in his school district. When asked about how participation in the TLI changed the way he thought about teaching and learning as related to teacher leadership or leadership in general, and his relationship with his school administrator, he gave me this response:

> Yes. Revolutionary. Light bulbs. Fireworks. I was just happy to be a teacher with National Board Certification. I am making a difference that way. I bettered myself and I'm better for my students. This one, I can better the profession and I can help others to better themselves too. The principal, you usually think in your school and my traditional sort of thinking, is your school leader. Now, I realize that I too am a school leader. So in

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that way, I did talk to him differently. I could converse with him differently. Now whether he realized, maybe he didn't see the difference, but in my head, I was talking on a different level.

This teacher stated through our interview conversation, that his school administrator during the TLI was a long-time colleague of his. The teacher and this administrator taught in the same school and worked on many projects together, so they had a good professional relationship before TLI. This teacher had experienced many professional conversations with this administrator before TLI but felt that because of the TLI experience, his capacity to have a conversation at the leadership level increased significantly. Through the process of the Teacher Leadership Initiative, this teacher now identifies himself as a teacher leader.

As reported by Sinha and Hanuscin (2017) from their study on teacher leadership, the development of the *teacher leader identity* is a process that requires a continuous and sustained effort to support the individual teacher's needs through this process. In addition, the progression of the teacher leader identity is highly influenced by teacher's "views on leadership, opportunities to lead, feedback and recognition during leadership activities, reflection on growth as teacher leaders and sustained support" (Sinha & Hanuscin, 2017, p. 358).

Sinha and Hanuscin's (2017) case study results in respect to the development of the teacher leader identity, show a definite similarity to this case study. TLI teachers gained in their teacher leader identities as they engaged in professional learning about leadership in collaborative venues and then were able to practice their strengthened leadership and collaborative skills through the implementation of their capstone project. As the teachers began to identify themselves as teacher leaders, they also acquired indelible qualities associated with being a teacher leader that other teachers without this experience and realization do not possess.

Each teacher in the TLI came to realize their teacher leader identity from their own prior experiences and opportunities with leadership, feedback with recognition from peers and administrators and through continuous reflection on their evolving leadership practices during the year-long event. To summarize, the *teacher leader identity,* though a complex phenomenon, is a level of conscious expertise, skills or qualities that can be associated with the term *teacher leader*, just as the association of the qualities or expertise of a Biologist is analogous to a scientist.

Could a teacher leadership initiative such as the TLI be implemented in a school system? The TLI model for teacher leadership had the components for a thoughtful inquiry process and embedded the work of the teacher's project in the school or district outside the classroom. The project work was tied exclusively to improving teaching and learning, which is a model that can bring teacher leaders to schools and districts as reported in this study. Implementing a teacher leadership initiative as in the TLI in schools and districts without the support and guidance from an outside entity such as the NEA, would require that the school district have resources to create the conditions for the model to be successfully implemented. Resources for initial and ongoing training and support for teachers would need to be carefully planned and budgeted for each school that participated. An initiative for creating and utilizing teacher leaders as in the TLI would also need to be part of the vision of the district leadership for implementation with fidelity to occur. To begin the initiative, training for district level leaders in the model followed by building principals is essential in creating the conditions that are needed in preparation for systematically implementing teacher leadership in schools and districts. Teachers could then apply for participation in the teacher leadership opportunity through the district or school. Criteria for teacher participation would need to mirror the level of accomplishment determined

by the district as an acceptable level for moving into a teacher leader role. The criteria could follow a state identified teacher leader continuum or a tiered continuum that aligned with the professional career pathway of the school district.

In her publication, Karen Hawley Miles (2017) details such a plan for integrating teacher leadership into a school system through the components in the Teaching: Leadership and Career Pathways report:

- New teacher roles that integrate with strategic school designs. Teacher leadership roles, responsibilities are collaboratively defined with stakeholders aligned to school and district priorities and linked to student learning;
- Prepare and select the right people for match defined roles that meet district and school priorities. Identify high-potential teacher leaders early in their careers and give opportunities to practice leadership. Establish clear eligibility and selection criteria process;
- Measure performance and student learning impact of teacher leader roles for the purpose of improving selection and support and recognizing strong results. Define measurements of success in the short and long term as part of the design process;
- Provide support to ensure the success of teachers in their new roles, as well as the principals who will manage and evaluate them. Create expectations and structures for release time for teacher leaders for their development and contribution to the TL learning community;
- Fund TL roles at scale based on their value and by reallocating: the components of teacher compensation spending; and the costs of the roles that teacher leaders

offset. Centrally define the stipend or salary ranges for different role types, and

align amounts to the level of responsibility and expertise required as well as the

value of the investments they displace with a long-term strategy in place;

- Stage the process of implementation to ensure that required adjustments are made

   for support, supervision, union contracts, and expense and payroll systems.

   Systematically review key policy and operational barriers with a path for scale in

   the plan (p. 20-21).

Further, an example of a state-wide teacher leadership initiative is the Iowa Teacher

Leadership and Compensation (TLC) System. The Teacher Leadership and Compensation

(TLC) System is a state-wide system for teacher leadership implementation throughout the state

of Iowa. The first year of implementation for TLC was in 2014-2015 and now every school

district in Iowa has a teacher leadership program. In addition, one in every four teachers in Iowa

have a "well-defined, compensated leadership role" (Allen, 2017, p. 240). The TLC System was

rolled out over a four-year time frame with an annual budget of over $150 million funded

through the state education agency (Allen, 2017). While flexibility in design was built in for

districts, five components were required for districts to participate:

- minimum salary of $33,500;

- additional coaching, mentoring, and opportunities for observing instructional

   practices for novice teachers;

- differentiated, multiple, meaningful teacher leadership roles;

- a rigorous selection process for leadership roles;

- professional development that is aligned with the Iowa Professional Development

   Model (Iowa Department of Education, 2013).

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Research collected from the implementation of TLC revealed a positive impact on teacher retention, teacher leadership roles, professional development, instruction and work climate were seen. Effects on student achievement were varied and not yet conclusive with only two years of data to draw from (Air, 2017).

Final Thoughts for Future Practices

As reported in the literature in this dissertation, Berry, Smylie and Ekert (2016) describe the seven conditions for Teacher Leadership through the release of the publication: Teacher Leadership & deeper learning for all students. The seven conditions included: "vision and strategy; supportive administration; adequate resources; enabling work structures; strong collaboration; blurred roles; and inquiry and risk-taking" (Berry, Smylie and Ekert, 2016, p. 22). Using the conditions in this publication on teacher leadership juxtaposed with the experiences of TLI teachers that participated in this study, the following comparisons were made:

- All teachers had a vision for improving student learning in their schools and districts and that vision was realized through the invitation to participate in a teacher leadership opportunity from the NEA. The invitation was not from a school or district vision, but did address a teaching and learning need. Strategies were the capstone projects in the TLI pilot;

- Teachers received support from administrative leaders for their projects and that support varied from just an awareness of the project to actual support during and after the TLI pilot but was a direct effort by only one administrator. Planned support from the administration as depicted in the conditions was not present;

- Teachers utilized the resources of NEA and the Center for Teaching Quality for the professional learning required for the projects with the exception of one

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administrator who gave any needed resources to the teachers. Other administrators in the study did report that these teachers would ask for support if they needed it;

- Teachers were given the opportunity to implement their projects in their schools and districts but the work toward their projects were mostly completed outside of the school day. Work structures were not changed to support their leadership efforts for their projects;

- Teachers were able to work in collaborative environments with other teachers on their projects through existing PLCs or school teams. TLI teacher projects were legitimized as the other teachers realized the impact the projects had on teaching and learning in their schools and districts;

- Systematic inquiry using different avenues for improving schools was present as these teachers were allowed to pursue this teacher leadership opportunity in their schools and districts. Only four out of eight teachers considered themselves risk takers in their practices but all the administrators stated that they were inquiry learners. Perhaps this could account for why the TLI was allowed in their schools and districts in addition to the union involvement.

According to Berry, Smylie and Ekert (2016) these are the conditions that need to be in place for teacher leadership to happen in schools and districts. Clearly the orchestrators of this teacher leadership pilot were prepared to support these teachers, as they knew the research behind moving teachers into leadership positions and the conditions necessary for that to happen might not be present. TLI teachers and administrators reported in the findings that training for both teachers and administrators, was needed for the implementation of teacher leadership in

schools and districts. Additionally, one teacher stated that it takes a willing administrator, one that will give up some of the power that exists in an administrative role for teacher leadership to happen.

The findings of this study call to mind the broader education reform efforts of developing countries like Singapore. In 2013, the Aspen Institute released a publication that described in the systematic changes that occurred in Singapore's economic system when they faced significant challenges in teacher shortages. The changes moved Singapore from a developing country to a modern country with a global outlook. They attributed their success to creating high-quality teaching and school leadership practices. The changes made to Singapore's teaching and leadership practices included these steps:

> The Ministry of Education developed a comprehensive plan to attract highly qualified people into education and support them in their work. Overtime a series of steps were taken, including recruiting teachers from the top one-third of academic performers, benchmarking salaries to those of other college graduates, strengthening teacher training, providing universal induction programs, giving each teacher 100 hours of professional development a year, publically recognizing teachers as nation-builders, and very importantly, systematically developing career paths that enable teachers to build their skills and responsibilities over time and that create the capacity for high-quality teaching and learning in every school (Aspen Institute, 2013, p. 13).

Additionally the report states that:

> Talented teachers cannot be expected to stay in the same roles for 30 years. Senior teachers play major leadership roles in their schools. They mentor new teachers, observe classrooms, create model lessons, run professional learning communities and help teachers develop their annual goals and professional development plans in the context of the school's strategic plan and their own performance evaluation. Surveys of Singapore teachers show that they stay in the profession because of decent compensation, positive school cultures with a strong sense of mission, and the wide range of opportunities for professional growth and leadership. Teacher leaders play a key role in school's capacity to deliver high-quality teaching and learning and in the continuous improvement and purposeful innovation ethic that underlies Singapore's high educational performance (Aspen Institute, 2013, p. 13).

The evidence collected from the participants along with the research reveals what teacher leadership can provide to improve schools, how teacher leadership can affect leadership in schools and how teacher leadership can inform professional practices has been presented. The research supporting teacher leadership clearly delineates the factors and conditions that support and can provide a sustainable approach to placing teachers in leadership roles in schools and districts. The research and the findings in this study also reveal that utilizing teacher leadership can positively and effectively improve teaching and learning for teachers, students, schools and districts. If the research supporting teacher leadership in schools and districts has been around since the iconic work of York-Barr and Duke in 2004, why isn't teacher leadership practiced throughout schools and districts in the United States? Why aren't teachers given regular opportunities to step outside their classrooms in schools and districts into teacher leadership events as in the TLI?

Most schools and districts are not structured to support the opportunity for teachers to lead outside the classroom and time is the main obstacle. In an elementary environment, teachers are assigned to a single classroom or have some multiple classrooms of students in a specified content area of instruction. Their classroom responsibilities are usually 4.5 hours out of a 6 hour instructional day. At the secondary level, teacher's classroom time varies according to the number of periods of instruction increasing the caseload of students to around five times that of the elementary level, and also expands the content areas of instruction to multiple secondary subjects as well as college level courses. Districts and schools develop their policies and practices according to the mandated instructional time frames which don't allow for teachers to have the option of not teaching students.

Districts and schools must create a system that constructs time for teacher leaders to work with peers in support of student and teacher learning. This can be accomplished by designating a specific time during the week or month that teams of teachers can meet and work on improving practices without affecting student instructional time. District leaders can support principals in strategies that would manage this endeavor first through a leadership vision of promoting protected time for Professional Learning Communities (PLCs). Strategies for PLCs include, early release or late start times for students to end or begin the day. This can be put into place on the designated days for PLC work to occur by adjusting the instructional time frames at each school allowing for the mandated requirements.

Additionally, time for teacher leaders to prepare for their work with teams must be structured into their responsibilities at the school and compensation for these additional responsibilities reflected in their salaries. District leaders can support this by providing principals with options in their use of funding sources for their schools. Also included in the support for principals and teacher leaders is training in adult learning strategies for use of teacher leaders, which can be provided through district level leadership or through contracted services. Sustainability for a system-wide structure for teacher leaders to lead outside the classroom can be a reality in schools and districts but must be a vision of the district. Support from the district provided along the way for implementation will ensure that additional obstacles can be overcome once they arise.

As the researcher of this study, the findings are in close proximity to my own path to leadership practices. I have been in the role of teacher seeking leadership opportunities as the TLI teachers in this study. I have also experienced the role of a school administrator working with teachers in schools and districts in support of teacher leaders. In my role as a teacher, the

conditions to place teachers in opportunities for leadership were not present in the rural districts that I practiced in so I reached out to the National Board Certification process and became a leader in working with the national board to support candidacy and advocacy for NBCTs in Oklahoma and Arkansas. When working in larger school districts, teacher leader positions were usually assigned to teachers by the administrators.

As an administrator, I have found that most teachers are not prepared for the leadership roles outside of the classroom as the findings in this study revealed. When working on a national certification for principals from NBPTS, one of my assignments was to look intensely into teachers as leaders in my school. What I found was that teachers, even though they exhibited leadership qualities and had numerous experiences on leading committees and informally with peers, were not prepared to take on leadership beyond the classroom. My experiences with teachers as leaders in my school is consistent with the responses from the both the teachers and the administrators in this study.

All the evidence and research from this study discloses that teacher leadership can improve teaching and learning in schools and districts, but certain requirements must be in place for effectiveness and sustainability to occur. These requirements give validity to future educational practices and include these components:

- Teacher and administrator professional preparation for teacher leadership in schools and districts must happen. This is accomplished through pre-service preparation for teachers and administrators while in their respective programs toward certification. For teachers and administrators already in practice, partnerships with universities and state education agencies can support the development of training modules and application strategies to bring teacher leadership into schools and districts.

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- Teachers and school leaders working in collaboration to plan for improving teaching and learning through *shared leadership* practices where teachers take the lead in: curriculum and assessment development and implementation; and professional learning experiences for teachers based the school or district's strategic plan for improvement.

- School systems and structures are changed to meet the demands of the time required for teacher leaders to take on shared leadership roles and fully implement them. Teachers are assigned a classroom position in the school or district, but have responsibilities outside the classroom in a teacher leader role to support the teaching and learning process.

According to a publication from Leading Educators (2015), release time for teacher leaders to work with teachers and schools must match their leadership responsibilities to be effective. In a survey conducted in 2014, Leading Educators (2015) reported that only 32% of teacher leaders' release time matched their responsibilities resulting in a "direct impact on teacher leaders' ability to improve the teaching practices of their peers, and accordingly drive student learning" (p. 8). Additionally, this publication revealed that teacher leaders through their work in schools were able to determine the amount of time needed to: successfully plan for and observe, coach and debrief with a teacher. Release time for this work was determined to be 9 hours per month for each teacher coached (Santoya, Lemov and Peiser, 2012); plan for and lead professional learning communities with release time determined to be 10 hours per month (Boudett, and City, 2014); and plan for and implement a new program, curriculum or approach with release time revealed to be 9 hours per month (Kotter, 1996). As a school administrator, an investment of thirty hours per month is a small amount to pay for the gains in teacher capacity that can result from utilizing teacher leaders to improve schools.

Implications for Future Research

The participants in this study were teachers that were highly accomplished practitioners in their fields of instruction and perhaps represented teachers that were not the average teacher in schools in districts. This could account for their willingness to step beyond the classroom and embark on a journey that they had not experienced prior to the Teacher Leadership Initiative. For teacher leadership to become the *norm* for improving teaching and learning in schools and districts, a comprehensive look from the novice teacher's entrance into teaching and their professional pathway to accomplished practitioner as a teacher leader is area for future studies. University programs such as Mount Holyoke in Massachusetts, have developed master's level programs and state departments of education as in Iowa, support the teacher's development in teacher leadership and district implementation of teacher leadership through state funding. Studies conducted to explore novice teachers' induction into a particular pathway whether through a master's level program or through a state level implementation of teacher leadership to the teacher leader level could provide the data needed for practitioners to utilize teacher leadership to improve schools and districts. Included in the data collected would be the knowledge of the increased effectiveness of the teachers in the schools and districts evidenced through elevated student achievement. Future studies that reveal improvement in student achievement due to the development of teacher leaders from the onset of teaching could establish the protocols needed for changes in teacher and administrator pre-service preparation as well as the policies, structures and practices necessary for implementation after certification in schools and districts. These studies could also provide a solution to the high levels of teacher attrition that exists today in schools and districts.

Examples for implementing teacher leadership initiatives in school districts and at a state-wide level have been presented in this dissertation as well as criteria for planning for the successful implementation of teacher leadership at the school, district and state level. The findings from this study and the research depicted in this study reveal that teacher leadership initiatives improve teaching and learning. As reported in this study and from Sinha and Hanuscin's (2017) case study, teaching and learning is improved through the advancement of the teacher in leadership, collaborative and pedagogical skills and in efficacy and confidence as they internalize this process and fully realize the identity and potential of the teacher leader. The qualities and skills affirmed from the process of this teacher leadership event acquired by the TLI teachers, are qualities and skills that all teachers from novice to accomplished should be exposed to throughout their careers to improve the learning in schools and districts. For this to occur, courses and embedded job experiences for pre-service teachers in higher education programs in both undergraduate and graduate classes need to be provided. A continuum of learning courses for the level of the teacher whether undergraduate or graduate along with opportunities for leadership in actual practice would establish the foundational concepts for teachers to know and understand teacher leadership. If established university programs in teacher leadership are provided to novice and practicing teachers at the undergraduate and graduate level, then stand alone programs as in the TLI would have a greater impact on the improvement of teaching and learning in schools and districts. For all teachers to be given the opportunity to lead in schools and districts beyond their classroom walls, teacher leadership events as in the TLI must continue. Only through the combination of embedding teacher leadership into higher education programs and the continuation of stand alone programs as in TLI, will all teachers be given the opportunity to actualize the benefits of teacher leadership.

Conclusion

The TLI pilot was organized to create a cadre of teacher leaders that would advance the profession of teaching through a leadership opportunity that took their expertise from inside the classroom to experiences in leadership outside the classroom in schools and districts. TLI teachers all gained in their ability to lead others and in their own identities as leaders. The idea of leadership and how leadership connects to effective educational practices became paramount to these teachers as they worked in collaboration with other teachers, administrators and students.

Through their capstone project work they were able to address a problem and provide a viable solution to improve teaching and learning and grow in their thinking as they practiced the "act" of leadership. As discussed by Lai and Cheung (2015), "teacher leadership beyond the classroom walls has been increasingly recognized as an important part of schools' collective power and should be more fully capitalized on to bring about educational improvement" (p. 674). I close this dissertation with the words from a TLI teacher who accurately describes the true essence of a teacher leadership experience:

> I guess I would summarize it with words that come to my mind so, opportunity. I would say eye-opening. Both from again, how can I be a leader but even ways to do it and…combining those two. The thinking outside the box in time and space. To pursue a professional interest that was also a personal interest. It was an opportunity to find my voice as a teacher leader and I didn't even know that opportunity was out there didn't even know it existed. I just feel that whenever you get that rich professional development and not the one day conference but the year-long things like national board and you are delving deep into your practices into your thought processes, into your projects-there's nothing better. There's nothing better than that kind of professional development. I mean it's just amazing. It's amazing how much I've learned. It's amazing how much I've grown.

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Teacher Interview Protocol

This is Leslie Sharp. Today is _____ (date) and it is _____(time).   I am interviewing

_____ at _____(time) at _____ (location of interview). Thank you for agreeing to

participate in this interview. This study's purpose is to determine the effect of the Teacher

Leadership Initiative on leadership and school improvement. When I use the term *teacher*

leadership, I am referencing any particular experience or opportunity that was an addition to

your classroom instruction that you engaged in during the Teacher Leadership Initiative (TLI)

Pilot.

Demographic and Background Information:

1. Can you tell me a little bit about your professional background?

2. When did you participate in the TLI pilot? When you participated in the TLI pilot, how long

had you worked in that school? In that particular school district?

3. Would you consider yourself a risk taker in your professional career? Can you give me

examples of risks that you have taken in your teaching career and did they involve leading

others?

4. During the TLI, what was your teaching assignment? Did you have other roles as the

department head, team leader or other roles in your school or district? If you had a differentiated

role, did this occur before, during or after the TLI experience?

5. Was your teaching expertise or leadership skills utilized by others in your building or by

district leaders before the pilot? In what capacity were your skills used?

6. Was your expertise voluntarily given to others at the building or district level or was a formal process involved in selecting you as having accomplished expertise?

7. Why did you participate in the TLI pilot? Was this a voluntary initiative for you?

8. Do you know why and how you were selected?

9. Was your principal or any other administrators involved in getting you into this process? Was there a process to the selection that you are aware?

10. Were other teachers selected for the TLI pilot in your school? In other schools in your district? In other schools in your state? Are you aware of how they were selected?

Purpose and Goals for TLI:

1. Can you describe what the overall goals were for the TLI pilot?

2. What were the goals you wanted to accomplish in the TLI pilot?

3. Why did you choose those goals?

4. Did you have an overarching goal that you wanted to achieve prior to the TLI pilot?

5. Did you enter the TLI experience with a desire to improve your pedagogy skills?

6. Did you enter the TLI experience with a desire to improve your ability to engage with others in collaborative venues to improve teaching and learning?

7. Did you enter the TLI experience with a desire to gain knowledge about leading others?

8. I know that the TLI had specific areas in which you could choose your focus. Was that an area of interest or important to you as a learner or did you choose the area because you needed to for the TLI experience?

9. Did you change your ideas or thinking about the area of interest as you worked through the TLI process?

10. Were the goals or area of interest that you chose to work toward in the TLI also part of the vision of the school or district? Can you elaborate on that?

11. Was your involvement with the TLI pilot shared with the entire school community? By school community, I am referring to the teachers, students, parents, school board and community members.

12. Who made your involvement known to the community?

Supports and Resources:

1. Can you describe supports/resources that were in place for you during the TLI at the building level from teachers, other certified staff and administrators? At the district level?

2. How did you utilize the resources/supports?

3. If you were given support, how were the supports/resources that you mentioned carried out at the building or district level?

4. Were the resources made available to you also available to teachers that were not part of the TLI? Can you elaborate on this?

5.Was the principal involved in providing the supports/resources needed to implement your participation in the TLI pilot?

6. What was the principal's actual involvement with you during this process?

Work Structures and Roles:

1. Were changes made to your teaching schedule or job responsibilities that allowed you to spend extra time working toward the goals that you set for the TLI pilot?

2. Can you describe how this happened and who was responsible for the change in your teaching schedule or job responsibilities that allowed you to spend extra time working toward your goals?

3. Were other teachers not working on the TLI pilot afforded extra time as well for work on extra projects or leadership opportunities? If so, what did that look like and how did that happen?

4. If your job responsibilities changed during the TLI pilot, did you take a different role in the instruction of your students? In the instruction of students of other teachers in your building or district?

5. If your job responsibilities changed and you took on a different instructional role, did this positively or negatively affect your students' learning or other teacher's student learning? Can you give me examples of how you know this?

6. Did this role change or your participation in the TLI affect the students of other teachers in a positive or negative way? Can you give examples of how you know this?

7. If changes were made to school scheduling structures and to job responsibilities, did this affect grade levels and teachers within your building? Were teachers in your building supportive in the changes that were made and if so, how?

8. Are the changes that were made in the school scheduling structures and/or job responsibilities still in the school schedule? Please describe and include any changes that have been made and the reasons for the changes.

9. Did the other teachers in your building or your district know what you were participating in?

Leadership and Improvement:

1. Did your participation in the TLI change the way that you think about teaching and learning as related to teacher leadership or leadership in a general sense by teachers outside of the classroom?

2. Describe the difference in your thinking about teaching and learning and teacher leadership before the TLI experience and/or after.

3. If the TLI did not provide a change in your thinking about leadership outside of the classroom, please describe if this change did occur at some point in your career and what experience or event caused this change?

4. Was this change in your thinking a personal change or did the other teachers that you work with also experience a change in their thinking about teaching and learning and teacher leadership?

5. Did your participation in the TLI improve your ability to lead others from within the classroom (instruction) or from outside the classroom? How do you know this? Can you give specific examples, data or media that reveals this improvement in practice?

6. After completing your Capstone Project, did you experience a change in your ability to work more effectively with other teachers in your building? With other teachers in your district? With other teachers across your state or at a national level?

7. Have you continued or enhanced your collaborative efforts with these teachers beyond the TLI? If so, please elaborate.

8. Did the TLI strengthen your relationship with your principal?

9. Since completing the TLI, have you been afforded any other teacher leadership opportunities?

10. Are you seeking out other opportunities as a teacher leader or any other leadership positions?

11. Are you seeking out other opportunities for professional growth?

12. If for some reason you did not get to take part in TLI, would you have sought another position or educational role that would have allowed you to experience leadership and improvement for yourself?

13. If you could, please summarize your overall experience in the TLI pilot.

Conclusion:

Is there anything else that I have not questioned you about that you would like me to know or share about your experience with the TLI pilot, about teacher leadership or teaching and learning, the improvement of schools or impact on student learning because of teacher leadership? Thank you so very much for your time.

APPENDIX B

Administrator Interview Protocol

This is Leslie Sharp. Today is ____ (date) and it is _____ (time). I am interviewing _____ at _____ (time) at _____ (location of interview). Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. This study's purpose is to determine the effect of the Teacher Leadership Initiative on leadership and school improvement. When I use the term *teacher leadership*, I am referencing any particular experience or opportunity that was an addition to classroom instruction that your teachers engaged in during the Teacher Leadership Initiative (TLI) Pilot.

Demographic and Background Information:

1. Can you tell me a little bit about your professional background?

2. When the teachers in your district participated in the TLI pilot, how long had you worked in that school? In that particular school district?

3. What knowledge do you have of the Teacher Leadership Initiative pilot?

4. What role did you play for the participants in the TLI? How were you involved with the teachers that participated in the TLI?

5. Have you ever participated as a support role for a teacher leadership opportunity before?

6. Was your involvement with the teacher participants in TLI voluntary for you?

7. Are you aware of other administrators that were involved with the participants in the TLI pilot in other schools in your district? In other schools in your state?

8. Would you consider yourself a teacher leader before becoming a school administrator? If so, please describe that experience.

9. Did your experience as a teacher leader influence your decision to become an administrator?

10. Why did you choose to become a school administrator?

Preparation for Teacher Leadership and Utilization of Teachers as Leaders:

1. Did the educational leadership program that you attended to get your administrative licensure prepare you to utilize teacher leaders in your building? If so, please describe.

2. If your educational leadership preparation program did not prepare you to utilize teacher leaders in your building, please describe how you engaged in this process? (collaborative groups, professional learning communities, graduate classes, ect.)

3. Did your district provide strategies for incorporating teacher leadership within schools at the time you participated in the TLI? If so, please explain.

4. If your district did not provide strategies for incorporating teacher leadership into schools, were changes made to support this during the TLI or after?

5. Do you welcome the ideology of incorporating teacher leadership into the leadership of the school or district? Please explain.

6. In what ways have or do you utilize the teaching expertise in your district? Please give all examples.

7. Did you utilize teacher leaders before the pilot? In what capacity?

8. Do you know if the teachers volunteered to participate in the TLI or was a formal process involved in the selection?

9. In your professional opinion, are teachers are prepared for leadership roles in schools and districts?

10. What type of preparation would you recommend for teachers moving into a leadership role?

School Structures, Practices and Resources:

1. How was the vision and mission developed in your district? Do you have occasion to revisit the vision and mission in your school?

2. Does your vision and mission reflect the vision and mission of your school district? Please describe this relationship.

3. Are teachers allowed to practice autonomy within their teaching practices within your schools?

5. Do you engage teachers in the development of the scheduling and structure of how the schools/district functions?

6. Do you utilize Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) in you school and why? Please describe how PLCs look in your school.

7. Do you promote collaboration between members of the school community?

How is that structured? Is this important to you as a school leader?

8. During the TLI pilot, were structural changes made to the schools where the participants work so that their projects could be completed?

9. Were resources needed for teachers that participated in the TLI? If so please elaborate. 10. Were TLI teachers given the opportunity to change their professional responsibilities/duties in the school?

Leadership and Improvement:

1. Did the TLI impact the professional learning of teachers?

2. Was student learning impacted because of the TLI?

3. Did the TLI improve teachers' ability to collaborate with peers?

4. Did the TLI experience improve the TLI teachers' ability to lead others in the building, district or beyond?

5. Did the TLI experience improve the climate of the schools or district?

6. Did the TLI pilot encourage additional teachers to aspire to other leadership opportunities?

7. Did the TLI pilot improve your schools or district in any capacity?

8. As an administrative leader, did you gain professionally from the TLI experience?

9. As a result of your experience with TLI, will you pursue any additional professional learning opportunities to strengthen your ability to incorporate teacher leadership in your school?

10. Would you participate in any other teacher leadership opportunities that are offered to you through teachers, district initiatives, or national initiatives?

11. Would you consider yourself an inquiry learner?

12. As you reflect on your overall experience with the TLI pilot, can you please summarize your experience as an administrative leader?

Conclusion: Is there anything else that I have not questioned you about that you would like me to know or share about your experience with the TLI pilot? Thank you so very much for your time.

APPENDIX C

Outreach to Participants Summary Document

for

National Education Association

I am looking for teachers and principals to interview by phone or through a video chat format, and provide their experiences from the Teacher Leadership Initiative (TLI) Pilot. I will be asking questions to find out how your participation in the TLI has affected your views and practices about teaching and learning and leadership.

Benefits include understanding how teacher leadership may improve teaching and learning practices and positively impact student learning. Also, how teacher leadership opportunities may help retain highly effective teachers in the classroom.

Interviews will be recorded and the total time for an interview will be no longer than 90 minutes. Participants may be asked to complete a second interview if needed. All information gathered by the researcher will be confidential. The results will be shared with TLI sponsors, the National Education Association, the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards and the Center for Teaching Quality.

UNIVERSITY OF
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Office of Research Compliance
Institutional Review Board

June 12, 2017

MEMORANDUM

TO: Leslie Sharp
John Pijanowski

FROM: Ro Windwalker
IRB Coordinator

RE: New Protocol Approval

IRB Protocol #: 17-05-715

Protocol Title: *Teacher and Principal Perspectives from Experiences in the Teacher Leadership Initiative*

Review Type: ☐ EXEMPT ☒ EXPEDITED ☐ FULL IRB

Approved Project Period: Start Date: 06/12/2017 Expiration Date: 05/30/2018

Your protocol has been approved by the IRB. Protocols are approved for a maximum period of one year. If you wish to continue the project past the approved project period (see above), you must submit a request, using the form *Continuing Review for IRB Approved Projects*, prior to the expiration date. This form is available from the IRB Coordinator or on the Research Compliance website (https://vpred.uark.edu/units/rscp/index.php). As a courtesy, you will be sent a reminder two months in advance of that date. However, failure to receive a reminder does not negate your obligation to make the request in sufficient time for review and approval. Federal regulations prohibit retroactive approval of continuation. Failure to receive approval to continue the project prior to the expiration date will result in Termination of the protocol approval. The IRB Coordinator can give you guidance on submission times.

This protocol has been approved for 12 participants. If you wish to make *any* modifications in the approved protocol, including enrolling more than this number, you must seek approval *prior to* implementing those changes. All modifications should be requested in writing (email is acceptable) and must provide sufficient detail to assess the impact of the change.

If you have questions or need any assistance from the IRB, please contact me at 109 MLKG Building, 5-2208, or irb@uark.edu.

APPENDIX E

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To:	Leslie Lynne Sharp
From:	Douglas James Adams, Chair IRB Committee
Date:	02/26/2018
Action:	**Expedited Approval**
Action Date:	02/26/2018
Protocol #:	1708007700A001
Study Title:	Teacher and Administrator Perspectives from Experiences in the Teacher Leadership Initiative
Expiration Date:	05/30/2018
Last Approval Date:	02/26/2018

The above-referenced protocol has been approved following expedited review by the IRB Committee that oversees research with human subjects.

If the research involves collaboration with another institution then the research cannot commence until the Committee receives written notification of approval from the collaborating institution's IRB.

It is the Principal Investigator's responsibility to obtain review and continued approval before the expiration date.

Protocols are approved for a maximum period of one year. You may not continue any research activity beyond the expiration date without Committee approval. Please submit continuation requests early enough to allow sufficient time for review. Failure to receive approval for continuation before the expiration date will result in the automatic suspension of the approval of this protocol. Information collected following suspension is unapproved research and cannot be reported or published as research data. If you do not wish continued approval, please notify the Committee of the study closure.

Adverse Events: Any serious or unexpected adverse event must be reported to the IRB Committee within 48 hours. All other adverse events should be reported within 10 working days.

Amendments: If you wish to change any aspect of this study, such as the procedures, the consent forms, study personnel, or number of participants, please submit an amendment to the IRB. All changes must be approved by the IRB Committee before they can be initiated.

You must maintain a research file for at least 3 years after completion of the study. This file should include all correspondence with the IRB Committee, original signed consent forms, and study data.

Correspondence Notes:
- The researcher states that audio & video recordings of the interviews will be kept. That means there is identifying information in the data, so the confidentiality section of the informed consent either needs to tell respondents that or explain when the recordings will be destroyed. Once that's done, this can be approved.

cc: John C Pijanowski, Investigator