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PERCEPTIONS OF EMPOWERED TEACHER LEADERS

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A DISSERTATION

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PERCEPTIONS OF EMPOWERED TEACHER LEADERS

ABSTRACT

Teacher Leadership movements over the last 30 years have attempted to create leadership opportunities within and across an organization. The purpose of this mixed method case study was to evaluate the impact of a district's teacher leadership opportunities to reduce teacher isolation and increase teacher collaboration. This study illustrated how effective teacher leadership initiatives should take Piaget's idea (1971) of discovery learning and combine it with the concept that teaching and learning are more powerful when they involve social interaction (Bandura, 1987).

A literature review revealed a gap in understanding what systems and structures made collaboration more successful for teacher leaders. The design of these structures should move away from punitive accountability to developing new capacities that promote the improvement of the group (DuFour & Fullan, 2013). The study employed an interpretive qualitative research design (Creswell, 2015). The research process documented how the roles and supports from district leaders impacted teacher capacity and the collaborative culture of the organization.

The perceptions of the teacher leaders who participated in the teacher leadership academy were that the experience had influenced the way they teach. Additionally, the use of teacher leadership as an improvement strategy helped reduce teacher isolation and improve collaboration among colleagues. It was found that effective collaboration should exist in smaller settings and have a common area of focus to increase the ability of teachers to take risks and to embrace

innovative teaching practices. An important finding was the need for leaders to understand organizational culture and possible misunderstandings that arise when teacher leaders are viewed as formal leaders by colleagues. This case study added to the body of knowledge about the importance of processes and structures in supporting teacher leadership development.

   Keywords: teacher leadership, collaboration, learning community, professional development

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Doctor of Education

Educational Leadership

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

"Every district in America is implementing strategies intended to help produce educational improvement" (Lemons & Stevenson, 2015, p. 19). Within each district, school leadership teams build school improvement plans that include various learning opportunities for teachers. However, these learning opportunities do not always produce the desired effects. This may be a due to teacher isolation that leads to a lack of teacher collaboration and few opportunities for teachers to offer feedback on improvement plans. The limited success of some professional learning initiatives may be due to the perception that professional learning is both an obligation and an opportunity (Patton, Parker, & Tannehill, 2015). This sense of obligation happens when schools map professional learning across traditional structures like Election Day or first week of school. The opportunity exists when leaders work with teachers to develop their capacity.

York-Barr and Duke (2004), in their twenty-year meta-analysis study of teacher improvement efforts, defined 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 increasing student achievement" (p. 288). Teacher leadership allows schools to use the power of teachers within the organization to improve the organization. The recent work of Goddard, Goddard, Kim, & Miller (2015) states that "strong instructional leadership can create structures to facilitate teachers' work in ways that strengthen organizational belief systems, and, in concert, these factors foster student learning"

(p. 510).

District staff should look to teacher leadership as an opportunity to include teachers when developing improvement plans at a much deeper and transformative level. Teacher leadership can be the vehicle to reduce isolation, drive teacher collaboration, and assist in building teachers' capacity for growth. Collaboration between teachers can result in improved instruction, thereby impacting student learning. The purpose of this study is to understand:

1. What aspects of a teacher leadership initiative do teachers perceive as most powerful in bringing teachers together and reducing teacher isolation?

2. What supports in a teacher initiative do teachers perceive as most helpful in developing peer collaboration and developing a community of practice?

A study that seeks to develop understanding of how to effectively build a teacher leader community over time with the right leadership strategies provides valuable information for educators.

The focus of a learning organization should begin with teaching and learning. District leaders should create optimism and lifelong learning for all staff, which begins with developing a culture that supports engaging learning structures and systems to grow staff (Davidson, 2015). A leader that has knowledge of strong cultures for learning can assist an organization in its improvement efforts. Teacher leadership initiatives, as a form of distributed leadership, have been well established as a successful school improvement practice (Barth, 2013; Broemmel, 2016; Carpenter, 2005; Goddard, Goddard, Kim, & Miller, 2015; Hattie, 2016; Kelley & Dikkers, 2016; Sterrett, & Irizarry, 2015). However, what has not been clearly established is how organizational culture both supports and improves a district implementation of a teacher leadership initiative.

The idea of teacher leadership is not new. It is based on the idea of making changes to the more traditional hierarchical model that often guides implementation of new initiatives in schools (Frost & Durant, 2003). Researchers have written about the need to develop teacher leaders (Barth 2013; Fullan, 2011; Thoonen, Sleegers, Oort, & Peetsma, 2012). The desire to empower teachers to engage in the leading of professional learning and to become more impassioned about their teaching is a strong motivating factor for many teachers. Empowering teachers to help design and enact professional learning opportunities will support teachers who are invested and motivated to improve their practice, while at the same time, reducing isolation.

When district leaders strive to develop teacher leadership, they can look to the structures used to bring teachers together for professional learning. Leaders of an organization need to understand how the structures they use contribute to the development of teacher leaders within and across classrooms and schools. The structures that districts use to bring teachers together to collaborate and to help each other develop their individual and collective capacity reflect a district's culture. Organizational culture impacts morale. At the center of a teacher leadership reform movement is a collaborative approach to developing teacher efficacy across all levels (Fullan, 2016, Hargreaves, & O'Connor, 2017, Goddard, Skrla, & Salloum, 2017).

District positional leaders typically decide a starting point in their school improvement plans. In their strategic planning, they make decisions about areas of focus that will be well received by the staff. This decision is usually based on their organizational context and culture. Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) suggest that, to build the collective capacity of teachers in support of school improvement, it is important to understand the role of human and social capital in organizational culture. "Human capital is defined as factors such as experience, subject knowledge, pedagogical skills. Social capital is defined as the patterns of interactions between

teachers" (Leana, 2011, p. 32). The key to creating internal accountability for school improvement and commitment to instructional improvement lies in the ability of school leaders to balance these two concepts. Systems like teacher evaluation programs, new teacher orientations and *teacher of the year* programs focus too much on the sole development of human capital. Strategic planning for building teacher capacity should include the development of systems for collaboration and internal accountability. Fullan, Rincón-Gallardo, and Hargreaves (2015) claim that true collaboration is built on both ideas of collaboration and internal accountability. This notion requires building human capital by connecting people who know what they are doing and those who have a desire to learn. In schools where teachers "share a sense of collective responsibility for the success of students, collaboration is more likely to occur, creating culture that cultivates professional capital" (Fullan, et al., 2015, p. 8). Professional capital is similar to the concept proposed by some researchers of using the group to change the group (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2013, Leana, 2011). Teacher leadership builds the groundwork for teachers to begin the networked approach to influencing change among their colleagues. A strong leader will take the opportunity to build a series of structures and supports to grow collaboration and efficacy for teachers. They will also give teachers the autonomy to determine where they will focus their efforts.

Building capacity in teachers should be grounded in drawing out their interests and passions for teaching and allowing them to work within and beyond their own classrooms. Barth (2013) illustrates the usefulness of tapping into a teacher's passion to teach when he states "teachers sign up for different reasons than those they're evaluated on" (Barth, 2013, p. 14). Many select the profession to be part of a learning culture and to be colleagues in learning. Creating this learning community is a vision that many leaders have but may not know how

teachers perceive the quest to create such a community. York-Barr and Duke (2004) found

in their meta-study that teachers are hopeful and impassioned about the possibility of engaging in

the practice of "informal arteries of influence" (Wilson, 2011). District leaders need a clear and

strategic vision for teacher collaboration and teacher leadership. "Not all kinds of collaboration

are desirable or effective, and not all are appropriate for the people who practice it or for the task

at hand" (Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2017, p. vi). Therefore, understanding teachers' perceptions

of how district leaders develop a community of practice matters. Collaboration that works well

needs leaders who can design a system to support effective teaming. This teaming is usually

grounded in important work that has been drawn out of the teachers themselves. When teachers

have voice in the collaborative topics and structures of the professional learning in their district,

they are more likely to be engaged in building their own capacity.

This chapter introduces a qualitative case study designed to document teacher perceptions

of district supports for developing teacher leadership and collaboration. The case study examines

teacher perceptions across four schools ranging from kindergarten to grade twelve in a suburban

school district in Connecticut. In order to fill the gap in the literature concerning teacher

leadership and district supports, this study focused on the district's initiatives regarding teacher

leadership. This chapter includes a statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, and the

research questions that focus the study. Additionally, the chapter addresses the conceptual

framework as well as the significance of the study. To provide clarity, the chapter describes the

scope of the study and addresses any limitations.

Statement of the Problem

Those leading change in schools often believe that teachers are the problem or the

solution to improving student achievement (Bandura, 2000, Goodard, et al., 2015). This is why

school leaders build their student improvement planning around the goal to *improve teachers*. These beliefs sometimes lead to attempts by positional leaders to *fix* teachers rather than developing teachers' practice and efficacy. This belief about teachers led politicians and state educational leaders to make major revisions to teacher evaluation plans that included the linking of teacher evaluation to student achievement. Assumptions about "fixing teachers" can also be seen in districts that provide single focused professional learning to raise the level of success for students by giving teachers training in an area like writing across the curriculum or reading skills. For example, Hargreaves and O'Connor (2017) cite the often-used refrain by education reformers that nothing will happen without good teachers. In light of recent national reforms like No Child Left Behind (sunset in 2015) and Race to the Top, one of the biggest challenges today is that leaders need to help schools move the focus from an accounting of learning to accountability for learning (Lieberman, 2011). Schools may be full of good teachers, but unfortunately, "too many have been accustomed to working alone, in silos, with little feedback and meaningful interaction with others" (Yiannouka as cited in Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2017, p. v). The challenge for school leaders is understanding how to play an effective role in developing the culture, the systems, and the supports necessary to grow teacher leadership in order to impact educational improvement for students.

Collaboration in teacher leadership is a culture statement for an organization. This requires district leaders, like principals, to focus less on instructional leadership and more on developing social capital in facilitating time, staff, and space for staff to develop formal and informal connections for learning (Leana, 2011). "Developing professional capital is about helping people [teachers] to help themselves and help their students more effectively; it is not about manipulating them into complying with externally imposed requirements or delivering

someone else's vision" (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012, p. 169). It is necessary for school district leaders to identify and implement systems that will support a culture of collaboration. These decisions will impact how teacher leadership and collaboration grow over time. Developing the talent within an organization helps use the group to improve the group.

Teacher leadership occurs within an organizational culture that is open to distributive leadership. The nature of the culture, as it relates to teacher leadership, is used as leverage for schools (Carpenter, 2015). Leaders that create an effective organizational learning culture give teachers autonomy to enact their own learning pathways and develop their practice. The opportunity to have voice and control over professional learning creates engaged teachers (Goodard, et al., 2015). The importance of how teachers feel about their place in such an improvement process cannot be underestimated.

It is critical that district leaders examine the process of embracing teacher leadership and develop a stance to develop a strong learning institution (Barth, 2013; Fullan, 2016; Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2017). Such a stance requires that the leaders have a strong understanding of what supports need to be available for teachers as they begin to collaborate to develop their capacity. Without a strong value for and strategy to build the capacity of its teachers, positional leaders cannot enact a vision for lifelong learning for everyone in the organization. Not all positional school leaders have created a culture where all teachers are responsible for their learning and their growth. Teachers are often left to teach in isolation without the ability to collaborate or get feedback from their peers. Teachers cannot always lead their own learning in some districts. "Schools that specify that only a chosen few should give only non-evaluative feedback or by making principals responsible only for formal, consequential evaluation are typically associated with low-trust cultures" (Fullan, 2014, p. 75).

The problem of teacher isolation is both a moral and pragmatic one in that teachers need to develop a sense of agency around starting and sustaining change, whatever their status within the organization (Durant & Frost, 2003). In other words, how can teacher efficacy be harnessed so all staff understand that "together we can make a difference to the students we teach, no matter what" (Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2017, p. viii). Teacher leaders are powerful agents for change (Barth, 2013). It is not a simple process. Developing fair and ethical practices to grow teacher leaders and to develop teacher capacity requires honest and effective feedback to garner meaningful effect sizes for change (Hattie, 2007, 2012; Kelley, & Dikkers, 2016).

Statement of the Purpose

The purpose of this study is to understand how teacher leadership can effectively impact the culture or how teacher leadership might improve the culture. Specifically, the researcher aimed to document, according to teachers' perceptions, what supports helped teachers collaborate and develop a learning community. Additionally, the researcher sought to prioritize the most important supports needed to assist teachers in developing their capacity. The findings derived from the study can inform district leaders of the collaborative learning structures that increase teacher capacity and reduce isolationism. Specifically, the study aims to understand 1) the roles district leaders play in the creation of, or modification of, organizational structures to build teacher leadership 2) and how these leadership moves change the culture and learning of the organization. It also attempts to document how certain collaboration structures adapt and adjust as learning grows within the organization. Menna Wilson developed an impassioned question for teacher leadership. She asked:

> Is it possible that teacher leadership be more than a semi-fulfilled potential? I
> hope so. I hope the school of the future will be a formal but nonhierarchical

system that nourishes informal arteries of influence, a place where the pulse and

rhythm of good teaching and learning are driven by the capabilities of teacher

leaders. It seems to me that only then will the potential contribution of these

teachers to their schools be realized. Only then will we genuinely begin the work

of fashioning school environments within which it is possible for every student

to achieve. (Wilson, 2011, p. 187)

This study documented teachers' perceptions of how teacher leadership impacted a

school district's professional learning culture and communities of collaboration as well as

teachers' perceptions on how teacher engagement improved and how teacher isolation was

reduced. This balance of supporting human and social capital to form a culture for teacher

leadership helps avoid some of the problems found in previous studies (Hargreaves & O'Connor,

2017; Wilson, 2011; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Ideally, this study will help school leaders

understand what a learning culture might look like as well as inform leaders how to create a

culture that adapts with different leadership moves over time to improve morale and reduce

teacher turnover while at the same time increasing student achievement.

Research Questions

The overarching question guiding this study is, how can districts can empower teacher

leaders to make a difference in the development of teacher capacity and student learning?

Specifically, the researcher investigated the following questions:

1. What aspects of a teacher leadership initiative did teachers perceive as most powerful in

   bringing teachers together reducing teacher isolation?

2. What supports in a teacher initiative movement do teachers perceive as most helpful in

   developing peer collaboration and developing a community of practice?

Conceptual Framework

Teachers are increasingly confronted with initiatives that put pressure on them to develop forms of teacher collaboration. Teachers have long been accustomed to working in isolation within the boundaries of their classrooms (Cosenza, 2015, p. 1). A teacher leadership initiative capitalizes on teachers as learners. Teacher leadership is built upon the idea of social capital or collaboration as a means for improvement. Teacher leadership takes the idea of discovery learning (Piaget, 1971) and combines it with the notion that teaching and learning are more powerful when they involve social interaction (Vygotsky, Cole, John-Steiner, Scribner, & Souberman, 1980). Providing teachers with the opportunities to collaborate to build their capacity reflects the argument that teacher leadership is the right driver for educational reform (Fullan, 2014). Social and contextual elements should be built into an effective teacher leadership initiative so that professionals can learn by doing. Complex tasks required to improves one's teaching and learning are best undertaken within social interactions (Bandura, 1987; Daniels, 2016; & Takaya, 2008).
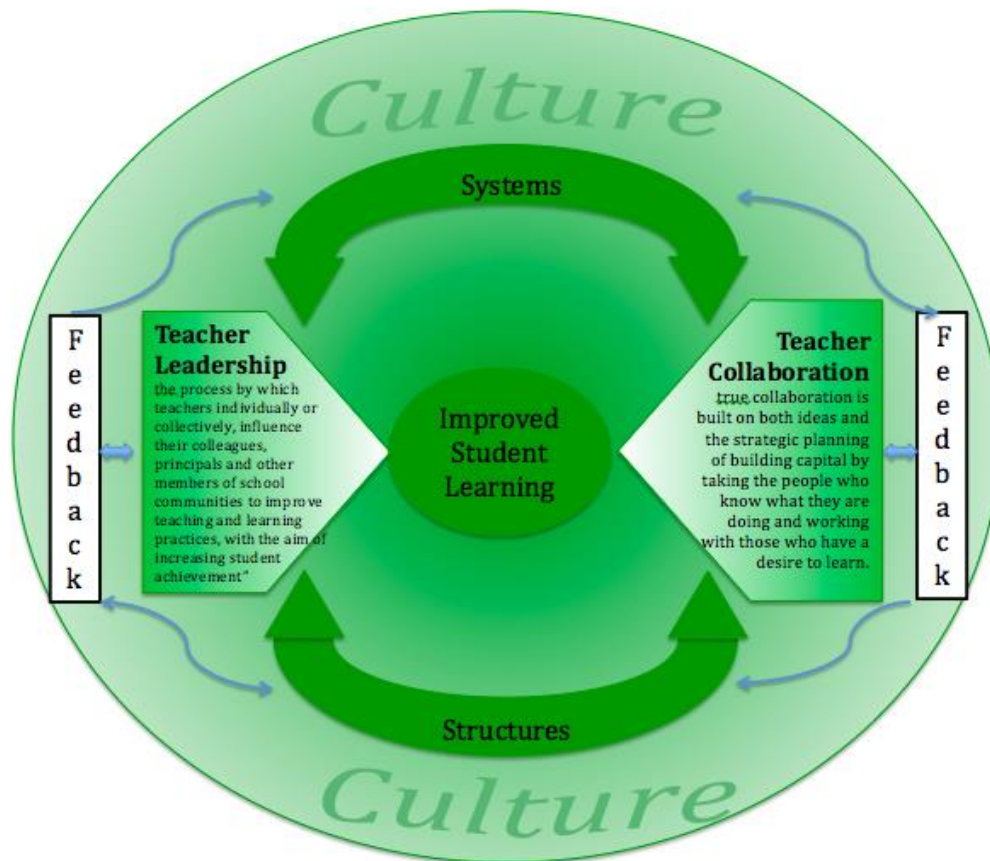
Figure 1. The Connection between Roles, Systems and Structures in Teacher Leadership

(Rafferty, 2018)

Schools leaders need to develop a culture that moves from collaboration to efficacy. From the perspective of "social cognitive theory, leadership that establishes cultural norms within the organization also serves as a form of social persuasion that can positively influence collective efficacy beliefs" (Goddard, et al., 2015). District leaders looking for leadership coherence will want a feedback loop to understand how different leadership roles can work within, change, and strengthen the district's structures and supports.

An effective teacher leadership reform focuses on the social theories that drive the quest for efficacy of the group to develop the group. The "social framework seeks to explain how

social behaviour is structured not merely by people's sense of themselves as individuals but also (and often more importantly) by their sense of themselves as members of social groups" (Haslam, 2014, p. 1). Social cognitive theory supports the idea that "people's shared beliefs in their collective efficacy influence the types of futures they seek to achieve through collective action" (Bandura, 2000, p. 76).

Effective teacher leadership learning needs to be *job embedded* into the organizational culture of the school. Job embedded means more than teachers taking courses while they are teaching; it means their learning is situated within an authentic context and constructed through social interaction and collaboration (Ross, Adams, Bondy, Dana, Dodman, & Swain, 2011, p. 1214). Teacher expertise is at the foundation of increasing teacher quality and advancements in teaching and learning. This expertise becomes more "widely available when accomplished teachers model effective instructional practices, encourage sharing of best practices, mentor new teachers, and collaborate with teaching colleagues. Through such interactions, they break down teacher isolation and help create a more professional work environment" (York-Barr & Duke, 2004, p. 258). This type of environment will positively impact students' learning.

One useful image (Figure 2) related to the concept of teacher leadership and its connection to students can be seen in the meta-analysis conducted by York-Barr & Duke (2004).
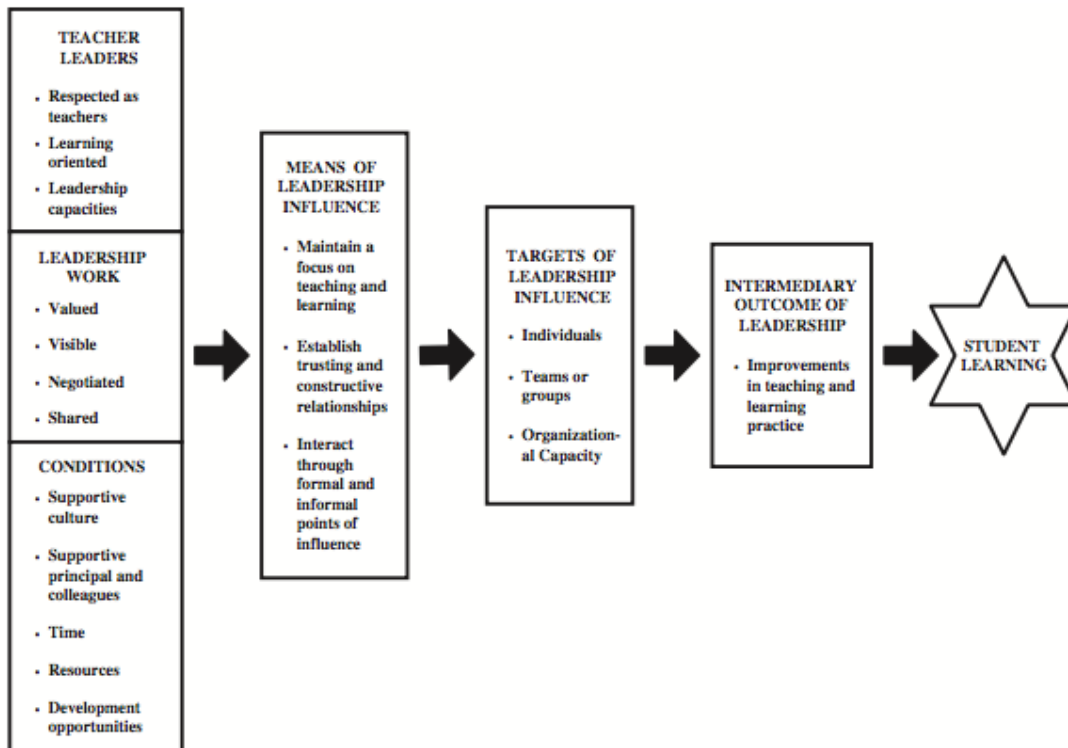
Figure 2. Teacher Leadership for student learning: Conceptual framework (York-Barr & Duke, 2004).

Definitions of Terms

A study on teacher leadership needs to describe what the literature says about teacher leaders, improving teacher capacity and institutional culture. The following words and phrases were identified as important and necessary for defining for common understanding. These words and concepts help identify key ideas in the literature on the topic of teacher leadership.

Teacher leadership: The process of applying new thinking to the concept of teachers being in charge of learning and learning from various angles (York-Barr & Duke, 2004).

Human capital: The factors such as experience, subject knowledge, pedagogical skills (Leana, 2011).

Social capital: The patterns of interactions between teachers (Leana, 2011).

Efficacy: The perception that the group to which you belong can positively affect student outcomes (Ninković & Knežević Florić, 2018).

Culture: The predominant norms, values, and attitudes that define and drive behavior in the district (Public Education Leadership Project at Harvard University, 2011).

Significance of the Study

Some literature suggests that the "quality of the teacher matters more than any other single school based factor as a variable for improving student achievement" (Ross, Adams, Bondy, Dana, Dodman, & Swain, 2011, p. 1213). Other research supports this essential finding (Goldhaber, 2016; Stronge, 2013). Some studies address the transactional structures necessary to develop teacher capacity (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Additional research is needed to understand the merging of transactional and transformative leadership that can provide the necessary supports to teachers to enable them to take risks and share practices that can be found at the heart of the development of teacher leadership. Fullan claims that commonly touted change strategies typically err in "trusting too much in the power of individuals to solve educational problems while failing to enlist and capitalize on the power of the group" (Fullan, 2016, p. 45). The culture of an organization and its ability to support individuals to learn together and share a common vision matters to change movements (Wilson, 2011). This study documented the ways teachers perceive how they collaborate and how the district supports structures to develop a community of learners with teachers leading the learning. It sheds light on how teachers perceive the leading of their own learning and of their colleagues' learning.

All school leaders, including teachers, will want to understand how teacher learning transfers to changes in practice. It is important to understand the teacher will be asked "to adopt the behaviour of a learner by choosing professional development as a learning process and not as

a remedial process" (Silva & Herdeiro, 2014, p. 186). The development of teachers'

capacity to teach in a changing world matters greatly to the future of the American educational

system as well as the country more broadly in developing future successful societies. Teachers

have a need for professional learning, but what is more important is how is teacher agency is

developed and sustained over time within an organization. Included in this study is an

examination of how teacher leadership supports organizational development. Use of the elements

of feedback by leaders creates a structure for coherence in measuring progress towards

organizational goals as well as developing the necessary culture for learning across all levels of

the organization (Hattie & Timperley, 2007).

Conclusion

This study documented teachers' perceptions of peer interactions designed to strengthen

communities of practice. The study sheds light on how the development of teacher leadership

within a teacher leadership initiative changes teachers' perceptions of their own district as well

as how they view their colleagues. Research indicates the need for organizations to build a

professional learning culture (Barth, 2013; Goddard, et. al., 2015; Hargreaves & O'Connor,

2017; and Hattie, 2016). Learning how teacher leadership positively impacts school

improvement, retains quality teachers, and promotes learning and teaching efficacy is fertile

ground for study.

Additionally, the gathering of qualitative data will help inform leaders who seek to

measure teacher leadership and its impact over time and across the organization. Too often,

standardized test scores become the only measure of a movement. Teacher leadership

movements should be built around more qualitative measures to document how the efforts

impact the learning environment and culture for teachers and students to innovate, create and

thrive. As all schools are different, it would behoove a district leadership team to work with school staff to develop reasonable follow up plans and appropriately support the balancing of the district supports and the emerging culture areas for schools.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

A literature review on teacher leadership draws from many sources. Chapter two offers a discussion of the literature related to teacher leadership and the development of teacher-led learning communities. It outlines the roles for leaders and introduces strategic planning with references to supporting literature. The literature speaks to the role of district leaders in developing the supports that build a teacher leadership initiative. Specifically, it will focus on district- and school-based supports for increasing collaboration and capacity for teaching and learning. To begin, it will frame the importance of leaders conducting strategic planning. This will lead into a discussion of the supports that the literature indicates are important to the development of collaboration and communities of learners. The chapter will also review literature that supports collaboration as a method to build efficacy of learners within a system.

Over the past thirty years, leaders of districts and schools have sought to identify aspects of education that could be leveraged to bring about school improvement. However, they have sometimes engaged in school planning without knowledge of clear ways to carry out the change effort (Huber & Conway, 2015). These improvement decisions have been influenced by a variety of factors both internal and external. Federal and state mandates have provided external influences through initiatives such as No Child Left Behind and Race to the Top. These external reforms ignored organizational context and did not garner the results expected (Neal & Schanzenbach, 2010). Their lack of measurable outcomes may be because policy makers focused on fixing teachers more than maximizing teacher expertise and leadership potential (Berry & Farris-Berg, 2016, p. 11). One such strategy for school improvement is the development of

teacher leaders within an organization (Barth, 2013; Goddard, et al., 2015; York-Barr &

Duke, 2004). The development of teacher leaders entails the consideration of the organizational

context, culture and capacity. Scholars define teacher leadership to include formal roles and

informal roles such as a leader of professional learning communities (PLC) or peer coach (Ross,

et al., 2011). Additionally, the literature is abundant with reasons for advancing the concept and

practice of teacher leadership (York-Barr & Duke, 2004, p. 258). The literature provides some

guidance on the essential leadership roles that influence the design of a teacher leadership

initiative that leverages teacher collaboration as a vehicle for change. Additionally,

understanding the context in which the collaboration structure will be built and how teachers

within the organization will perceive such structures should be a focus of planning for leaders.

The design of these structures should move away from punitive accountability and toward

developing new capacities that promote the improvement of the group (DuFour & Fullan, 2013).

Roles for Leaders in Strategic Planning

District leaders have a role and a responsibility to develop systems and structures for

teacher leadership to develop and grow. Using strategic leadership, leaders can connect their

roles as district decision makers and their strategic actions to student learning. Goddard et al.,

found a direct effect of leadership and the role of leaders on teacher collaboration, noting that

teacher leaders play a strong role in "creating structures to facilitate teachers' work in ways to

strengthen organizational belief systems, and, in concert, these factors student learning"

(Goddard, et al., 2015, p. 501). Leaders that bring a long-range mindset to their strategic

planning understand that teacher leadership unfolds across the system with thoughtful planning

and monitoring. They also understand that it takes time, ways, and means. Schools where

teachers are provided arenas for common work and common practice have the necessary

foundational structure to develop teacher leadership. A forum for teachers to voice their preferences for how and when they will collaborate is critical. It is important that teachers feel a connection to a collaborative process to work on their professional development. Lieberman (2011) highlights the importance of public forums for sharing as well as having multiple entry points into the learning community. Teachers have demonstrated across various settings that a learning community helps develop organizational culture, which is connected to the structures that are put in place by leaders. In other words, they create a system of job embedded professional learning opportunities to build teacher capacity for today and tomorrow (Fullan, 2016). This shift creates a feeling of a school as a community of learners and moves staff away from a "reliance on external sources of power" (York-Barr & Duke, 2004, p. 281). Schools with organizational conditions such as "participative decision-making, teaming, teacher collaboration, an open and trustful climate, cultures which value shared responsibilities and values, and transformational leadership practices can foster teachers' professional learning in schools" (Thoonen, et al., 2012, p. 443).

To get to this coherence of leadership across all levels and to provide opportunities for teachers to take ownership for building capacity, leaders must be mindful of some common barriers that create a system where teachers are don't engage and fail to commit to the goals of the organization. DuFour and Fullan mention some common barriers to setting up this type of learning community. Two common barriers that can create a troubled initiative are failing to communicate purpose and priorities clearly and consistently and believing that reform means launching a program rather than a process (DuFour & Fullan, 2013). Attaining positive learning processes that bring about self-efficacy require that these barriers be overcome early and often.

Resisting Roles

Teaching has deeply entrenched norms for autonomy as well as structures that create isolation and perpetuate the pattern of teachers choosing privacy. There are examples of teachers resisting leadership within ranks of their own (Szczesiul & Huizenga, 2015). These long-held practices have not provided teachers with the confidence to lead their colleagues in developing their own capacity as teachers and learners. Furthermore, teacher leadership can be seen as taking on something more or having another duty or untitled leadership position. Unfortunately, teachers may not be receptive to the idea of taking on informal or positional leadership roles because they are jaded by their past experiences. It has been found that, in a learning context, many teachers had a negative experience with leadership that limited their desire to assume leadership roles (Woodhouse & Pedder, 2016). In other words, district and school leaders influence the appeal of teacher leadership. Certain leaders inspire and mentor leadership aspirations in staff where other leaders create the opposite effect (Alsalahi, 2014; Woodhouse & Pedder, 2016). In some settings, it was found that certain contextual variables impacted the results for different constituents. Therefore, it is not always guaranteed that research-based practices easily transfer from setting to setting. This may well be a result of the blurring of authority and the role of teacher leaders. While teachers recognize the formal authority of the principal, when principals do not empower teachers and limit their leadership capacity, school reforms do not succeed (Sebastian, Allensworth, & Huang, 2016, p. 92). It appears that at times the staff confuses use of the word *leader* when it used differently across different levels of an organization and at different times.

While teacher leadership has a long history, it does not always inspire all teachers to formalize their contributions. It is not an avenue of growth sought by all teachers. A positional

leader must understand that not all teachers will aspire to be teacher leaders and that for some teachers, engaging in collaborative processes with other teachers may present problems. As norms, rules, and understandings change with teacher leadership roles, "conflicts increase, tensions rise, congeniality declines and jealousies increase. For teacher leaders, feelings of loneliness and isolation often result" (Murphy, 2013, p. 117). With these issues possibly at play, district leaders need to monitor and support teacher leaders as they attempt to spread influence and change. Fairman and Mackenzie found that teacher leaders leading school improvement work were reluctant to see themselves as "formal" leaders, and rarely referred to themselves or others as leaders. They go on to say that the term "teacher leader" may be counterproductive (Fairman & Mackenzie, 2015). This concern is indicative of the importance of culture within an organization working on a teacher leadership initiative.

Another cultural piece that most district leaders at all levels will have to confront is the place of high stakes assessment and its impact on teachers gravitating towards teacher leadership. Over the last two decades, schools have increased the use of accountability measures for teachers. Depending on the emphasis brought by district leadership, teachers may worry more about the accountability for improving test scores as opposed to accountability for growth. Gill mentions that a hallmark for accountability is the transparency of practice, which induces accountability through the mere presence of others (Gill, 2017, p. 2). When teachers open their doors, they are creating a system of accountability. This accountability puts the focus on the right driver--instruction (DuFour & Fullan, 2013). Introducing a teacher hierarchy around distributed leadership is made more complex by the importance of accountability and tensions raised must be acknowledged by teachers and others if change is to come to the organization.

Supports for Collaboration

To grow one needs support. Hargreaves and O'Connor make a pitch for collaborative professionalism that helps positional leaders move away from perceptions of resistance and move towards providing clearer autonomy for staff. They push for more collective autonomy, meaning educators will have more independence from top-down bureaucratic authority but less independence from each other (Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2017, p. 83). This does not just happen inside schools or learning organizations. Transformative change requires thoughtful and strategic planning. If education leaders want teachers to collaborate more, then "leaders must truly lead the way and model the collaboration that they want to see among teachers" (Piercey, 2010, p. 56). How a positional leader organizes time when teachers work together impacts the ways systems will run in a school. Therefore, every faculty meeting and every professional learning opportunity creates an opportunity to highlight systems that espouse the ideals of distributive leadership. For Burns, the distribution of power should match the "purpose at hand" (Burns, 1978, p. 478). That means providing teacher leaders the opportunity to influence and deliver systems for building teacher capacity. Fullan refers to this structure as "decisional capital, that allows for practice and expertise in making decisions that may spread across many individuals or groups in a school" (Fullan, 2016, p. 44). A positional leader brings the vision of the way an organization operates and interacts through the deliberate structuring of collaboration of teachers and staff. These visions become the systems and structures for the way a school does business. It is important to note that systems alone do not produce the type of collaboration that builds capacity. The structures within systems help teachers to bring clarity to the purpose and practice of their work. In a study conducted by Fairman and Mackenzie, teachers used "a variety of strategies within the spheres of leadership action to influence others toward the goal of

improving teaching and learning" (Fairman & Mackenzie, 2015, p. 9). In their study, school leaders that imparted teacher leadership as an improvement strategy used modeling, coaching, and collaboration, as they advocated for change with their colleagues.

Research suggests that using collaborative structures for teachers working together is built upon the idea that the leaders have effectively communicated with staff within the organization and developed an understanding about collaboration as leverage point for developing teacher capacity. The skills and strategies that leaders employ to grow teacher leaders become the tools for change, granted that those involved in the coaching and collaborative settings understand these important coaching moves (Stevenson, 2017). Leaders would do well to co-construct meaning with teachers around strategies that involve growing teacher leadership within a school. It is important that this understanding is developed through a co-construction process with the hope of developing collective insights (Bond, 2014). Leaders can impact this process. Sense making is grounded in social environments where "individuals make sense of environmental messages in conversations and interactions with colleagues" (Gawlik, 2015, p. 397). A healthier culture responds to and supports collaborative structures as a means for improvement.

The motivation to leverage a change in teacher collaboration and capacity building is built upon a desire to improve the conditions and outcomes of student learning (Fairman & Mackenzie, 2015). The strategy of using teacher leaders as the conduit to share professional learning techniques between staff will also help develop relationships. This idea of teacher leadership supports development of teacher capacity and will enact the improvement of teaching. When teachers make decisions about and implement professional learning experiences within their classrooms then a cultural shift will take place. Farley-Ripple & Buttram (2013) take the

position that a place to start leveraged change is in understanding of the power of teacher networks and relationships as a way to scale change across the organization. This collaborative network of teachers is a primary structure for developing teacher leaders. These networks act as hinge points for change as teachers are likely to seek advice from those within the organization with whom they have relationships. Furthermore, they contend that these "relationships are conduits for knowledge and that understanding these relationships helps build capacity for improvement and change" (Farley-Ripple & Buttram, 2013, p. 15). This is part of using the organization as a culture building institution and should be seen as inherent in school improvement.

School culture is widely recognized as a dominant influence on the success of improvement initiatives in schools (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). A prerequisite for successful and effective teacher leadership is changing the culture of schools so that the old norms or ways of doing "school" are replaced with collaboration and teamwork (Wang & Zepeda, 2013). If teacher leaders are to thrive, the culture needs to be such that teachers are engaged in shared collaborative experiences to work on highlighted focused areas for their own improvement. Murphy (2013) highlights how American teachers' relationships are largely private, autonomous, and equal, thereby creating a feeling of isolation. Protocols and structures lay the groundwork that then support teachers interacting and collaborating. The way these structures are perceived and who teachers think is really running the initiative or reform can impact their effectiveness. According to some, the old adage that perception is reality is an important consideration when implementing structures and movements. This thinking suggests that leadership is built on influence and interaction rather than power and authority (Poekert, 2012 as cited in Charteris & Smardon, 2014).

District Supports for Collaborative Learning

A basic tenet of support within the organization needs to be a focus on continuous

learning for all teachers with access to professional learning with colleagues. This approach

requires an understanding of how teachers perceive change, role differentiation and practices.

Leaders need to be strategic because the context impacts the possibility of any initiative's

success. Understanding their role as leaders, in this dynamic, is important when considering and

making strategic decisions. A teacher leader is a unique position within a learning organization.

Embracing the concept of a teacher leader requires a thoughtful explanation of how teachers can

be leaders within an organization. The organization needs communicate with clarity how teacher

leaders are teachers who take leadership of their own learning. It takes time for positional leaders

in an organization to explain how teacher leaders are decidedly different than administrators. It is

necessity to explain how these teachers and their practices around building capacity should be

separate from the evaluation process. The aligning of formal evaluation with teacher leaders'

responsibilities impinges upon instructional risk-taking behaviors that organizations should

encourage. A better stance for administrators developing teacher leaders would be to encourage

growth plans as opposed to annual evaluations, for example (Lumpkin, Claxton, & Wilson,

2014). Encouraging teachers to advocate for their own growth should be a value for all teachers

and positional leaders.

Conceptualizing the roles of and incentives for teachers, and leveraging teacher

leadership to redesign the instructional delivery model and the design of schools, is

transformative work. For some individuals, public education is an inflexible, bureaucratic

institution where change tends to be incremental, piecemeal, and strongly resisted" (Curtis, 2016,

p. 2). That belief will prevail unless leaders provide ongoing supports to dispel these notions

among staff. A core support that needs to be provided to dispel this idea is encouraging

teachers to try out new ideas and share their findings and experiences with others during

professional learning opportunities (Patton, Parker, & Tannehill, 2015). Such collaboration

happens when district leaders work to align and strategically plan for monitoring and supporting

teachers, as they become leaders of their own learning. Teachers look to their colleagues for

support. Leaders have the ability to design and provide such support systems. "In a highly

coherent and cohesive system, people will be able to articulate effortlessly what they are doing in

their classrooms and the school as a whole, how their actions connect to the wider system

priorities, and what supports are in place for them to advance those priorities" (Fullan, Rincón-

Gallardo, & Hargreaves, 2015, p. 11). Quite simply, professional development and teacher

leadership requires the support of positional leaders and teachers for working together. This

entails processes that allow decision making to be a structure that involves teachers in sharing

perceptions and having a say in how they collaborate.

Collaboration is an approach to professional learning that school staffs have been trying

to develop over many years. One example, Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), have

gone through three generation of change (Hargreaves and O'Connor, 2017). These researchers

contend that the latest iteration involves teachers leading work about concerns and goals that

matter to them. Teacher leadership is no different. If schools are to support this concept of

teachers leading their learning, then the supports, communication and the release of authority

must be established and ongoing.

Conclusion

The research found in the literature review illuminates important elements in the

conceptual framework. "Successful organizations are characterized by a distributive, collective,

complementary form of leadership, wherein a group of carefully selected individuals can

become a highly effective team that delivers much more than the sum of its parts" (Northouse,

2016, p. 323). The delivery of a teacher leadership initiative is about collaboration and this

mindset requires distributing the leadership. As seen in Figure 3, this study aims to understand

how teachers perceive this framework as a means for improving capacity and reducing isolation.
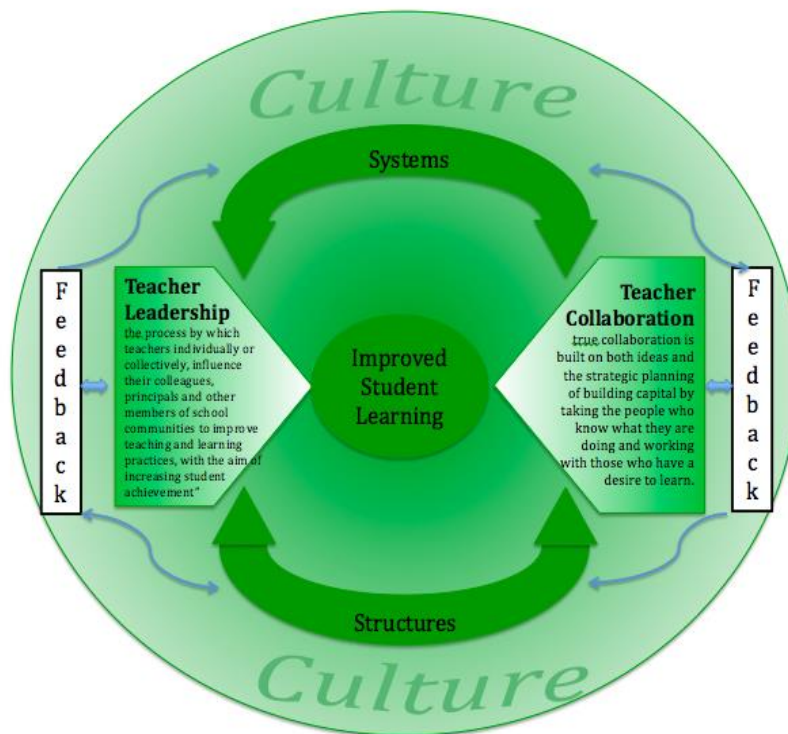
Figure 3. The Connection between Roles, Systems and Structures in Teacher Leadership

(Rafferty, 2018)

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this mixed methods case study was to understand teachers' perceptions about a district initiative that seeks to empower teacher leadership for staff in one school district. The study aimed to understand what teachers perceive as important in the implementation of teacher leadership as a district improvement strategy. This chapter explains the methods and procedures that were used to answer the questions that guide this study. Specifically, the first section describes the setting where the study occurred. The setting is an organization where leadership moves were enacted to develop and support teacher leaders. The description also provides context for the teachers within the study by illuminating the perceptions of teachers within the teacher leadership initiative. This section also summarizes the district initiatives around teacher leadership that were enacted as an improvement strategy. The study interprets the roles taken and decisions district leaders made in order to grow teacher leadership across the district that teachers perceived as the most effective. This section will also address data sources, data analysis and any limitations or conflicts of interests in the study.

Setting

The Reading School District is a school district comprised of two towns that are situated between two urban areas. According to the United States Census 2010, one town had a population of 9,591 with 24% of the population under the age of eighteen. The median income was $79,387 with 5.1% of the population living under the poverty level. The other town had a population of 3,607 with 24.7% of the population under the age of eighteen. The median income was $69,542 with 2.6% of the population living under the poverty level.

The Reading School District consists of two elementary schools, one middle school and one high school. The district also has a regional vocational program at the high school, which draws from 23 sending towns. According to the Connecticut State Department of Education's District Profile and Performance for School Year 2015-2016, the district had 1,768 students and a per pupil expenditure rate of $18,082. The percentage of students who are English learners is 1.1%. The percentage of students who are eligible for free or reduced meals is 9.2. The district has 122 teachers and instructors. Of this staff, 20.9% are special education teachers or instructors. The district has five central office administrators: Superintendent, Director of Teaching and Learning, Director of Special Services, Director of Human Resources and Director of Finance (Figure 4). The schools have seven school-based administrators. The elementary schools have one principal at each building. The middle school has a principal and an assistant principal. The high school has a principal, an assistant principal, and a dean/athletic director. The elementary schools have instructional leaders in literacy and math. The secondary schools have instructional leaders only in literacy. All of the schools have an instructional leader for special educations. In Figure 4, the district leadership structure can be viewed as such:

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                         │  Superintendent  │
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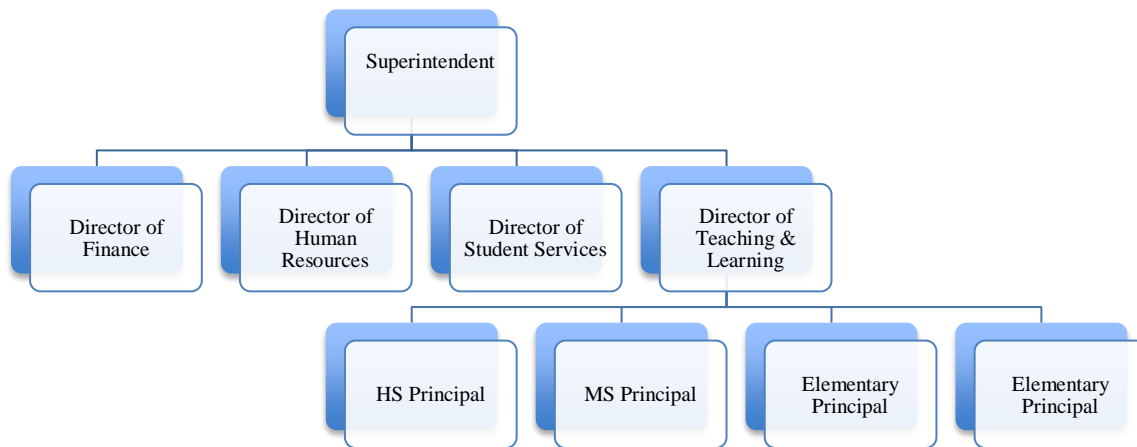
Figure 4. The Reading School District Leadership Structure

The Board of Education (BOE) has developed a series of goals to in a quest to move the

school district forward and to improve student achievement. The BOE goal that most directly

relates to teacher leadership is: "Reading School District will attract, develop and retain the

highest quality teachers, administrators and staff" (ReadSD.org). Teacher leadership is an area of

interest for school leaders as an improvement strategy to reach this Board of Education goal. The

district leadership team has aligned resources towards the improvement of teaching and learning

by increasing teacher leadership.

Smarter Balanced Assessment Data

On average, the district tends to outperform the state averages in all tested areas (English

Language Arts, Math, Science and High Needs Students) on the Smarter Balanced Assessments.

The most recent results show a slight downturn in math and English Language Arts (Table 1). Of

note, the district just recently revised the curriculum in both of these areas.

Table 1.

Smarter Balanced Results*

District	Year	ELA % Level 3 Or Above	Math % Level 3 Or Above
Reading	14-15	60.3	45.9
Reading	15-16	63	46.3
Reading	16-17	60.7	41.1
State	16-17	54.2	45.6

*Source: Connecticut State Department of Education 2017.

District Priorities: 2015-2017

The district leaders began to engage in a process of gathering feedback and developing a district strategy map that was based on student data and feedback from individual schools. The district leadership had made a commitment to invest in teacher leadership as a lever to raise student achievement. This priority aligns to BOE goal number two which is related to the attraction, development and retaining of the highest quality teachers. Ross, Adams, Bondy, Dana, Dodman, & Swain (2011) have supported the idea that teacher quality matters the most to improve student achievement. The district has built its improvement strategy around this notion. The district has identified a through line from Central Office to students in designing and naming its improvement strategy. In Appendix F, there is a chart that contains the initial focus areas identified as means to developing teachers' capacity and raising student achievement. This is referred to as the district strategy map.

The district strategy map was the result of school-based visits made by the Superintendent in order to gather teacher voice to inform the writing of the district priorities. The

chart encompasses, with feedback from each school during the fall of 2016, some of the initial focus areas for leaders, for schools, and for teachers, as well as for students. A common thread that can be found in the map is teacher leadership and teacher collaboration. Additionally, the idea of voice is highlighted as an important element of organization development. When reviewing each individual school strategy, there is evidence of teacher leadership as a force for leveraging teacher capacity and improving student achievement.

Data Sources

The study used two main sources of data. The data were drawn from a teacher perception survey and semi-structured interviews with selected staff from all buildings within the district. This data from the interviews formed the basis of a qualitative understanding of how teacher leadership has impacted one school district.

District-level Documentation

Data collection began in the 2016-2017 school year. This year the district started a Teacher Leadership Academy developed in conjunction with the state university. The initiative came with a syllabus for learning and an expectation for participation. This initiative is the starting point of a formal system and structure for teacher leadership as an improvement strategy. Twenty-one teachers from all levels and all four schools signed up to be part of the first cohort. The first cohort of teacher leaders participated in a weeklong summer professional learning opportunity to build their teaching capacity. The researcher used the exit surveys to help to design the research questions that helped drive this study. (See Appendix A) This exit survey also set up a purposeful sampling of participants based on their self-selected role as a teacher leader. Eighteen out of twenty or 90% percent of the teachers who participated in the teacher leader academy rated the experience a five out of five in terms of its ability to help them grow

professionally. The teachers in the cohort continued to meet once a month formally across the school year as a group to develop their capacity. The teachers also met informally to engage in cross-school and cross-level visitations around a guided focus for observation during classroom observations. Data in the form of various documents were collected around the planned visits between teachers as well as meeting agendas designed to deliver professional learning to teachers.

Teacher Leadership Documents

Data was collected from a variety of sources involved in the teacher leadership rollout. The data documents include surveys, interviews and organizational documents related to the district's Teacher Leadership Academy. Specifically, the data is as follows: a) syllabus describing and content covered as well as meeting dates from the teacher leadership academy, b) documents describing the variety of supports put in place to enable teacher collaboration, c) archival teacher surveys from teachers who participated in the academy over the last two years, and d) district leadership meeting agendas. The documents were reviewed to capture important themes related to teacher leadership.

Interviews

A series of interviews of teacher leaders were conducted and transcripts are a source of data. There were two categories of interviews related to the perceptions of the teacher leadership movement. They were as follows:

1. Teachers who signed up for the first teacher leadership cohort
2. Teachers who signed up for the second teacher leadership cohort.

These staff members who were interviewed were asked to identify their perceptions of the teacher leadership movement.

The interviews provided information about a) teacher leadership and its impact on teaching practice, b) teachers' perceptions of district supports that facilitated teacher leadership and teacher voice, c) teachers' perceptions around district support within their schools. The researcher used a semi-structured interview protocol to provide flexibility in responding as well as using questions aligned to major research questions in the study (Creswell, 2015). The intention in gathering this data was to engage in a process of qualitative data collection to understand ideas central to this study. Creswell states that the intent of "qualitative research is to understand and explore the central phenomenon, not to develop a consensus of opinion from the people you study" (Creswell, 2015, p. 129). The data collection captured the emerging themes of cultural changes within the school district. Themes reflect the teachers' perceptions of the teacher leadership movement and their perceptions of professional collaboration within that initiative.

The teachers in the first cohort of teacher leaders completed a series of surveys about professional learning, collaboration and teacher capacity. The first data collection involved the gathering of data to understand teachers' knowledge about using feedback to guide learning and their perceptions about their capacity to deliver effective feedback, thus their capacity to use a research-based instructional strategy. This same survey was delivered to building leaders. The purposeful sampling of these individuals developed leadership's understanding of the central phenomenon in play for teachers in the teacher leadership program. The district launched a second cohort in school year 2017-2018. Artifacts from their experiences have been recorded as well. The intention of gathering and reviewing these artifacts was to get a sense of how teachers perceived the district supports for teacher leadership and the development of collaborative learning communities led by teachers.

Data Analysis

The study employed an interpretive qualitative research design (Creswell, 2015). The research process involved collecting the words and perceptions of teachers within the organization to better understand how the roles and supports from district leaders impacted their learning and capacity to teach as well as the collaborative culture of the organization. The survey and interviews provide documentation of teachers' perceptions concerning feeling isolated and cut off from learning from one another. The data was coded and analyzed to gather the themes and the larger meaning within the findings. To triangulate the findings, central office leaders reviewed teacher leader surveys for common understandings and findings around themes that emerged through the data. Bloomberg and Volpe highlight that "analysis is essentially about searching for patterns and themes that emerge from the findings. The goal is to discover what meaning you can make of them by comparing your findings both within and across groups" (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012, p. 14). Specifically, the study illuminated the comparison between strong district supports and a correlation to teacher satisfaction when engaged in teacher collaboration.

Additionally, the study employed a theory-driven quantitative survey instrument. The survey is based on a teacher perception instrument developed by William, Larkin & Kensler (2014). The survey instrument, entitled *Teachers' Perception of Teacher Leadership Survey* (William, Larkin, Bond, 2014) is aligned to the Teacher Leader Model Standards developed by the Teacher Leadership Exploratory Consortium (2011). Specifically the researcher's survey aligns to Domains I, III, and IV of the William, Larkin and Kensler survey instrument. The unit of analysis for this study was teachers' perceptions of their professional growth as related to the systems and structures and supports provided to them from district leadership within the

organization. The survey assessed teacher growth across the following Teacher Leader

model Standards: 1) fostering a collaborative culture, 2) promoting professional learning, 3)

facilitating improvements in instruction (Teacher Leadership Exploratory Consortium, 2011).

The data analysis process of the surveys and interviews used a closed coding system in

order to categorize the data in frames related to the three areas of focus in this study. This

process illuminated teachers' perceptions of the positional leaders' organizational decisions and

the possible impact of those decisions.
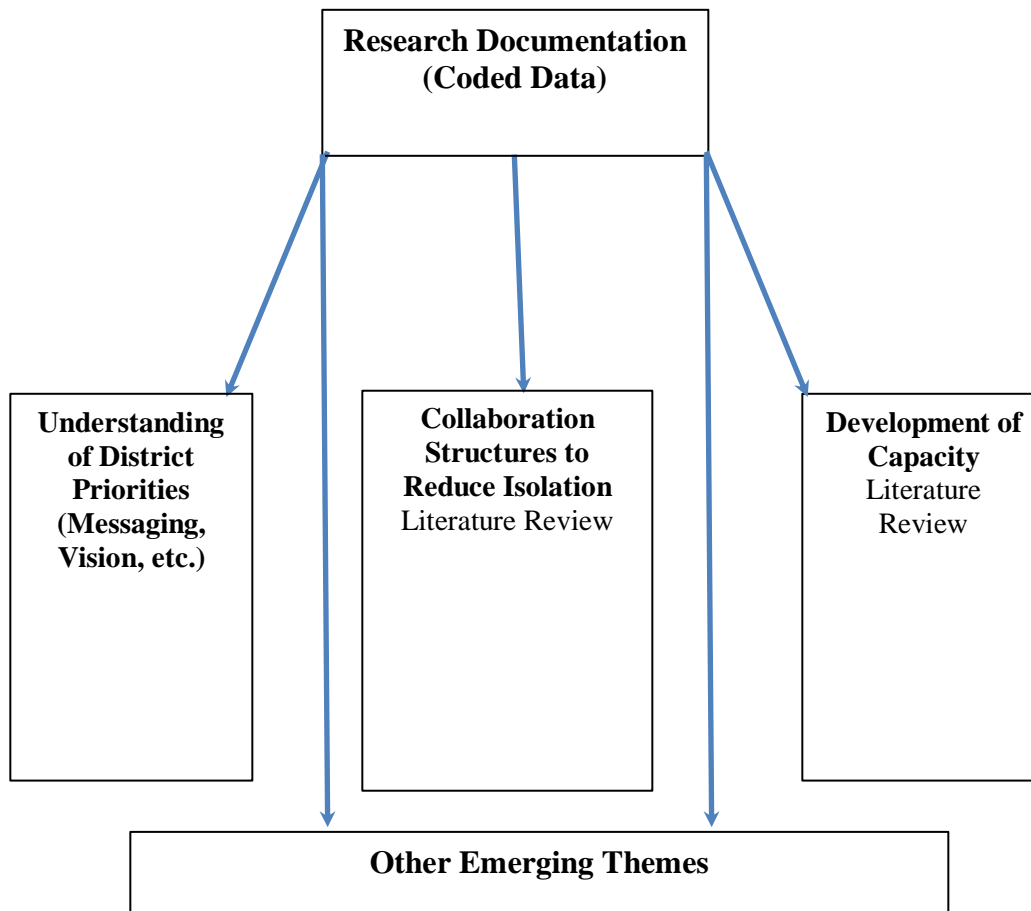
Figure 5. Research Coding Process

Participant Rights

Teacher leaders who participated in the Teacher Leader Academy cohort were enrolled on a voluntary basis. Prior to data analysis process, they had the ability to withdraw from the study without judgment or retribution. All survey data collected from teachers in the program has been anonymous and without forced participation in these data collection points over time. Participants were aware that the survey and interviews are confidential and would not be shared with any other administrators or fellow teachers.

Possible Limitations

In 2015, the researcher joined Reading School District as Director of Teaching and Learning. As part of the central office staff, the researcher had access to information about the district's operations that many others did not. The district leadership has been a central part of the decisions regarding the development, implementation and modifications to the teacher leadership as a district strategy for improvement. Agendas and planning documents have been maintained and archived and continue to inform decisions made over time. The central office leadership has influenced the decisions around the roles of district leaders, the systems and structures developed and the supports provided for teachers and buildings.

In light of the fact that the researcher previously served as a curriculum leader and as a lead Reading Recovery teacher, he has extensive experience in developing teacher leadership. Based on past successes evident in teacher surveys and interviews, the researcher has a strong belief in the effectiveness of the teacher leadership initiative at the center of this research study. This belief could potentially influence the level of research bias.

The researcher sought to identify a stronger link to understand how a district-developed teacher leadership initiative can increase teacher effectiveness and morale. The study examined

the link between the district's roles and leaders' reactions and the impact on teachers and classrooms. The researcher did not directly supervise or evaluate teachers engaged in this study. There is little possibility of coercion via supervisory roles and responsibilities. Although none of the teacher leaders who have offered survey or interview data are the researcher's direct reports, the use of open-ended questioning in the data allowed for a wide range of responses that vary from one respondent to the next. It is understood that when a central office leader gathers information face to face, participants may be cautious about speaking honestly about their experiences.

Conclusion

This case study undertook the quantitative and qualitative understanding of teachers in one district and their perceptions around their district's culture for teacher leadership and collaboration. The study employed an interpretive qualitative research design (Creswell, 2015). It was rooted in phenomenology to focus on teachers' experiences from their perspective (Roberts, 2010). Through surveys and interviews, the researcher garnered themes reflecting the cultural impact of a teacher leadership movement in the district. The study documents how supports impacted teacher isolation and promoted teacher leaders as empowered learners.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

The findings from this case study are grounded in the perceptions of teachers and the effects of a teacher leadership initiative in one district. This case study analysis involved a mixed method procedure of documenting teacher perceptions using a quantitative survey instrument and conducting a qualitative data analysis of twelve semi-structured interviews.

The data collection process began with a blanket request to all teachers who participated in the Reading School District Teacher Leader Academy (TLA). This was done with an opt-in letter sent to all participants (Appendix E). The teachers who agreed were provided the parameters of the study and the parameters of the data collection process as well as the question prompts for a semi-structured interview (Appendix D). A total of sixty teachers received the initial request to participate in the study. The next step was to identify a pool of staff members to interview. The researcher used a purposeful sampling method to identify particular staff to interview. This purposeful sampling method was designed to gather participants from both the first and second teacher leader cohorts as well as teachers from all four schools and representatives from inside and outside the classroom. The results from the interviews document teachers' perceptions about teacher leadership through the lenses of thinking about their collaborative actions and their efficacy for developing their own capacity. The context of the study was the teacher leadership initiative and it drew data from different teacher leadership cohorts, different levels (elementary, middle and high school) as well as different degrees of teaching experience.

Out of the 60 requests made to staff members, 34 teachers responded to the survey. The district had two cohorts of teachers participate in the Teacher leadership Academy. The first cohort had 21 teachers and the second cohort had 40 teachers. In terms of numbers of respondents, cohort one had 15 teachers participate (45% of the total responders) and cohort two had 18 teachers participate (54.5% of the total respondents). One teacher did not answer the question about which teacher leader cohort they had been enrolled in. It is worth noting that the first cohort of teachers had a higher participation rate as a group (71% to 42.5%) and that one teacher from cohort one is no longer working in the school district and was unavailable to partake in the survey.
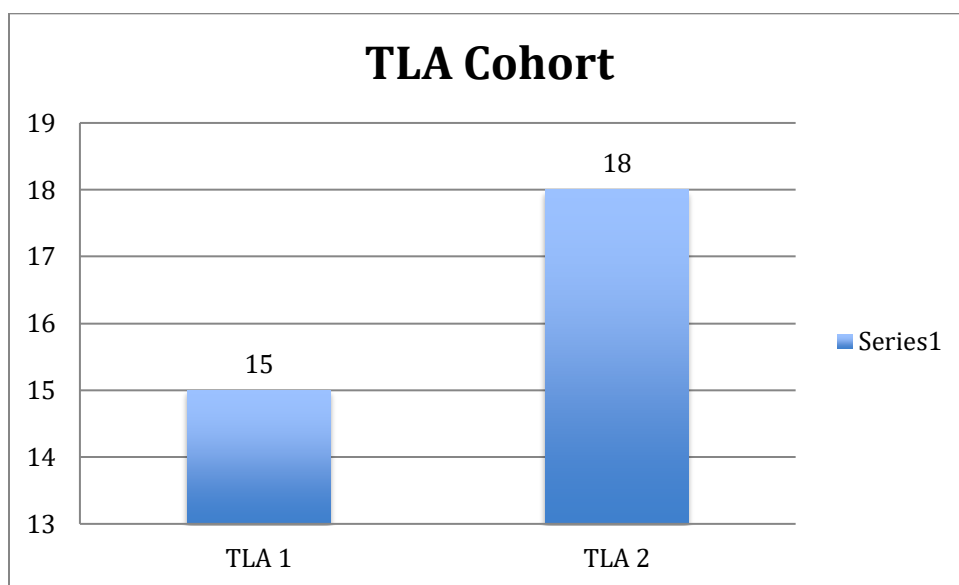
Figure 6: Teacher leaders and the teacher leader cohort they represent

Demographic Data

The teacher leaders who responded to the survey came from all school levels of the district. The representation across elementary school, middle school, and high school levels was equal. Eighteen, or 52.9% of the respondents worked at the elementary level. Seven, or 20.6% of

the respondents, worked at the middle school level and nine, or 26.5% of the respondents

work at the high school level.

Teacher Leaders by Level
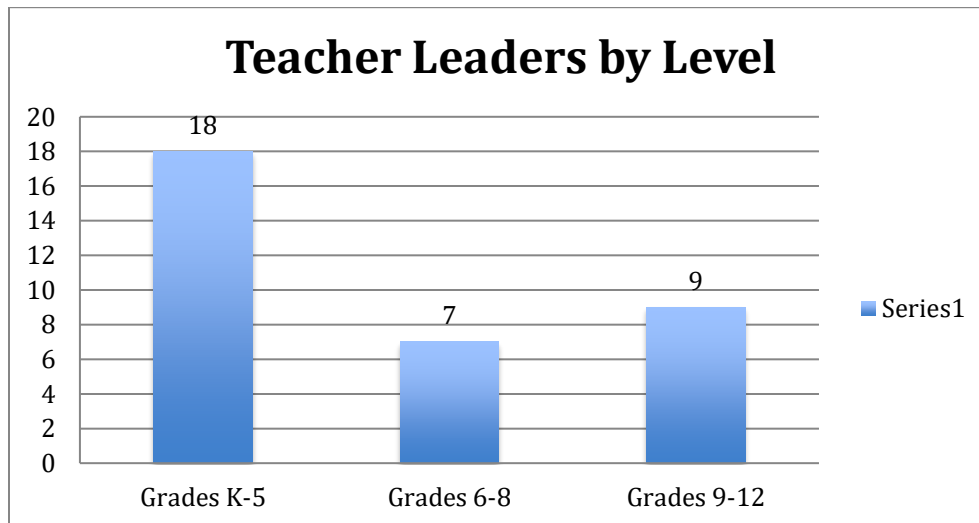
Figure 7: Teacher leaders and their assignment within the district

The teachers surveyed had various levels of experience as educators. As part of the

survey, teachers were asked how many years they had been employed as educators. None of the

respondents indicated that they had been employed in the field of education for less than three

years. Three, or 8.8% of the respondents had between 4-10 years of experience in education.

Nineteen, or 55.9% of the respondents had 11-20 years of experience. Finally 12, or 35.3%, of

the respondents had over 20 years of experience in education.
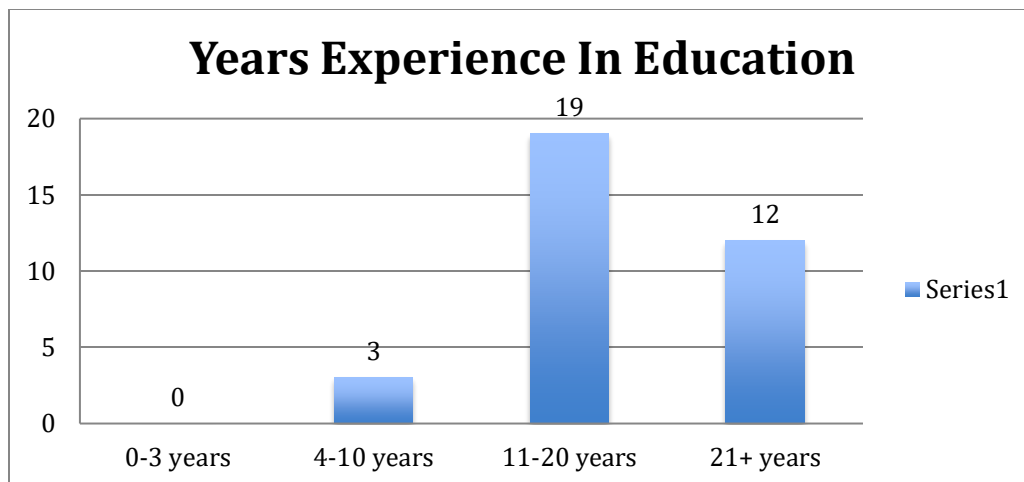
Figure 8: Teacher leaders and their years experience in education

The results indicate that most of the teacher leaders who responded to the survey were well experienced. Over ninety percent of the responders had over 10 years experience in education. The respondents also came from a variety of roles within the district. In Tables 2 and 3, it can be seen that the respondents come from all school levels, both cohorts and work inside and outside the classroom within the district.

Table 2.

Demographics of the Staff Interviewed

Background	Trait One	Trait Two
Position	Classroom Teachers: 8	Related Services / Support Staff: 4
Level	Elementary: 6	Secondary: 6
Teaching Experience	Average Tenure (Region): 16.75 years	Range of Experience: 2 years to 30 years
Teacher Leadership Cohort	Cohort One: 8	Cohort Two: 4

Table 3.

Interviewees and Role Within the District

Interviewee	Grade Level	Years of Experience	Role
Interviewee #1	K-5	15-20	Classroom Teacher
Interviewee #2	K-5	20+	Support Staff
Interviewee #3	K-5	1-4	Support Staff
Interviewee #4	K-5	15-20	Classroom Teacher
Interviewee #5	K-5	20+	Classroom Teacher
Interviewee #6	K-5	15-20	Classroom Teacher
Interviewee #7	6-8	20+	Classroom Teacher
Interviewee #8	6-8	10-14	Support Staff
Interviewee #9	6-8	20+	Classroom Teacher
Interviewee #10	9-12	10-14	Support Staff
Interviewee #11	9-12	10-14	Classroom Teacher
Interviewee #12	9-12	15-20	Classroom Teacher

The survey produced additional insights into the perceptions of teachers in three categories: the district supports, the examples of teacher collaboration and the impact of the teacher leadership academy on teaching and learning. This chapter highlights the insights within these categories and answers the research questions related to teacher isolation and perceptions about effective district supports for teacher collaboration.

Survey Data

The first set of data addresses the results of the quantitative survey. The purpose of the survey was to document teacher perceptions in three categories that are identified in the Teacher Leader Model Standards (Teacher Leadership Exploratory Consortium, 2011):

1. Teacher perceptions of district supports

2. Teacher perceptions around collaboration and professional learning practices, and

3. Teacher perceptions of teacher leadership, culture and learning

The first set of questions on the survey was focused on the concept of teachers talking with one another as professionals. The survey aimed to document if teachers believed that their school has a culture built on talking about teaching and learning. Figure 9 illustrates how the teacher leaders perceived to what degree their fellow teachers focused on teaching and learning. The chart demonstrates how teacher leaders perceived the supports the district provided around time, variety of ways to share teaching practices, and resources.
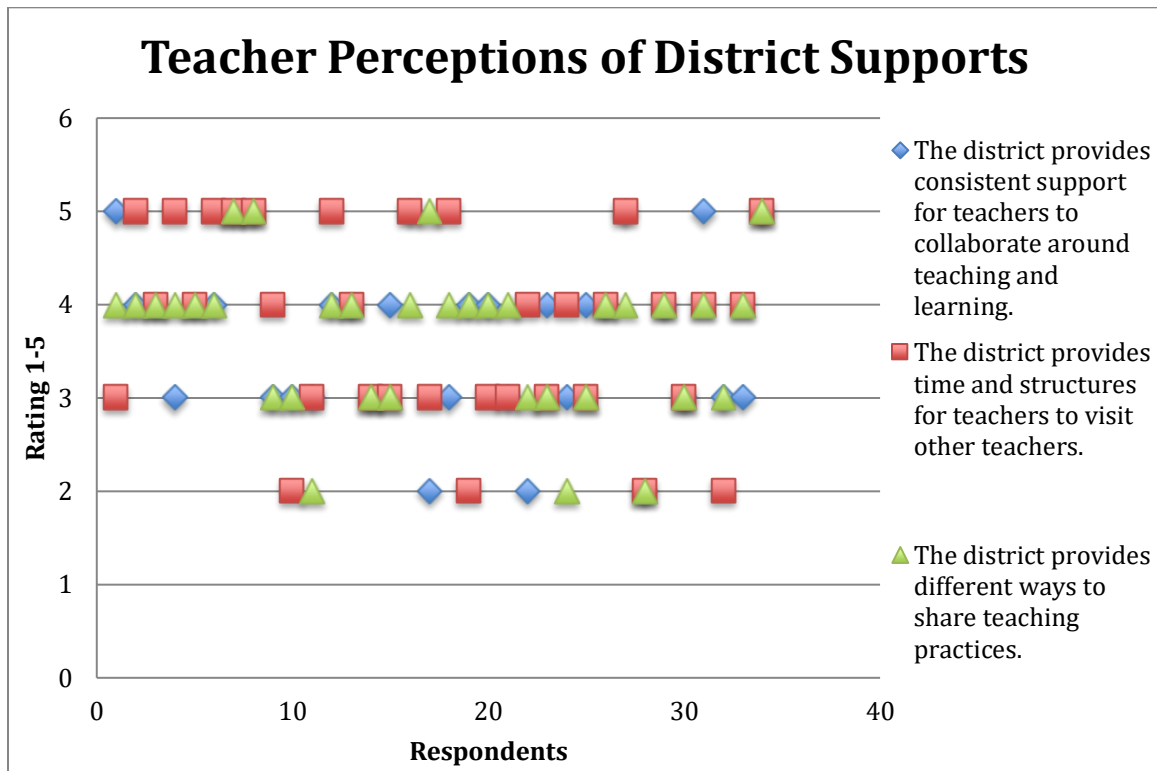
Figure 9: Survey responses to teacher perceptions of district supports.

This chart displays the range of answers to the three questions regarding the district supports for teacher collaboration. The chart shows the range of responses from teachers and their perceptions of the supports provided by the district. The score range runs from 1 (none) to 5 (all).

In Figure 10, the teachers responded to three questions about their perceptions of how receptive their fellow staff members were to the various ways and times that the district provided for teachers to collaborate. The survey assessed teachers in the teacher leadership cohorts on their perceptions of how well their colleagues responded to district supports for increasing collaboration and reducing teacher isolation.

Teacher Leader Perceptions of How Fellow Teachers Perceive District Supports
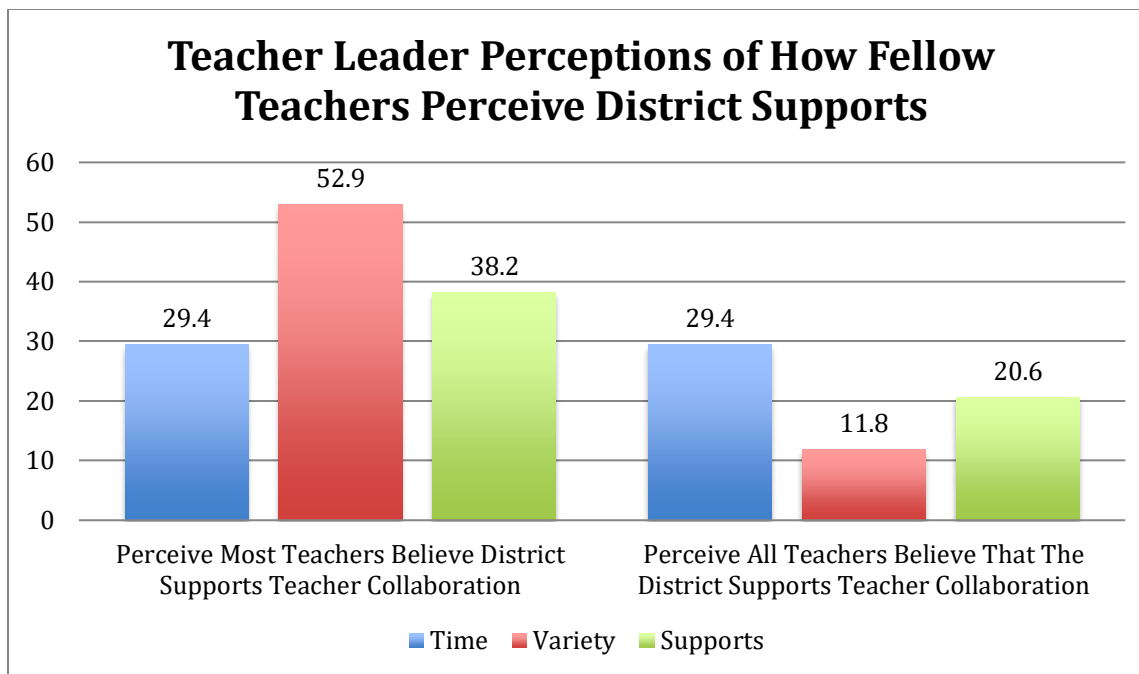
Figure 10: How Teacher Leaders Perceived How Their Fellow Staff Members Viewed the District Support for Teacher Collaboration. This chart displays the perceptions of teacher leaders and how they viewed the district supports provided for time, variety and supports. The score range runs from 1 (none) to 5 (all).

The survey assessed how teacher leaders perceived the way their fellow staff members viewed the district support for teacher collaboration. For 58.8% of the teachers surveyed, they felt that most or all of the teachers in their school believed that the district provided consistent support as well as time for teacher collaboration. In terms of the district providing a variety of ways for teachers to share teaching practices, 64.7% of the responses rated most or all of the teachers believe that there are a variety of ways to collaborate. When considering all three questions about district supports for increasing collaboration, 60.7% of respondents believe that most or all teachers perceive that the district supports are open to the teachers as ways to collaborate.

The survey also addressed teachers' perceptions related to teachers leading each other in

their learning. Collaboration reduces isolation and many school staffs are trying to encourage teachers to move away from working in isolation (Fullan, 2016, Goddard, et al., Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2017). "In countries with high performance in education such as Finland, teachers collaborate to a high extent with excellent results as a consequence. In other countries, this appears to be rather difficult to achieve" (Vangrieken, Dochy, Raes, & Kyndt, 2015). Just over 64% of the teachers felt most or all of their colleagues were talking to one another about teaching and learning. On a more encouraging note, 70.6% of the respondents felt that the teachers supported professional learning that was developed and delivered by the teacher leaders or colleagues in their schools.

In considering this foundational idea of teachers supporting professional learning through collaboration, 70.6% of the respondents felt that most or all teachers were supportive. The survey extended beyond assessing the value for this foundational skill to see if teacher leaders felt that their colleagues perceived others as more collaborative. In section two of the survey, the researcher attempted to better understand how teachers perceived teachers collaborating to create a learning community. The surveys aimed to assess the degree to which teacher leaders saw changes in their colleagues specifically around the concept of collaboration as well as in the reduction of isolation of teachers. The survey asked teacher leaders about teachers having a voice in designing professional learning for their colleagues, the sharing of instructional practices, and if they felt more teachers were opening their classrooms for visits from their colleagues in order to discuss teaching practices. In Figure 11, two results closely mirrored each other around the idea of teachers supporting professional learning through their colleagues and opening classrooms to other teachers. Over 70% of the respondents felt that most or all teachers

supported a collaborative learning environment through the leadership of fellow teachers
who were part of the teacher leader academies.
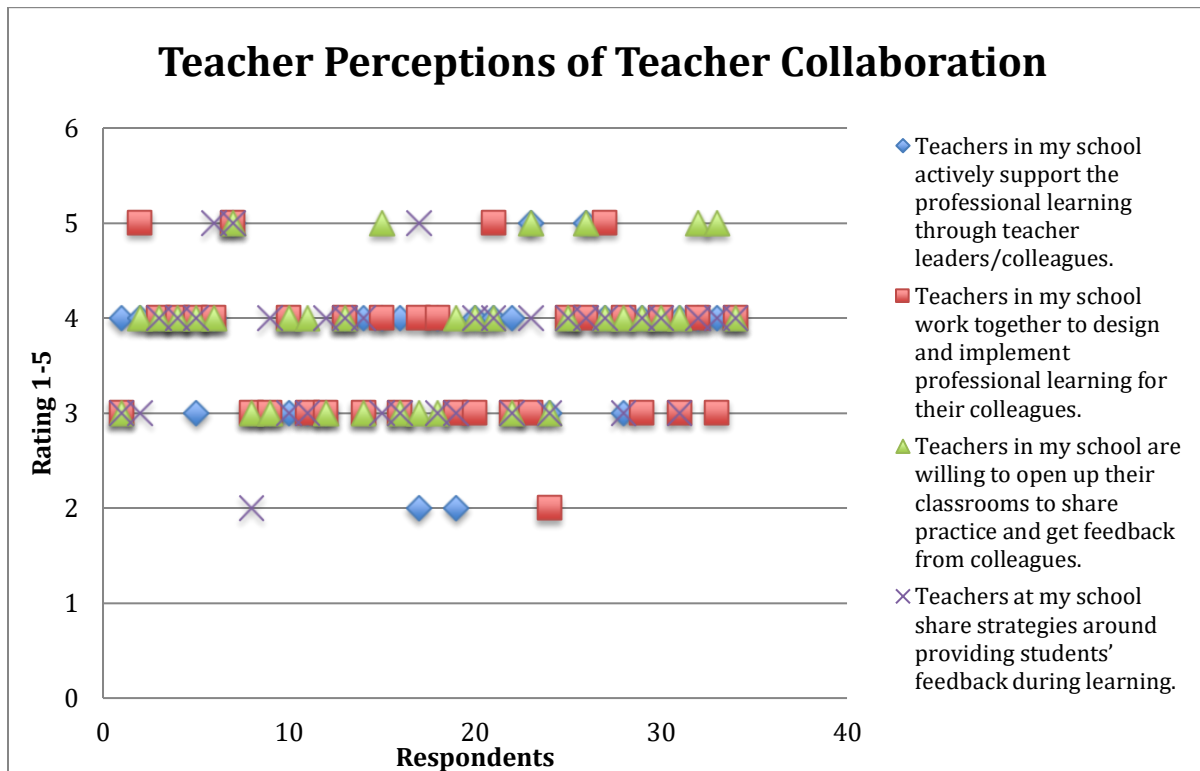
Figure 11: Teachers' Perceptions of Colleagues' Attitudes For Collaboration. This chart
displays the range of responds from teacher leaders and their understanding of how their
peers felt about collaborating with one another. The score range runs from 1 (none) to 5
(all).

Teachers' perceptions were similar around the idea of teachers supporting professional
learning via learning from fellow teachers and the notion of opening classrooms to other teachers
to get feedback as part of a learning community. In Figure 12, it is noted that over 70% of the
respondents felt that most or all teachers supported a collaborative learning environment through
teacher leaders. These respondents believed that most of their colleagues (70%) supported the

idea of learning through collaboration and by opening their classrooms to share practice

with one another.

Teacher Leader Perceptions on How Fellow Teachers View Collaboration
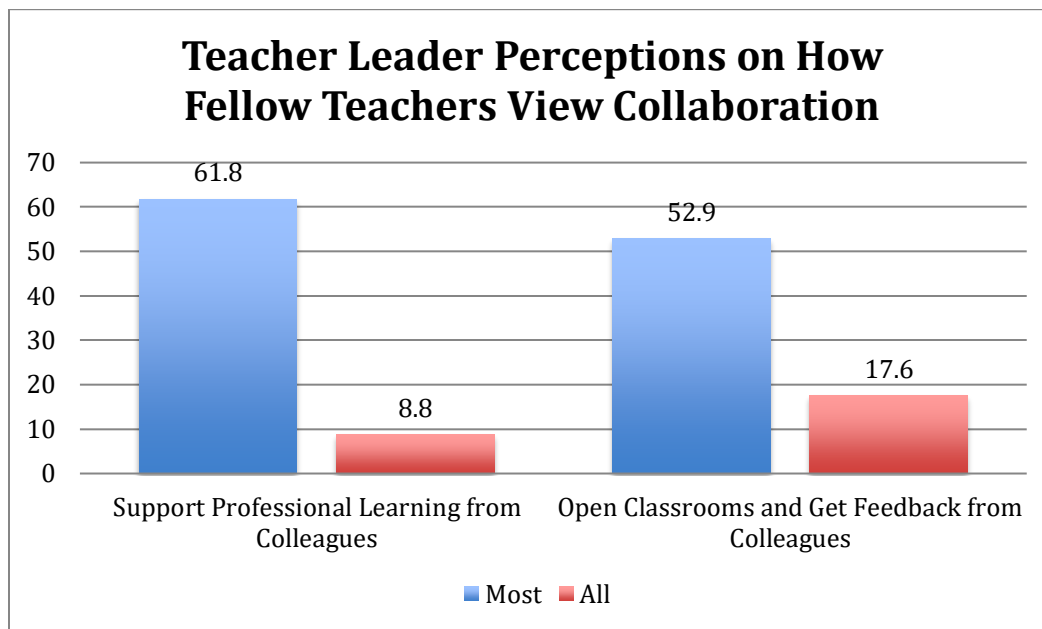
Figure 12: Teacher Perceptions for Teacher Collaboration. This chart illustrates the range

of responses from teacher leaders and how they perceive the school's embracing the idea

of teachers learning from one another.

The survey also documented teacher leaders' perceptions about having a voice in the

design and implementation of professional learning. The question asked teacher leaders how they

perceived their fellow teachers' views on deciding about and designing professional learning

experiences.
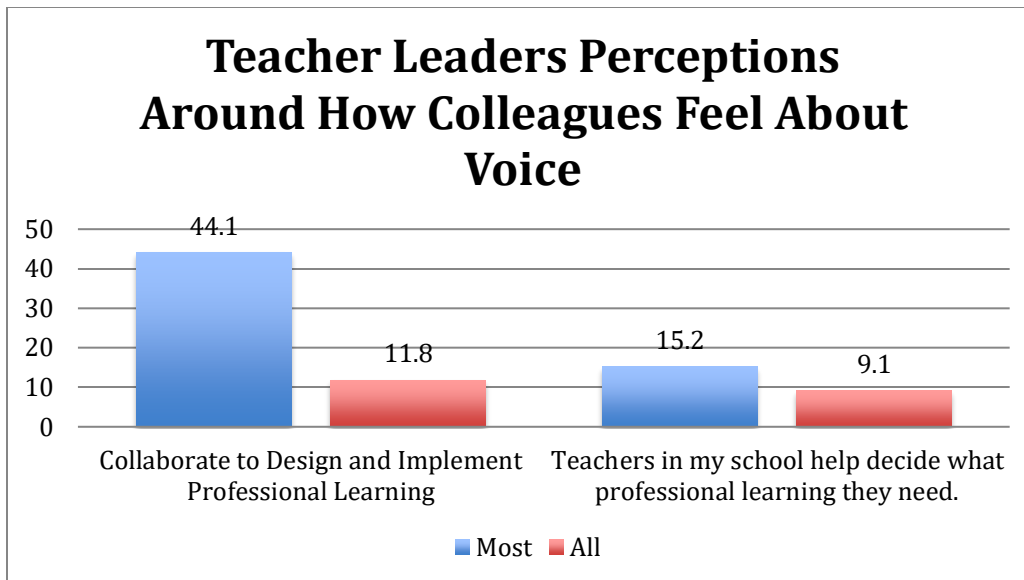
Figure 13: Teacher Perceptions for Voice in Designing Professional Learning. This chart illustrates how teacher leaders feel their colleagues would answer concerning their voice in the development of professional learning.

It is notable that teacher leaders' perceptions around the idea that their colleagues believe that teachers work together to design and implement professional learning is not perceived as high in the area of building a learning community (Figure 13). The results related to teacher voice in designing the professional learning were the lowest ranked scores in the entire survey.

Finally the survey attempted to document if teachers perceived increased teacher and student interest in learning. According to Williams, Lakin, & Kensler (2014), the field needs more research on the link between teacher leadership and student achievement. This case study garnered teacher leaders' perceptions around the building of a learning community and its perceived impact on their fellow colleagues as well as any changes in student engagement or achievement.

Teacher Leaders Perceptions for Collaboration and Connection to Teacher and Student Learning
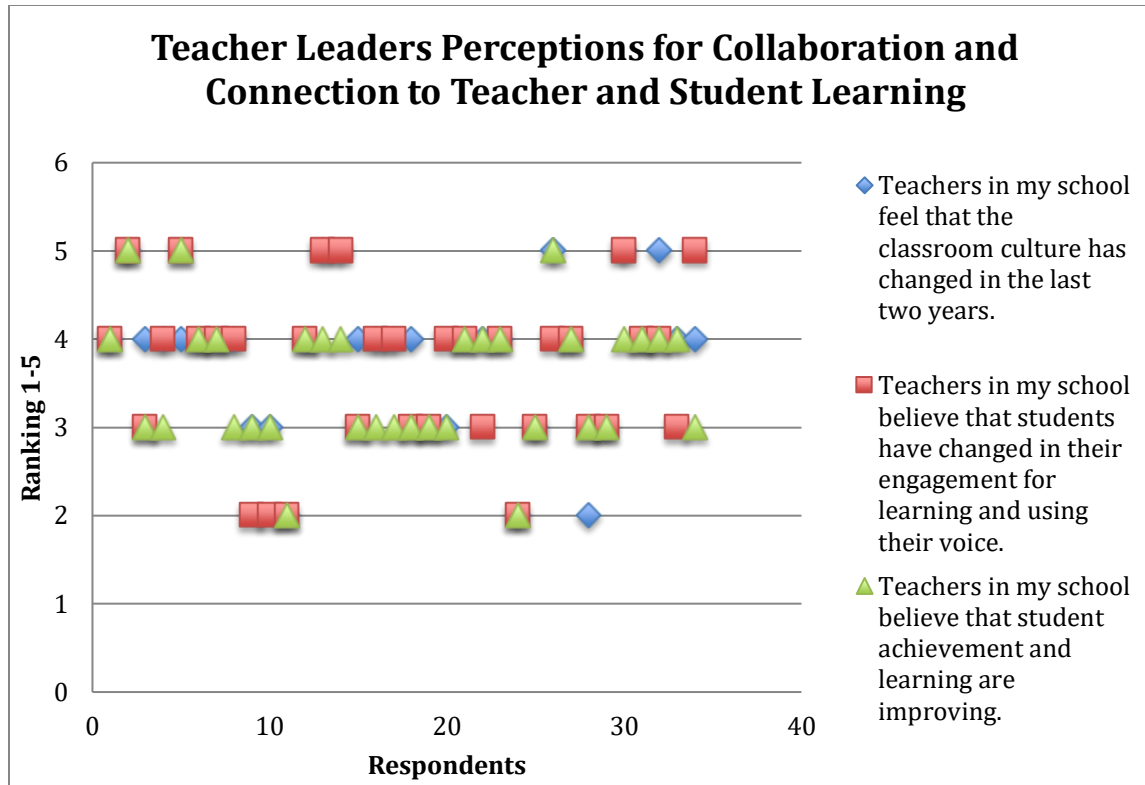
Figure 14: Teacher Leader Perceptions on Connection Between Collaboration and Teacher and Student Learning. This chart illustrates the range of responses that teacher leaders gave in response to how they see teacher leadership impacting classroom culture and student experience. The score range runs from 1 (none) to 5 (all).

In considering the results in relation to the three focus areas (supports, collaboration professional practice), the teacher leaders perceived that one of the other most impacted areas was classroom culture. More than 73% of the respondents perceived that most or all of their colleagues believed that the classroom culture had changed over the last two years of the teacher leader initiative. These results reflect how teacher leaders perceive their colleagues view the culture of a learning community. With more than 70% of the teachers favorably responding to perceiving cultural changes within their school, the results indicate that teacher leadership is impacting the classroom culture as well as improving engagement for teachers and students.

Teacher Leader Perceptions Around How Colleagues View Culture and Engagement
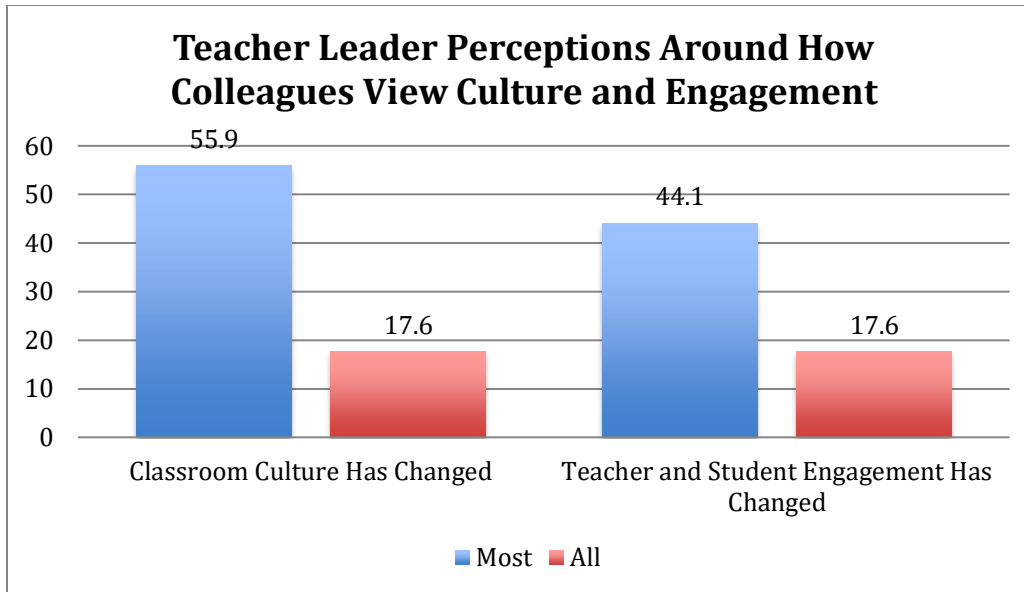
Figure 15: Teachers' Perceptions for Changes to Classroom Culture and Teacher and Student Engagement. This chart illustrates the perception of changes in classroom cultures and student engagement as seen by teacher leaders.

As part of the survey, each respondent was asked to identify one *take away* from being a part of the teacher leadership initiative. The researcher engaged in a coding practice to analyze the responses for links to the data found in the survey results. Specifically the researcher employed descriptive coding to find patterns in the qualitative inquiry process. The process allows the researcher to go from the data to the ideas (Saldaña, 2013) that emerge through pattern analysis. The coding process allows the data to be seen in "separate categories, forcing one to look at each detail, whereas synthesis involves piecing these fragments together to reconstruct a holistic and integrated explanation" (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012, p. 175). The data that emerged could be tied to four themes: collaboration, feedback for connected learning, empowering students, and structures for a learning community. When analyzing the 30 open-ended responses, the following themes emerged:

Table 4.

Themes found in the qualitative section of the survey

Major Theme	Number of Times Referenced	Percent of Responses
Collaboration	11	36%
Feedback for Professional Learning	11	36%
Empower Students	7	23%
Structures for a Learning Community	6	20%

The data found in the open-ended responses matches the data found in the survey. The concepts of structures and collaboration were mentioned in multiple responses as the number one *take away* from the teacher leader initiative. The results indicate that the concepts of teacher collaboration and using feedback as a leverage process to develop professional conversation amongst teachers was identified and named in a majority of the responses. As noted in Table 5, the concepts of collaboration and the development of a learning community to reduce teacher isolation was evident in 72% of the overall responses on the survey.

Table 5.

Percentage of References to Collaboration and Learning Communities

Topics for Research Questions	Number of Times Mentioned	Percent of the Responses
Collaboration and Learning Community	22	72%

The Reading School District implemented a teacher leadership initiative focused on reducing teacher isolation and improving teacher collaboration. The survey results highlight the concept of collaboration or the development of a community of learners in 72% of the open-ended responses. This finding corresponds to the quantitative results in the section of the survey that questions the perception of a collaborative structure developing within the district. Over 70% of the responses indicated that there was a feeling that teachers were open to and moving towards collaborating more in a variety of ways.

Semi-Structured Interviews

The second data set was gathered through a series of semi-structured interviews. The results illuminate an understanding that if teacher leadership grows, "it allows the system to be more self-monitoring and self-improving" (Akert & Martin, 2012, pp. 286-287). The researcher used a purposeful sampling method to identify twelve participants to interview. The participants were assigned a participant identification code upon agreement and submission of the recruitment letter (Appendix D). The twelve teacher leaders were interviewed and their responses were recorded digitally on a password-protected device. The teacher leaders came from all four buildings in the district. The interviewees came from the pool of sixty-one teachers who participated in the two teacher leadership academies that were held over the previous two years in the region. This part of the chapter provides a narrative description of the results from the semi-structured interviews. The section includes the key code words as well as the themes and subthemes identified in the data. It will also provide a narrative summary of each theme along with quotes from the interviewees.

Each transcript was listened to and transcribed for data analysis. The interviews were played back many times for accuracy and understanding of codes recorded. Each interview was

printed, and text was highlighted and annotated for links to the research questions and the conceptual framework. A multiple step process was invoked to move from data to information to knowledge (Bloomberg, 2007). The first step involved reviewing and exploring the data for big ideas. The first coding cycle involved holistic coding. The initial cycle of reading and analyzing the interviews was in the consideration of the big ideas related to the research questions in terms of isolation, collaboration, support and developing capacity. The first results that were garnered were related to two direct questions. The first question was related to the perception teacher leaders had in regards to their understanding of the district priorities.

Data Related to Perception of District Supports

Each participant was asked to explain from their perspective, what they believed the district priorities were over the last two years. These last two years coincide with the launching of a teacher leadership initiative that was rolled out in the district at that time. The district priorities centered on the following areas:

- High Quality Instruction

- Feedback for Focus Teacher Visits

- Teacher Leadership

- Collaboration

When coding the data from an interview question that asked interviewees about their perceptions of the district initiatives, all respondents identified the following areas as the district priority areas:

Table 6.

Teacher Leader Responses to Naming the District Priorities

District Priority Named	Responses	Percent of the Respondents Naming the Priority
Feedback	12	100%
High Quality Instruction	8	66.6%
Teacher Leadership	5	41.6%
Collaboration	5	41.6%

Data Related to Perception of Personal Capacity

In this holistic view, one data point emerged from the direct and structured interview question related to participants' experience within the TLA cohort. To the question regarding developing their capacity as a teacher, 100% of those interviewed stated that their experience in the teacher leader initiative changed them and improved their teaching. The coding process centered on understanding the elements of this learning community as asked in the research question related to collaboration in a learning community.

Themes From Coded Data

In the first cycle of coding there were 263 code references that emerged from the data. These references were analyzed again in order to place the coded data into categories. This second step involved rereading and examining the data to be placed into multiple categories. It involved looking into the initial coding and taking the qualitative data and breaking it down into discrete parts, analyzing for similarities and differences (Saldaña, 2009, p. 81). This process resulted in the distinct categories where code references could be placed to formulate greater

understanding. The categories were then compared to the topics from the research

questions and conceptual framework regarding teacher collaboration and capacity building of

teachers.

Within the data it was found that teacher leaders describe their experiences and

perceptions about their work with commonly used words or phrases. The following table (Table

7) illustrates the number of references to certain words or phrases found upon coding the

transcripts. The repetition of these phrases can be connected to the categories that emerged in the

transcripts.

Table 7.

Frequency of Word Use by Interviewee

Category	Word/Phrase	References	Number of Interviewees Using Word or Phrase
Feedback	Feedback	18	12 (100%)
	Asking questions	9	7 (58.3%)
Capacity	Growth	6	6 (50%)
	Process	10	5 (41.6%)
	Reflect/Reflection	8	6 (50%)
	Improved practice	5	5 (41.6%)

Collaboration	Collaboration	15	5 (41.6%)
	Opening doors/going in classroom	13	10 (83.3%)
	Conversations	8	8 (66.6%)
	Relationships	7	5 (41.6%)
	Debrief	6	5 (41.6%)
Voice	Voice	3	3 (25%)
	Choice	5	4 (33.3%)
	Perception/Perspective	5	5 (41.6%)

These topics were connected to categories that were selected by the researcher because they were connected to the conceptual framework regarding teacher leadership. When the data is categorized, the next step is to look for themes. A theme is a phrase or sentence that identifies what a unit of data is about and what it means. "It is an outcome of coding, categorization and analytic reflection. These themes serve phenomenology to gain a deeper understanding of the nature or meaning of our everyday experiences" (Saldaña, 2009, pp. 139-140). The coding for themes was a cycle to analyze the perceptions of the everyday experiences of the teacher leaders in Reading School District. Through the analysis of the interview data, units of information that contribute to themes or patterns-or the study's findings were identified (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012, p. 192).

After multiple readings and analysis the following code words were captured according to respondents and occurrences. Upon analysis of the transcripts from the semi-structured interviews, the data gather highlighted four major themes and multiple sub-categories that were derived from the data. The following themes emerged when analyzing the code words were:

feedback, collaboration, capacity, and voice. As seen in Table 8, the following themes and

subthemes were found in the interview data that relates to the following four themes.

Table 8.

Themes From the Interview Data

Final Major Themes	Round Two (Refined) Categories	Round One (Initial) Categories
Theme One **Feedback as a** **Common Focus for** **Colleagues**	• Focus of discussions to promote a learning community • Using questions as feedback in learning • Using feedback as a common lens for viewing teaching	• Asking questions • Common language • Validation
Theme Two **Collaboration for** **Improving** **Instruction**	• Professional conversations • Viewing practice • Debrief with colleagues • Planning together	• Conversations • Opening doors/visiting classes • Relationships • Communication • Together
Theme Three **Building Capacity** **for High Quality** **Instruction**	• Process for learning new instructional practices • Reflection of teaching practices • Impacted teaching	• Process • Reflecting • Improved practice • Growth

Theme Four **Teacher Voice**	• Teacher voice for planning learning	• Perspective
		• Choice
	• Providing choice for professional learning	• Perceptions
		• Different ideas/opportunities
	• Considering different ideas	

The goal of the interviews was to document the perceptions from teachers about what supports developed and offered to teachers helped to reduce isolation and what supports created a system of professional learning that promoted a learning community and promoted collaboration.

Theme One: Feedback as a Common Focus for Colleagues

Feedback has no effect in a vacuum; to be powerful in its effect, there must be a learning context to which feedback is addressed (Hattie & Timperley, 2007, p. 82). In the Reading School District feedback became a district priority that was designed to bring teachers together to learn how to improve their use of feedback from leader to teacher, teacher to teacher, teacher to student, student to teacher and student to student. Therefore, the survey and the interviews were designed to understand how teachers perceived feedback as a tool to bring teachers together to share teaching practices. The use of feedback as a focus became an area for bringing teachers together to discuss teaching. To further clarify, teachers in the district were also introduced to the concept of effective questioning as a form of feedback. "Asking the right question at the right time affords the possibility that there is another way to approach an issue, thereby building that person's capacity to solve not just the problem right in front of her, but future ones, too" (Stevenson, 2017, p. 33).

When analyzing the data, 100% of the respondents identified feedback as district support that was designed to enable teachers to work together in visiting each other's classrooms as well as a link between all staff members. During the interviews, teachers remarked on how feedback had operated as a link for teachers to communicate about when working together and as an area for self-reflection. Interviewee 8, a middle school support staff member, stated that: "People saw my passion for feedback and how it was ingrained in a person and people cared about it." The data from the interviews indicates that teacher leaders understood that feedback was an area of focus that created a observational focus for classroom visits and operated as a instructional area for colleague discussions. Interviewee 12, a high school classroom teacher, stated what was well known about the district priorities. This was evident in the survey results as well as the direct questioning in the interviews. They stated that, "The district priorities have focused on feedback and planning activities that foster feedback and to work hard with staff."

For some teacher leaders, the time spent conversing and reflecting was a new experience for them as educators. The deep study of how feedback is used across the organization became a course of teachers in the teacher leadership cohorts. Many interviewees explained how it affected their interactions with peers as well as students. As stated by Interviewee 6, an elementary support staff teacher, "I think it's more than just my teaching. I think it's impacted me in all areas of my life because it's definitely led me to be more thoughtful in my approach-in my relationships with people and in my conversations with people."

The Reading School District used feedback as the focus of training in the teacher leadership academy workshops. The teachers, regardless of role or position, were able to engage in the learning and therefore the initiative. This central focus on feedback enabled colleagues to engage in visitations to each other's classroom with the focus on watching teacher to student

feedback. It was also a central piece in any debriefing session teachers partook in as

learners. This focus reduced isolation by providing a link from colleague to colleague. It is as

Fullan (2016) asks of schools to start to understand to what extent do teachers work together in a

focused collaborative way to improve learning.

Theme Two: Collaboration for Improving Instruction

The Reading School District prioritized teacher collaboration as a key improvement

strategy. "When teacher collaboration is centered on instructional improvement in schools, it is

more likely to build real capability and hence enhance the resolve of teachers that they possess

the ability necessary to achieve student learning goals" (Goddard, et al., 2015, p. 504).

In reviewing the data around collaboration, 83.3% of the respondents discussed the ways

teachers were now opening their doors and classrooms to each other for visiting. This correlates

to the survey results where teacher leaders believe that 70% of their colleagues supported a

collaborative learning environment. It was also noted in analysis of the transcript data that there

was an acceptance to visit classrooms and share teaching practices across schools and levels of

the organization. The collaboration was centered on trying to learn how to use feedback to

engage students and to discuss the elements of effective feedback loops.

It was also noted that the teacher leaders viewed collaboration as the opportunity to visit

and discuss teaching and learning. Interviewee 4, an elementary classroom teacher, explained

how the development of structures to allow cross-school visitations impacted their work. They

stated:

> I loved the opportunity to work with people in other buildings. When it first started, I had
>
> teachers from the middle school and the high school and I got to go to the high school
>
> and see what they are doing that I'm trying to do here. And when they came here they

were amazed that we were doing the things they were trying and I thought that was great. Those are my friends now.

For the interviewees, the responses covered aligned ideas around the idea of reducing isolation and prompting a learning community. To that end, Interviewee 11, a high school classroom teacher expressed the following:

When I sit down with the other cohort of people and we are discussing how we are going to do the professional learning for Wednesdays or when we just get together that's really beneficial to me.

The Reading School District used teacher leaders across all levels and roles within the district and the district improvement process. The district goal was to include all staff members. "Collaborative professionalism …should be a culture that permeates the whole school or system" (Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2017, p. 19). The data found in the interview transcripts points to the theme of collaboration across all levels of the organization.

Theme Three: Building Capacity for High Quality Instruction

Hill, Blazar, & Lynch (2015) encourage schools and districts to avail teachers of certain resources to help achieve high quality instruction. They suggest helping teachers in a variety of ways: enable them to learn more content knowledge, providing access to materials appropriate for supporting learning, developing teachers' skills in motivating learners to apply themselves to classroom tasks, and providing guidance for instruction and collaboration (Hill, Blazar & Lynch, 2015). In the past year, the Reading School District unveiled the idea of building teacher capacity by highlighting elements of classroom teaching that constitute high quality instruction. Specifically, the focus has been around guidance in instruction and collaboration. There is work being done at each school to have teachers agree to the elements of high quality instruction. This

priority can be seen in the district strategy map (Appendix F). This theme of high quality

instruction was identified in 66.6% of the interviewee's responses to district priorities. Two

thirds of the interviewees named this as an important priority for schools within the district and

something they believed that they and their colleagues were working on together.

In the interview data, teachers identified the concept of teachers trying to improve their

capacity. One prevailing notion related to building capacity for high quality instruction,

expressed by half of the respondents, were the ideas of growth and reflection. This compares to

the survey questions where teacher leaders believe that their colleagues have seen a change in

classroom culture (73.5%). It was expressed that an improved classroom culture was essential for

high quality instruction. In the transcripts, the respondents expressed a variety of thoughts

around growing and that developing their capacity was a process. Interviewee 2, an elementary

support staff member, expressed how the process of working on high quality instruction was a

connector of staff when they stated:

> I think it's kind of taking on a role of trying to make support staff people feel included
>
> and see how we fit in the same way that the teachers do especially in terms of the
>
> feedback and talking about high quality instruction…I think that the conversations that
>
> we have are so different than they were two and a half years ago.

Within this statement, the connection from high quality instruction is linked to reducing

isolation as well as using feedback as a connecting focus point for starting conversations.

When the interviewees were asked if the teacher leadership initiative impacted their teaching, all

of the respondents indicated that it changed the way they taught. Interviewee 4, an elementary

classroom teacher stated that, "It has impacted my teaching in ways that I never imagined when I

signed up."

 They went on further to explain how they perceived the district priorities and the connection between collaboration and high quality instruction when they stated:

> I think collaboration is a priority. I think you know we're trying to drive everybody's instruction in the same way. If you guys (leaders) are valuing our need to talk and converse with our coworkers and peers, I think you know feedback and high quality instruction are priorities right now.

Across the interview data, the practice of viewing live teaching was identified as a key component for understanding high quality instruction. This notion was echoed by Interviewee 1 who expressed this idea during the interview that:

> I was fortunate enough to be part of it (Teacher Leadership Academy). And I think for me, it was the most transformational professional development I've ever received in my career. From my perspective, you don't get to see live teaching like that ever. You can watch videos and things like that but you don't see it like with the kids. And to be able to have the depth of conversation afterwards. There just was a sense of collaboration and people not afraid to put things out there.

Reading School District leaders asked all school staffs to develop the capacity in teachers to deliver high quality instruction. The schools developed professional learning structures to have teachers develop their understanding and capacity for delivering high quality instruction. This became an area of focus for professional learning sessions. The teacher leaders worked together to develop learning experiences for their colleagues in each school. This focus allowed for schools to have shared goals as well as a focus to identify and share effective instructional practices (Fullan, 2016).

Theme Four: Teacher Voice

Collaborative professionalism values the voices of all and reflects an approach in support of our shared responsibility to provide equitable access to learning for all (Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2017, p. 3). In the process of coding the interviews, the use of teacher voice and choice was mentioned by a third of the interviewees. Although not part of the interview questions, the notion of teacher voice appeared in multiple responses. The emphasis on teacher voice as part of professional learning plans was found in the survey results where only 24.3% of the teacher leaders felt that their colleagues believed they had a voice in making decisions about professional learning. In the notion of developing teacher capacity, the idea of providing voice and choice was illuminated by the respondents as a reference point as a hope to engage more of their colleagues. This idea was seen in the survey results, the open-ended survey question as well as the semi-structured interviews. Interviewee 2, an elementary support staff member, illustrated the concept across a few answers. They went on to state:

I think that choice goes a long way. Like student choice and student voice-teacher choice and teacher voice…I think what we are trying to do is give teachers the same choice that we've been given…Choose the one that you are most comfortable with…

During the coding process, the words perceptions and perspectives were found in the data. This mindset was put forth as a consideration for teacher leaders when working with colleagues. The idea of others was mentioned across participants in their expression that the perspective of their peers is an important consideration in a teacher leadership initiative. Interviewee 1, an elementary support staff member, spoke on the topic of thinking about how their colleagues might consider the learning they were undertaking. They said, "It's allowed me to have a different perspective…I need to step back. What are other people's thoughts on it?"

Inside the data, the respondents offered up ideas for improving the teacher leadership initiative. Interviewee 7, a middle school classroom teacher offered the following idea:

I think when we break up we should break up into small groups, however it has to be a self-selection thing…more like a study group. It might be effective. And I think more choice, more self- selection.

The idea of teachers providing solutions to promote capacity building is an important theme in the data. Teachers were suggesting that the district leaders use the idea put forth by Fullan, Rincón-Gallardo, & Hargreaves (2015), that a solution may lie in the idea of using the group to change the group. The interview data spoke to the idea of appreciating teacher voice as an important component of building teacher capacity and school or district improvement.

Summary

The purpose of this case study was to understand how one district's supports reduced teacher isolation and promoted a learning community. The results from the survey and the semi-structured interviews have brought forth elements of the district supports that impacted teachers and their perceptions around their colleagues' work and growth.

Through the responses, teachers in Reading School District valued the ideas around feedback, collaboration, building capacity, and teacher voice in their work around professional learning. In these four codes, feedback was universally mentioned but interviewees mentioned collaboration most frequently. In this light, there was an important consideration put forth by teacher leaders that more voice and choice is needed to engage more of their colleagues.

The four themes derived from the interview transcripts are important components and align with the district priorities. The first theme of using feedback enabled teachers to connect to

one another regardless of role within the district. It started to reduce teacher isolation by

providing a focus for discuss across all levels of the organization. The second theme of teacher

collaboration was present in most of the interview data and highlighted the need to use each

other to improve each other (Fullan, et al, 2015, Goddard, et al, 2015). The data also indicated a

heightened awareness around trying to become a teacher who provides high quality instruction. It

was identified as a common area of focus for schools that required teachers to discuss as a way to

reflect and grow. In this area, as well as with the theme of feedback, interviewees indicated how

the element of live teaching embedded in professional learning opportunities brought clarity to

the concepts around building teacher capacity.

Finally, the results speak to the need to consider teacher voice and choice. As the data

was coded the concept of using teachers' ideas, "those in the trenches" (Interviewee 12, a high

school classroom teacher reminded leaders of this concept) was an important concept to getting

teachers to take ownership of any district priority. Classroom teachers taking ownership is

illustrated by Fullan (2016) when he offers ideas for solutions. He states:

> The solution for system improvement for me consists of three matters: deep change in the
> culture of learning, local ownership of the learning agenda, and a system of continuous
> improvement and innovation that is simultaneously bottom-up, top-down and sideways.
> (p. 543)

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSIONS

This case study focused on understanding how teacher leaders perceived district supports and how these supports impacted teacher isolation, collaboration and teacher capacity among themselves and their colleagues. The researcher investigated the following questions:

1. What aspects of a teacher leadership initiative did teachers perceive as most powerful in bringing teachers together reducing teacher isolation?

2. What supports in a teacher leader initiative movement do teachers perceive as most helpful in developing peer collaboration and developing a community of practice?

With permission granted from the school district, the researcher gathered survey results from 34 participants from two Teacher Leader cohorts. Through purposeful sampling, 12 teacher leaders were asked to opt-in to a semi-structured interview process. This sample of teacher leaders came from all the schools in the district and reflected a wide view of teachers who participated in the teacher leader academy. The following section will present a narrative description of the researcher's findings. The results from the data collection process will be aligned with the research questions and to the conceptual framework. To this end, the results from the survey and the interviews were analyzed to draw conclusions about what can be learned from this case study.

Interpretations of Findings

The first step in the analysis process started with findings that can be drawn from the demographic data. The teachers who volunteered from the elementary level (52.9%) and secondary level (47.1%) were almost equal in their participation rate. The data indicates that teachers from all levels were equally interested in participating in the teacher leadership

academy. None of the teachers that volunteered to be part of the teacher leadership

academy were untenured. In terms of their experience teaching, 91.2% of the teachers who

participated in the survey had ten or more years in education.

The survey data highlighted that 55% of the teachers who participated in the teacher

leadership academy participated in responding to the survey. The participants and responses

were anonymous. There was equal distribution across the three levels of the school district.

In follow up questioning during the interviews, it was indicated that the most compelling

rationale for seeking out the teacher leadership opportunity was to challenge themselves as

teachers. In this case study, when asking multiple teachers, teachers with experience and have a

degree of confidence in their teaching ability as a teacher, commonly stated that they were open

to a challenge to improve their craft as teachers. Additionally, the data highlights that the earliest

adopters of teacher leadership roles participated in providing survey results at a higher

percentage than staff that signed up for later teacher leadership cohorts. It is worth noting that the

first cohort of teachers in the teacher leadership academy had a higher participation rate as a

group (71%) than the teachers from the second cohort (42.5%). Considering that one teacher

from the first cohort was no longer available to participate, the participation rate from the first

cohort could have increased to 75% participation. This discrepancy suggests that the teachers

from the first cohort were more willing to share follow up feedback than teachers from the

second cohort. This may be related to the different experiences that the two groups experienced.

For example, the first cohort took on more informal leader roles and were more responsible for

leading professional learning sessions than the teacher leaders in the second cohort.

**Question 1: What aspects of a teacher leadership initiative did teachers perceive as most
powerful in bringing teachers together reducing teacher isolation?**

McLaughlin claims:

> Most teachers work in settings characterized by professional isolation and a lack of
>
> shared sense of practice. Strong professional communities, uncommon in American
>
> public schools, are distinguished by a strong technical culture, or sense of how we do
>
> things here. (McLaughlin, 2005, p. 65)

The teacher leadership initiative in Reading School District introduced structures that
were unfamiliar to the teachers interviewed. During the interviews, participants were asked why
they signed up for the teacher leadership cohort. All of the interviewees explained while they did
not fully understand what the teacher leadership academy was asking of them and they all agreed
that they were open to learning more and taking on a challenge. Working to improve their craft
of teaching was a clear focus and motivation for joining the cohort of teacher leaders.

To first understand the impact of the teacher leadership initiative, the researcher posed a
simple survey question concerning the perception of teacher leaders around some key ideas
based in the teacher leader initiative. In looking across multiple data points, it appears that
teacher leaders from both cohorts believed that teachers were talking to each other, opening their
classrooms to share practices, and providing feedback to one another. For example, 64.7% of the
teacher leaders believed most or all of their colleagues were talking about teaching and learning.
Aligned to this idea, 70.5% believed that teachers were opening their classrooms and sharing
feedback with one another. This finding aligns with 83.3% of the interviewees who, during their
interviews, indicated that more teachers were opening their doors to one another for visitations
focused on teaching and learning. The interviewees cited specific structures the district made
available to teachers. They highlighted district designated lab sites, cross building visitations,
feedback groups, and an *Observe Me* movement started in one building. During the interview

process, a respondent from the elementary level indicated that teachers were given "a freedom that was not provided by previous administrators."

Isolation

Cosenza (2015) indicates that teachers need to be given opportunities to leave the isolation of their classrooms. The results indicate that teachers believe that the teacher leadership academy experience opened doors and opened teachers to one another. This shift was perceived to be a more recent occurrence, leading to the conclusion that the district leaders' encouragement and support of teacher-to-teacher visitation had an impact in reducing teacher isolation. An important consideration noted during the interview data analysis was that, while teachers were open to visiting, it was the conversation and communication that mattered. According to one interviewee, "It's one thing to go in and observe but for me I learn best through conversation." This aspect of dialogue was echoed through many of the interviews that using a debrief protocol following classroom visits was helpful for bringing teachers together. The visits were clear in their focus for both the teacher and the observers. For example, the first visits involved teachers giving feedback to each other in relation to their conferences or conversations with students. Teachers provided each of the following feedback to students. They asked each other to code how often they used certain phrases or feedback to students. The feedback could be organized into three big categories: 1) giving praise to students, 2) acknowledging effort, or 3) highlighting a process for learning a skill. Teachers coded the language they heard in the visit and used it to debrief the teaching moves and other possible instructional techniques for the group to consider. Cosenza (2015) suggests that, regardless of who leads the discussion, teachers saw collaboration as a form of leadership as opposed to working in isolation in the rooms. To this end, the district used different supports to bring teachers out of their classroom and provided a variety of ways

for them to work together. The district used the following structures to enable teachers to engage in discourse about teaching and learning. The structures that were used to bring teachers together were:

- Teacher Leadership Academy

  A weeklong live teaching professional learning opportunity offered in June immediately after school had ended. The classroom used a multi-grade and multi-school mix of students. The classroom session involved a 90-minute teaching block with rigorous math task. The structure included pre-teaching, a focused classroom observation, and a focused debriefing with a common protocol. The area of focus for the viewing and debriefing was centered on the teacher's use of effective and actionable feedback.

- Lab Sites

  A lab site was a two-hour session that was held during the school day. A selected teacher leader opened their classroom. It had a pre-teach portion, a focused classroom visit, and a focused debrief. The lab sites happened in both classrooms and pull out support services sites.

- Colleague and Cross School Visits

  A colleague visit was a two-hour session where teacher organized his or her own focused visit to another teacher during the school day. The visits happened inside and across buildings and content areas. The visitors used an informal discussion and debrief.

- Wednesday Professional Learning

    A teacher leader group of teachers collaboratively planned professional learning opportunity for all staff at the same time across the district. The professional learning experience was co-designed between the teacher leaders and the building administrators. The professional development session was delivered on a district wide early release day, which happened once a month across the year.

- Monthly Teacher Leadership Professional Learning (half-day sessions)

    A half-day session for teacher leaders in cohort one used to develop additional understandings around effective teaching and learning. The sessions were offered during the school day. The topics ranged from providing personalized feedback to learning intentions to criteria for success. The sessions included a teaching block around area of teacher collaboration (e.g. feedback) and then time to co-plan with building leaders a learning session for their colleagues.

All of these structures did not exist three years ago. The new structures were put in place to allow teachers to open their doors to one another and bring teachers together. In reviewing the survey and interview data, the ability to discuss instructional practices with other teachers for a longer period of time, like during the summer weeklong academy, gave teachers a stronger sense of connecting to colleagues. The data across the surveys and interviews illustrated an understanding by teacher leaders that the district priority was around bringing teachers together and reducing teachers working and learning alone.

Bringing Teachers Together

One of the district's initiatives was to reduce isolation and promote collaboration among staff in the schools. Bringing teachers together is not as simple as literally bringing teachers

together. In this case study, there is evidence that teachers had little to no experience in working directly with other teachers in their grade level or department. This pattern of a lack of collaboration between teachers was seen when analyzing the interview data. Interviewees highlighted this idea and indicated that working with teachers in unlike positions had value beyond the usual discussing of content, but rather the focus was on teaching and learning. According to Hargreaves and O'Connor (2017), many designs for collaborative professionalism, such as lesson study, end up being ineffective when they are adopted without any consideration of the culture in which they evolved. The data found in the survey as well as the interviews highlights the ways that the teacher leadership initiative impacted teachers' feelings of being connected to their colleagues through sharing common work. This common work was centered on the identification of providing feedback to others in the organization as an improvement strategy for developing one's capacity. In other words, by focusing on how individuals give and receive feedback, all staff can use this focus on effective feedback as leverage for improving their capacity. For example, teachers can focus on how teacher feedback was actionable for students. Additionally teachers can focus on how they share feedback with each other in order to provide personalized ideas on improving their teaching capacity.

The interview and survey data indicated that some structures gave teachers more ability to engage together as opposed to other structures. When analyzing data from surveys and interviews, the prevailing feeling of the weeklong experience was reflected in the use of the words: *"magical, big picture* and *something different*." Upon further analysis, the interviewees explained how the longer time devoted to working with other teachers for many days in a row created a connected experience. The experience reduced the feeling of isolation because the focus of the weeklong academies was on the concept of using feedback to improve one's

capacity for working with children and colleagues. The common area of focus in the academy brought staff from all four buildings and different content or subject areas to collaborate under the quest to implement a common improvement strategy. This experience together brought a stronger commitment to the group. As was stated in the survey and echoed in the interview transcripts, "It has definitely improved professional conversations between teachers."

The content of the interviews indicated that not all structures reduced isolation but merely put teachers together in the same space. According to Fullan, et al., (2015):

> Groups with commitments to a compelling moral purpose and to each other (rather than merely teams which are collections of people drawn together to perform particular tasks) act in more responsible and accountable ways than any external force can make them do (p. 6).

This idea of ownership and feeling more personally accountable was seen in the interview data when the idea of teacher voice was mentioned as well as highlighted in the survey data where it was perceived that teachers did not have a strong enough voice to plan and develop professional learning. For example, the district leadership developed a plan to have teacher leaders deliver professional learning to their colleagues on Wednesday afternoons. This was widely mentioned as not a connecting force for teachers. In fact, during the interviews, the words, "*deflated, not connecting,* and *not again,"* were some hard feelings expressed by teacher leaders as they tried to deliver and inspire teacher leadership ideas with their peers. This structure appeared to promote a feeling of isolation when some of the data revealed that they started to feel disconnected from their peers. There was a perception reported by some staff that the teacher leaders who presented to their colleagues were of favored status by the leadership of the school.

This was found in the survey open-ended results when a respondent stated, "Change is not as quick as I would wish but it is steady."

Summary of Research Question One

To summarize the first research question, teacher isolation was impacted and teachers felt more connected. The structures to bring teachers from all disciplines and roles together created connections within and across building. This made teachers feel less alone during the school day because they used the district structures to reach out to others and visit each others' classrooms. The research question also shed light on the notion that some structures could also produce isolation. The data produced some cautionary lessons in regards to teacher leaders who, when attempting to work with colleagues in large groups, actually felt more disconnected and a sense of defensiveness that in their perception was coming from certain staff members. It is also important to remember that certain structures that were pushed out by district leaders for reducing isolation did not necessarily lead to connections teachers could continue on their own.

Question 2: What supports in a teacher initiative movement do teachers perceive as most helpful in developing peer collaboration and developing a community of practice?

Hargreaves and O'Connor advocate a shift from professional collaboration to "collaborative professionalism" (2017). The researchers sought to understand if the teacher leaders engaged to a deeper degree of collaboration and not just collaborate as a function of district structures. All teachers who were interviewed, when asked if the teacher leadership academy experience had impacted and improved their teaching, indicated yes it had impacted them for the better. To understand how this perception developed, it is important to review the alignment between the survey results and the responses to interview questions. In the survey, teachers were asked to provide their perceptions of the district support in terms of providing

time, providing different ways to collaborate, and giving support to collaborate (coverage, instructional resources, etc.)

Effective Collaborative Supports

When looking more specifically at which supports were most highly valued by teachers, the weeklong academy had strong support from classroom teachers and support staff teachers. It was ranked the best support for developing collaboration and providing teachers with the ability to, as explained by Interviewee 3 who is an elementary classroom teacher, that to "have a week of continuous learning and building background…and the impact on kids and how they change over a week." Eleven out of twelve interviewees ranked the weeklong academy as the most powerful support provided to the teacher leaders across the year. The twelfth interviewee indicated that while she ranked it second it was in light of the fact that they wished it were offered in August so that they could apply their learning right away.

Upon further analysis, the element of working around live teaching and not videos or webinars made for a different way to collaborate and discuss ways to improve teaching and learning. This concept was repeated in multiple interviews as well as echoed in the open ended survey when a respondent stated that the one big takeaway is that classroom visits followed by debriefs are valuable. In subsequent questioning, the concept of teachers collaborating around live teaching was the most powerful connector for collaboration. Across multiple interviews, teachers referenced their ability to discuss different ways to engage with colleagues around feedback as the common talking point for live teaching. They stated that the discussion around possible teaching moves made for common and deep conversations. It was also stated how the area of focus enabled all staff to participate. One interviewee remarked how the focus allowed support staff to take part in classroom discussions because there was a common focus for

discussion.

According to the data found in the interviews, the Wednesday professional learning (PL) time was not a conducive time for teachers in terms of collaborating. For starters, it was widely mentioned that the time frame of late in the day and in the middle of the week, did not lend itself to prime learning time. Interviewees regularly ranked it in the bottom of their perceptions of which supports promoted collaboration. Interestingly, there was a slight difference of opinion in how they worked to bring teachers together. At the elementary level, they were seen as a middle level support system whereas secondary teachers (middle and high school level) ranked them consistently at the bottom in terms of effectiveness. It was conveyed from most respondents from the middle and high school level that the Wednesday PL structure may have created a division between teacher leaders who presented to their colleagues and teachers who were in the audience. This structure appears to not be an effective measure to reduce isolation and promote more engaging collaboration.

Culture

The surveys and interviews also attempted to understand how the culture between teachers and the culture in classrooms was impacted. The survey respondents were asked directly if they believed their colleagues supported the learning from one another. The survey also asked if this culture shift or attitude was changing the culture of the classroom. Table 9 provides the average ranking (on a 1-5 scale) of these two statements.

Table 9.

Teacher Leader Perceptions Concerning Learning from Colleagues and Classroom Culture

	Teachers in my school actively support the professional learning through teacher leaders/colleagues	**Teachers in my school feel that the classroom culture has changed over the last two years**
Average Ranking	3.73	3.82
Standard Deviation	.69	.91

The average score indicates that most respondents believe that most teachers are open to learning and collaborating with one another. This is based on an average score of four indicating a perception of the belief that most teachers agree with the concept. This data coincides with the understanding that teacher leaders indicated during their interviews that learning is best done with teachers. The idea of using those in the trenches is echoed in this data.

Community of Practice

Teacher leaders were asked about their perceptions around how a community of practice was developing within the district. To understand this issue, the following questions of the survey were analyzed because of their link to teachers being open and collaborating as a community of practice:

- Teachers in my school talk with one another about teaching and learning.
- Teachers in my school are willing to open up their classrooms to share practice and get feedback from colleagues.

- Teachers at my school share strategies around providing students' feedback during learning.

These three areas in the survey highlighted the idea of teachers collaborating to talk, view and share teaching practices and strategies. As seen in Table 10, these three areas had similar average scores and the three lowest standard deviations. These areas indicate that the respondents see that most classrooms are open to these ideas and that these area the areas in the survey that have the closest level of agreement among respondents.

Table 10.

Average Score and Standard Deviations for Survey Questions Involving Collaboration

	Teachers in my school talk with one another about teaching and learning.	**Teachers in my school are willing to open up their classrooms to share practice and get feedback from colleagues.**	**Teachers at my school share strategies around providing students' feedback during learning.**
Average Ranking	3.76	3.88	3.67
Standard Deviation	.56	.65	.49

This data was compared to the open-ended responses on the survey. In 33% (10 out of 30) of the open-ended responses, the one takeaway from the teacher leadership initiative had mentioned the importance collaborating around teaching and learning with one another. Two of the responses mentioned how teachers need to take on the role of student. This data confirms the perspectives found in the interviews. After feedback, collaboration was the most frequently

named code word. It was mentioned a total of 15 times. Synonyms or parallel concepts for collaboration or collaborative practices (i.e. going into classrooms, dialoguing to grow, learning from one another, improve others practices, etc.) were mentioned 61 times across the interview transcripts. These data points were analyzed across all three sets of information indicating a foundational development of a collaborative culture being grown in the district by the actions of the teacher leaders.

Vangrieken, Dochy, Raes, & Kyndt, (2015) state that teachers involved in collaborative environments and who modeled for students the types of collaborative skills needed in the real world, tended to innovate better as teachers, they felt more satisfied in their work and developed better self-efficacy. The data that came from the survey indicating that 70.5% of the teacher leaders felt that most or all of the teachers in their building were open to sharing classroom practices found in the survey helps point to the development of such possible consequences for the district's teacher leaders. This idea that the collaboration was impacting innovation, morale and self-efficacy can be seen across the open-ended results in the survey. In Table 11 below, the survey data was analyzed to determine the consequences teacher leaders were describing in response to open ended survey questions and the semi-structured interview questions related to impact of their teacher leadership academy experiences.

Table 11.

Frequency of Consequences Mentioned in Survey Data

	Innovative Practice / Risk Taking Behaviors	Morale Influencing	Self Efficacy Feelings	Change in Students
Times Idea Was Mentioned in Open-Ended Survey Question.	10	7	6	4
Percent of Total Open-Ended Responses.	33%	23%	20%	13%

When reviewing the data in Table 11 above, 28 out of the 30 of the open-ended responses contain a reference to the consequences identified by Vangrieken et al. (2015). These references can be seen as links to possible outcomes of empowered teacher leaders experiences. According to Vangrieken, et al., the categories in Table 11, were seen in schools that developed true collaboration.

Table 12.

Frequency of Consequences Mentioned In Interview Data

	Innovative Practice / Risk Taking Behaviors	**Morale Influencing**	**Self Efficacy Feelings**	**Change in Students**
Times Idea Was Mentioned by Interviewees	31	12	9	5
Percent of Interviewees Mentioning	100%	58%	66%	41%

      The next step in understanding what the data says about the teacher leadership initiative and the outcomes on a community of practice was that the results from the open-ended questioning were compared to the responses found in the interview data. When cross-referencing this data with the references found in the semi-structured interviews, the interviewees mentioned the same consequences across the transcripts. As is seen in Figure 12, the most widely mentioned consequence from the teacher leadership initiative was in the area of risk taking and attempting or trying out innovative teaching practices. All twelve interviewees (12 out of 12) mentioned the experience they had engaging with colleagues in the area of considering, discussing or attempting innovative teaching ideas as a result of their collaboration around a viewed lesson or classroom. Teacher leaders mentioned across all interviews that the district priority was opening classes so teachers could discuss their practice. This idea of engaging in innovative teaching was

many times linked to the idea of teachers being able to develop their capacity or self-efficacy. This concept of self-efficacy was mentioned by 66% (8 out of 12) of the respondents. When considered together, the data indicates that the idea of taking risks and developing a system for self-efficacy was a strong consequence as a result of the teacher leadership initiative from the teacher leaders perspective.

The second most widely mentioned concept or consequence was the impact of the teacher leadership on teacher morale. Responses had indicated that peers were "excited" and "happy" that the district had chosen this format and structures for professional learning. While it was mentioned by 58% (7 out of 12) of the interviewees as an important consequence the concept of morale was also raised as an area of concern for 41% (5 out of 12) of the respondents. Interestingly, all five of these teachers who raised these concerns of the impact of the teacher leadership on staff morale operate at the middle and high school levels. Their concerns centered on how their colleagues were receiving professional learning from their peers as well as a conjecture that perhaps the staff had learned enough about using effective feedback as a tool for increasing student engagement. There was also a mention by two of these respondents that it possibly is linked to the culture of the building and that is was a link to the teacher leaders.

Finally reviewing the impact on changing students, it was mentioned by 41% (5 out of 12) of the interviewees. This is aligned to the open-ended survey results that indicated the effect on students to be lowest mentioned consequence as seen by respondents (13% and 41%). This finding corresponds to much of the literature that indicates there may be an indirect result of teacher leadership on student learning. An important tenet of understanding to know is that, "by promoting a culture of collaboration around instructional improvement, leaders have the potential to support school improvement in ways that positively influence teachers' collective

efficacy beliefs and thus promote student achievement" (Goddard, et al., 2015, p. 526). The district initiative attempts to build a community of practice has emerged a series of consequences and concerns. It is the potential of teacher leadership that provides the insights and possible next steps in this case study.

Summary of Research Question Two

In summary, to the question regarding what teacher leaders perceived to be the most powerful supports for collaboration, live teaching with deep continued discourse was a consistently highly rated experience. Teacher leaders perceived that live teaching in the summer academies and in the lab sites or colleague visits helped promoted deeper discussion for teaching and learning as well as developing a practical application for these experiences. Teacher leaders also believed that by collaborating once a month across buildings and roles inside a common lens enabled teachers to collaborate on the development of innovative teaching practices.

Implications

The following section introduces and explains the implications of this case study. These areas of focus identify areas to improve the field of education specifically in the area of shared leadership for professional learning through teacher leadership. The findings point to key considerations for action planning in a teacher leadership initiative.

Opening Doors for Dialogue

The district initiative was centered on teachers working together. When the district developed a teacher leadership initiative, it put in structures to reduce the experience of teachers working alone and being isolated. The data derived from the surveys and interviews indicate that teachers look to one another as a potential source for developing their capacity as teachers.

Teachers from all levels responded to the value of visiting one another's classrooms. The opportunity to see live teaching with their colleagues proved to be practical professional learning for teachers. The live teaching experience from the summer academies and the lab sites afforded teachers to leave the solidarity of their classroom and join a small community of learners focused on developing their capacity to engage students as learners. This opportunity to join others was positively viewed in the same light from the elementary level teachers as it was to the secondary level teachers. The opportunity to engage in this activity happened more frequently at the elementary level as opposed to the secondary level. The elementary teacher leaders were able to, on their own volition, design and participate in follow up lab sites and classroom visits.

The case study also illustrates that how teachers are invited to leave their classrooms makes a difference. To reference once again the ideas of Hargreaves and O'Connor (2017) when an organization moves toward collaborative professionalism that helps define how teachers will work together and not just how they talk and reflect together. They go on to say that some professions have been defined by their autonomy and now is the time to reconsider these practices as practices in need of change.

Impacts for Professional Learning

This case study investigated how teacher leaders felt about different district supports for professional learning. The district provided a variety of different time and structures for teacher leaders to help influence and impact teaching within and across schools. The data suggests that leaders should consider the way teachers perceive certain structures.

The data clearly illustrated that teachers valued the ability to view each other's practice as a means for dialogue. Additionally this dialogue promoted a culture of attempting and displaying

different or innovative instructional practices. Professional learning structures that can employ live teaching for teachers to use as a means for discussing professional practice was widely seen as an essential structure. An important consideration for live teaching was the ability to view teacher practice across consecutive days. Teachers indicated that this type of structure allowed for the big ideas to emerge.

Conversely the district designed other structures to have teacher leaders lead collaborative learning experiences for their colleagues. The teacher leaders did not receive these structures as strong opportunities to collaborate. For example, using the Wednesday afternoon sessions was identified as not an ideal structure for promoting collaboration and sharing of practice. Teacher leaders expressed concerns around being able to engage with their colleagues during a time they perceived to be a time of low energy for new learning. It was also expressed that professional learning from teacher to teacher is better handled in small groups. The Wednesday afternoon professional learning sessions tended to be whole school and at times composed of 60-70 staff members. The challenging and productive struggle of colleagues working to improve appears to be lost is such a setting. The challenge for leaders is to take professional learning structures across a journey that can sometimes be found in some organizational settings. It may be a journey of growing pains for a district where the structures for learning need to transform over time. A leader who is charged with designing professional learning structures has to consider how such structures may start as comfortable cultures to constraining structures and then hopefully be able to integrate structures and cultures that promote challenging yet respectful conversations about improvement (Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2017).

The data also suggests that leaders should try to be mindful of how teacher voice and

choice can impact the development and roll out of professional learning experiences and choices. Teachers regularly stated their desire was to be more included in how professional learning is created and offered to them as learners. Although the teacher leaders acknowledged that including all voices in the designs of professional learning was a challenge there was a feeling that the district controlled most of the perceived content and in this case, feedback. Teachers understand that having a voice in their vocation is a powerful affirmation (Cosenza, 2015). The challenge is how to design district improvement strategies and include the teachers' voices in way that one does not silence the other.

Impacts for Collaboration

Being able to provide structures for teachers to come together helps to reduce isolation and yield additional possible benefits for morale and retention of staff. The important element to remember about real collaboration is that it is focused on the improvement of teaching and learning and it is one of the highest yielding strategies to boost student, school and system performance (Fullan, et. al, 2015, p. 8).

Recommendations for Action

In this case study, the data has illuminated implications for practices that will impact leaders looking to engage in a teacher leader initiative**.** Based on the analysis of 34 surveys and 12 interview transcriptions, the researcher developed the following recommendations:

1. Incorporate live teaching as a learning method to help bring teachers together and help develop teacher capacity. Additionally, if this experience can occur over consecutive days, it is preferred to promote a deeper understanding of instructional practices and a movement towards collaborative professionalism and

the notion that everyone is committed to the success for all within the organization (Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2017).

2. Teachers working together in lab sites to improve their instructional capacity in reaching all learners should be viewed as teachers collaborating to improve teaching and learning.

3. When teachers are engaged in visiting each other's classrooms, the use of a common area of focus and a protocol for viewing and debriefing helped to maintain an experience of building efficacy and capacity (Fullan, 2016).

4. When asking teacher leaders to lead the learning of their colleagues, use of small groups and settings to enable deeper discussions and connections to practical applications for individuals was preferred.

5. Consideration should be given to the labeling and promoting of teacher leaders within a district initiative. The perception of teacher leaders within a district needs to be collectively addressed and leaders need to enlist the active support of their principals and colleagues (Lumpkin, Claxton & Wilson, 2014, York-Barr & Duke, 2004).

6. Leaders should devise a system for gathering teacher voice in the development of teacher leadership and topics for professional learning. This also extends to promoting risk taking and innovation in trying our new instructional strategies (Sterrett & Irizarry, 2015).

Recommendations for Future Study

The researcher recommends the following areas for further study based on the data obtained during the course of the study. These areas of interest and concern arose that while not related to this study has led to these considerations for possible study.

1. The areas of job satisfaction and teacher retention have emerged as areas of interest and importance of teacher leadership and staff morale. Increases in morale, professional and personal satisfactions are changes that are appreciated by school leaders (Lumpkin, Claxton, & Wilson, 2014). Information concerning teacher leaders and how to tap into these potential impact areas are important to leaders of learning organizations.

2. Teacher leadership and its links to job satisfaction are also connected to balancing teacher voice and district priorities. Understanding the development of professional learning connected to teacher interests for professional learning areas and experiences would assist leaders who engage in teacher leadership initiatives.

3. Finally, measuring teacher leadership and its connection to student achievement has been a challenging area of study in terms of linking teachers' collective work to student outcomes (Goddard, et al, 2015). Studies of students' perceptions of changes in classroom culture and changes in their capacity as students would be a welcomed area of study.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to understand how a district teacher leadership initiative was perceived in terms of its supports for reducing isolation and promoting collaboration. The

study elicited information from educators engaged in a variety of roles within one district. They came from all levels and roles inside and outside the classroom. They also had a variety of experience as educators. The data collected from two cohorts of teacher leaders provided insights to make shared leadership more successful.

In particular, this case study highlighted the value of a teacher leadership study in one district. In the interview data, all respondents indicated that participating in a teacher leadership initiative had impacted they way they teach. The interviewees also indicated that this change had impacted their classroom cultures. The perceptions of these teacher leaders were that most teachers in the district were opening their doors to each other. This helped teachers to feel more connected and less isolated. Teachers had a common rationale for working with one another. The viewing and discussing of practice that resulted from the teacher leadership initiative is setting a foundation to produce collaborative professionalism within the district (Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2017).

There is also hope that the district can see added benefits for teachers and students. The desire to develop and attempt innovative practices in a risk free environment was mentioned many times in the data. This culture of innovation for teaching and learning will need tended to by present and future leaders. If done correctly it should produce, as noted by teachers, feelings of self-efficacy as educators and therefore there should be hope that staff morale will increase. This culture will enable teachers who want to know how to improve their practice have access to others who know how to improve practice (Fullan, 2016).

Finally teacher leadership requires the close attention to contextual issues, which can impact the successful roll out of teachers helping each other through collaboration. To begin with, it may be an issue merely using the title of teacher leaders (Fairman & Mackenzie, 2015).

The labeling of teachers may create a perception amongst staff that some are separate and not equal. To add to this idea, teachers who lead collaborative issues may have feelings of being disconnected or perceived as feeling superior to their colleagues. These perceptions of role and status should be well dismissed through strong communication. It is the charge of leaders to move away from a context of worrying who is and who is not a teacher leader and move to a culture that evokes leadership from all teachers (Lumpkin, et al., 2014). When a district evokes leaders at all levels, success will be had for all of the organization.

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Appendix A

Archival Survey from Teacher Leadership Academy

Teacher Leadership Workshop 2017
June 22 – June 28

What was the most positive aspect of the way in which the instructor taught this module?	What can the instructor do to improve the teaching effectiveness of this module?

I would recommend this workshop to others.

1   2   3   4   5

Explain (use back as needed)

What do you need more of (content/process)?	What do you need less of (content/process)?

It was valuable to observe a teacher working with students.
(Strongly disagree) 1   2   3   4   5 (Strongly Agree)
Explain (use back as needed)

This workshop added value to me professionally.
(Strongly disagree) 1   2   3   4   5 (Strongly Agree)

What do you wish you had known before you started?

Continued on back

What do you want others to know about your experience in the Teacher Leadership Program?

Do you have any suggestions for improving the program?

Anything else you'd like us to know?

Appendix B

TL Questionnaire

Directions: We would like to understand your perception of the district initiatives around teacher leadership in the district. Please use the scale provided to indicate the thinking that best reflects your perception of the statement.

School:

Grade Band: K-5   6-8   9-12
Years Experience: 1-3 yrs.   4-10 yrs.   11-20 yrs.   20+ yrs.

Attended TLA: Yes or No (circle one)
Year Attended TLA: Cohort 1   Cohort 2

	None	Few	Some	Most	All
Priority Area I ***Perceptions of District Supports to Create a Collaborative Culture***					
Teachers at my school talk with each other about teaching and learning.					
The district provides consistent support for teachers to collaborate around teaching and learning.					
The district provides time and structures for teachers to visit other teachers.					
The district provides different ways to share teaching practices.					
Priority Area II ***Perceptions of Professional Learning Practices***	None	Few	Some	Most	All
Teachers in my school actively support the professional learning through teacher leaders/colleagues.					
Teachers in my school work together to design and implement professional learning for their colleagues.					
Teachers in my school are willing to open up their classrooms to share practice and get feedback from colleagues.					

Priority Area III **Policies and Procedures Teachers Credit for Increased Teacher and Student Interest in Learning**	None	Few	Some	Most	All
Teachers at my school share strategies around providing students' feedback during learning.					
Teachers in my school feel that the classroom culture has changed in the last two years.					
Teachers in my school believe that students have changed in their engagement for learning and using their voice.					
Teachers in my school help decide what professional learning they need.					
Teachers in my school believe that student achievement and learning is improving.					

Open-ended question: If you have one take away from TLA, what would it be?

Appendix C

TL Interview Protocol

AFTER Interviewees have signed the informed consent form:

OK? Ready to begin? Now that the tape-recorder is on, please state your name, the date, and that you consent to have your response tape-recorded.

A. **Context**
1. Please tell me about this district/school. Strengths of this school. How long have you been at this site?

    a. Potential Probes: Have you worked at other districts/schools? How does this school compare to your past experience in other settings?

B. **School Focus/Instructional Improvement Efforts**
1. What are the priorities your school/district has been working on in the past year or two?

2. What particular responsibilities have you assumed in relationship to the district vision/goals?

C. **Situational Context**
1. Are there particular structures in this district that are organized to help support your formal leadership or collaborative structures? If so, what? In what ways?

2. Are there any other factors you haven't yet mentioned that help develop or support the way you go about this work?

D. **Teacher Leadership**
1. Describe your own experience enacting leadership (formal or informal) at your own site?

    a. Probes: level of participation, alignment to school and district priorities

2. How has TLA impacted your teaching?

    a. Probes: capacity development, collaboration, instructional flow

3. How has TLA impacted student learning?

    a. Probes: classroom culture, student voice

E. *Wrap-up*

1. This is a project on teacher leadership. If there is one interaction that makes a difference what might it be? If there were one lesson, one message that we should take back from this study—what would it be?

Appendix D

UNIVERSITY OF NEW ENGLAND
CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH

Project Title: *Perceptions of Empowered Teacher Leaders*

Principal Investigator(s):

Michael Rafferty
Doctoral Student
University of New England
mrafferty@une.edu
203-263-4330 x1112

Dr. Michelle Collay
Advisor
University of New England
mcollay@une.edu
207) 602-2010

Introduction:

General requirement language:

- Please read this form, you may also request that the form is read to you. The purpose of this form is to provide you with information about this research study, and if you choose to participate, document your decision.

- You are encouraged to ask any questions that you may have about this study, now, during or after the project is complete. You can take as much time as you need to decide whether or not you want to participate. Your participation is voluntary.

Why is this study being done?

The purpose of this study is to understand the supports that teachers perceive to be the most helpful in reducing teacher isolation and promoting peer collaboration. It also hopes to understand what structures the school district uses that were found to be helpful in their efforts to develop teacher collaboration and enable teachers to grow as professionals.

Who will be in this study?

You have been selected randomly as a staff member who has had exposure to the district priority around teacher leadership. The researcher is interested in learning about

your perceptions around teacher leadership as well as the collaboration structures set up by the district. The researcher was looking to find participants from each school and each level of TLA participation (TLA1, TLA2, No TLA participation). Additionally, the researcher is looking for staff members at various stages of their career as well as having different roles within the school (i.e. classroom teacher, special area teacher, related services, etc.)

- The study is looking to survey 36 staff members and interview 8-12 staff members.
- To participate you should have heard of TLA or been part of school training around feedback

What will I be asked to do?

As a participant, you will be asked to complete a three-part survey. It will ask your perceptions around the district priorities and teacher leadership affect on teacher isolation and peer collaboration. Surveys should take 10-15 minutes. The interviews should take approximately 30 minutes.

All staff within the district will be asked if they are interested in participating. Participants are randomly selected from a pool of interested candidates from all four schools within the district. From here, researchers looked to balance participation across levels of experience with the Teacher Leadership Academy (TLA). Additionally the researcher is looking for staff members at various stages of their career as well as having different roles within the school (i.e. classroom teacher, special area teacher, related services, etc.). The primary researcher (Michael Rafferty) will conduct the interviews as well as administer and analyze the survey results. The individual results will not be shared. The participant will not be required to travel or commit time beyond the work day. There is no compensation for individuals who choose to participate and no obligation or consequences who chose not to participate.

What are the possible risks of taking part in this study?

There are no foreseeable risks associated with participation in this study.

What are the possible benefits of taking part in this study?

There are no direct benefits to you for participating in this study. There may be a benefit to others and the organization in applying changes to professional learning structures within the schools in the district. The findings may help design future professional learning structures for teachers within the district.

What will it cost me?

There are no costs associated with participating in this study.

How will my privacy be protected?

- All participants will be coded for anonymity. All results will be recorded with a system that does not personally identify any of the participants. The interviews will happen in an office at Central Office so as to provide privacy.
- No individual results or surveys will be shared with district or school administration. The results of the survey will be shared with the leadership of the school district. They will be shared in aggregate and published as a summary report that will help qualify the perceptions of teachers and teacher leaders within the school district.
- The principal investigator will be the only person collecting this data to ensure the anonymity of the settings and participants, as well as to provide uniform collection procedures. The investigator will code schools with a letter (i.e. School A, School B, etc.) and participants with a number (i.e. Participant 1, Participant 2, etc.) to protect their anonymity and maintain organization of the data throughout the collection, analysis, and reporting process

How will my data be kept confidential?

This study is designed to be anonymous, this means that no one, can link the data you provide to you, or identify you as a participant. The data will be coded. The only exception researcher will know the participants who take the survey and who participate in the interview process. The data will be stored on a password protected computer. It will also be backed up on a portable backup drive which is also password protected.

Notes and artifacts from the interviews will be locked in file cabinet of the principal investigator (Michael Rafferty).

General requirement language:
- Please note that regulatory agencies and the Institutional Review Board may review the research records.

General requirement language:
- A copy of your signed consent form will be maintained by the principal investigator for at least 3 years after the project is complete before it is destroyed. The consent forms will be stored in a secure location that only members of the research team will have access to and will not be affiliated with any data obtained during the project.
- Interviews will be audiotaped for review purposes only. The files will be password protected and erased after they are reviewed for coding and analysis.
- The final summary report will be available, upon request, to all participants.

What are my rights as a research participant?

General requirement language:
- Your participation is voluntary. Your decision to participate will have no impact on your current or future relations with the University or the Region's Schools.

General requirement language:
- You may skip or refuse to answer any question for any reason.

General requirement language:
- If you choose not to participate there is no penalty to you and you will not lose any benefits that you are otherwise entitled to receive. You are free to withdraw from this research study at any time, for any reason. If you choose to withdraw

from the research there will be no penalty to you and you will not lose any

benefits that you are otherwise entitled to receive.

What other options do I have?

- You may choose not to participate.

Whom may I contact with questions?

General requirement language:
- The researcher conducting this study is *Michael Rafferty*. His research advisor is Dr. Michelle Collay. For questions or more information concerning this research you may contact her/him/them at:

Michael Rafferty
67 School Street
Woodbury, CT 06798
203-263-4330 x1112

Dr. Michelle Collay, Advisor
University of New England
mcollay@une.edu
(207) 602-2010

General requirement language:
- If you choose to participate in this research study and believe you may have suffered a research related injury, please contact:

  Dr. Michelle Collay, Advisor
  University of New England
  mcollay@une.edu
  (207) 602-2010

General requirement language:

- If you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a research subject, you may call Olgun Guvench, M.D. Ph.D., Chair of the UNE Institutional Review Board at (207) 221-4171 or irb@une.edu.

Will I receive a copy of this consent form?
- You will be given a copy of this consent form.

_____

Participant's Statement

I understand the above description of this research and the risks and benefits associated with my participation as a research subject. I agree to take part in the research and do so voluntarily.

_____   _____

Participant's signature or   Date

Legally authorized representative

_____

Printed name

Researcher's Statement

The participant named above had sufficient time to consider the information, had an opportunity to ask questions, and voluntarily agreed to be in this study.

_____   _____

Researcher's signature   Date

_____

Printed name

Appendix E

To: All Staff

From: Michael Rafferty

Re: Research Study

I am writing to let you know about a research study I am engaging in here in the district. I am a

doctoral student at the University of New England. I am studying educational leadership and

specifically teacher leadership. I am looking for volunteers who might be interested in partaking

in a short survey (10-15 minutes) and an interview (20-30 minutes) regarding the teacher

leadership movement in the Region.

If you are wiling to partake in the survey, please email and let me know if you can participate in

the survey, the interview or both.

Thank you,

Michael Rafferty

Appendix F

Reading School District Strategy Map

Reading Strategy Map for Teacher Leadership

Theory of Action: If Reading School District is an organization that values continuous improvement, a feedback-rich culture and a clear vision for teaching and learning, then teachers are leaders for building their own and other's capacity by providing and receiving effective and powerful feedback to themselves, colleagues and students, so that a classroom climate of risk-taking, powerful teaching and learning will increase student achievement

A. CO team will learn	B. CO team will do	C. Principals will learn	D. Principals will do	E. Teacher Leaders will learn	F. Teacher Leaders will do	G. Teachers will learn	H. Teachers will do	I. Students will
A1 Principles of adult learning and how to facilitate professional learning A2 Communication and feedback protocols for continuous improvement A3 Understand the unique needs of the individual schools A4 Strategic leadership moves including but not limited to vision, communication, shared leadership, and leading improvement A5 Learn the levels of feedback to support the growth of building administrators A6 Provide clear and consistent communication to various stakeholders	B1 **Communicate district priorities through action and focus** B2 Operationalize district priorities for all departments B3 Define parameters of implementation of district and school priorities B4 **Facilitate, guide the development of R14 Instructional Model** B5 Design systems and structures B6 Be physically present and emotionally engaged in schools B7 Respond to administrators in a timely manner B8 **Provide professional learning based on identified leadership needs** B9 Provide opportunities for leadership team to contribute, collaborate and calibrate practice B10 Develop measurements of student learning B11 **Use feedback to support administrator growth**	C1 Principles of adult learning and how to facilitate professional learning C2 Region 14 approach to improvement planning C3 Strategic leadership moves including but not limited to vision, communication, shared leadership, and leading improvement C4 Facilitate conversations among teachers to improve instruction C5 Facilitate and not always lead C6 Use feedback to support teacher growth C7 Provide clear and consistent communication to various stakeholders	D1 Develop capacity of self D2 Communicate shared vision and support for Region 14 and school priorities D3 Lead staff in developing high impact instructional practices D4 Get everyone in school working together to know and value their impact D4a Create structures to ask effective questions D4b Provide feedback to teachers D4c Work with teachers to set goals D4d Support teacher data collection and reflection on their impact D4e Ensure colleague visits are focused on student learning to understand impact D5 Facilitate improvement planning with teacher leaders D6 Develop strong relationships with staff D7 Create a culture of learning, risk-taking and welcoming errors as learning guides for adults and students D8 Leverage teacher leaders and other staff to support and move the work	E1 Learn from each other E2 How to provide feedback to each other around an instructional focus. E3 Build their own instructional capacity E4 To develop measuring student mechanisms for learning E5 Better ways to facilitate inquiry based learning for teachers E6 How to foster risk taking in teachers E7 How to provide effective feedback to each other and teachers around an instructional focus E8 Learn from each other by observation	F1 Lead professional learning F2 Give feedback to teachers in cohorts. F3 Model gathering research on collecting data on student performance and teacher instruction—to be used for F2 F4 Lead peers in implementing measures of student learning F5 Model the use of effective feedback with students F6 Lead colleagues in taking risks with instructional practices F7 Facilitate the implementation of curriculum F8 Facilitate inquiry based learning for teachers F9 Give feedback to teachers in cohorts	G1. Teachers locate, implement and provide feedback on curriculum documents. G2. Teachers use effective instructional strategies to create engagement within and beyond the classroom.	**Culture** H1 Teachers use classroom set up effectively, and make adjustments to the physical environment when needed. H2 Teachers create innovative tools and strategies for learners. H3 Teacher regularly share effective instructional practices H4 Teachers prompt for thinking about resources to accomplish goals (tools, strategies, peers). H5 Offer interesting varied and relevant learning opportunities (choice) H6 Teachers take risks by using strategies to provide a different ways for students to demonstrate mastery. **Feedback** H7 Teachers provide and probe for evidence and examples to support and justify ideas; purposefully challenging one another with counterpoints, new interpretations, and questions. H8 Teacher question students to promote goal	**Culture** I1. Students use the classroom set up effectively, and make adjustments to the physical environment when needed (making a learning space). I2.Students utilize varied and divergent approaches to problem solving. I3. Students select and use resources to accomplish goals (tools, strategies, peers). I4. Students take risks by using strategies and asking questions at point of difficulty. I5. Students are reflective learners and can self assess progress towards a learning goal. **Feedback** I6. Students research and share evidence and examples to support and justify ideas; purposefully challenging one another with counterpoints, new interpretations, and questions. I7.Students question one another to promote goal setting and reflection based on visible criteria