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TEACHER LEADERSHIP:

EMERGENT LEADERSHIP IN A COMPLEX SYSTEM

FUNCTIONING AS A PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITY

by

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A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of
Old Dominion University in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

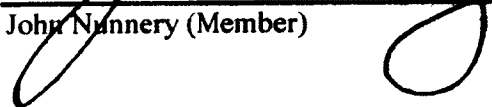
OLD DOMINION UNIVERSITY

MAY 2013

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ABSTRACT

TEACHER LEADERSHIP: EMERGENT LEADERSHIP IN A COMPLEX SYSTEM FUNCTIONING AS A PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITY

Andrea L. Voshell

Old Dominion University, 2013

Director: Dr. Steve Myran

The extent to which organizational, social, cultural, and leadership contexts within schools support or impede the complexity of emergent leadership as it relates to professional learning communities was investigated in this study. Through in-depth interviews exploring ways in which teacher leadership manifests itself, the ability of teachers to understand their own leadership capacity, and how their emergent leadership influences others, data from this study reshape the notion that schools do not need to reform, but need to transform from traditional schools of teaching into contemporary schools of learning, providing the type of professional knowledge needed to foster 21st century skills for students. Data were collected through one-on-one semi-structured interviews conducted with fourteen teachers from four schools designated as the highest and lowest Title I and Non-Title I schools in a large urban district based on state wide achievement scores. These interview data were analyzed to develop five thematic constructs with sixteen themes. Thematic constructs were also developed to address the four context factors that may support or impede emergent teacher leadership. The findings suggested that teacher leadership has the ability to develop through the process of collaboration which is socially constructed in the context of professional learning

communities. Findings further reveal that deep considerations for the ramifications of working within such a complex system as a learning community be made. These considerations include understanding that teacher leadership leads to a shift in decision making from a hierarchical to democratic model, that collaboration builds organizational intelligence, that struggling students are motivators for reflective professional discourse, and that influential peers set the model for this type of intuitive teacher leadership. Implications for further practice and directions for future research are also discussed.

This work is dedicated to my family

Rusty, Justin, and Kevin

Thank you

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I would be remiss in not thanking my friend and colleague, Dr. Sophia Stubblefield, for planting the seed in me to start on this path of study. She is a quiet influencer that models true leadership. I would also like to thank Lisa Hannah for her attention to detail while editing this manuscript. Her support through this process has been unwavering and for that I am appreciative. I would like to thank my husband, Rusty, for his incredible skills with word processing. He made my life easier with his help and know-how. My friends and family have given me the time and space to complete this and without their patience and understanding, I would not have been able to do it. I am just happy I will never have to answer again, "When will you be finished?" I finally have my fuzzy hat!

No one begins this journey unless they have been inspired by an idea, belief, or person. I am humbled and honored to work with teachers who are committed to their profession and to the belief their students will succeed. I am inspired each and every day as I observe your struggles and triumphs in the classroom. Thank you for all you do.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In the midst of this new age, 21st century organizations such as schools, are facing complex competitive landscapes driven largely by globalization and a technological revolution (Uhl-Bien, Marion & McKelvey, 2007). Educators are continuing in their struggle to make massive changes in America's schools while working in an educational system that was never designed to meet the needs of today's students (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001). In trying to design and disseminate new and effective educational practices to prepare students for tomorrow's quickly evolving workplace, educators are faced with change that calls for new organizational environments, cultural shifts, and social paradigms. As schools look to the future, they are confronted with unknown realities in terms of student diversity as under-represented groups enter our classrooms, as new technologies are being developed and as embryonic international and global relationships and economies are being adopted.

Accountability mandates and the rise of high-stakes testing have also resulted in the need for a closer look at how schools operate. Linn (2000) reports that accountability mandates have played prominent roles in many of the reform efforts over the last half century. These assessment and accountability measures have historically been externally controlled which Linn argues have been easier and cheaper than taking actions that involve actual change in what happens inside the classroom, such as increasing instructional programs or implementing program changes which involve substantial professional development. By the first decade of the 21st century, No Child Left Behind,

NCLB, incorporated many state measures and raised the stakes through accountability mandates with the purpose of graduating students prepared for a knowledge-based economy (Cuban, 2006). With the advent of NCLB, America's schools have equal demands for accountability as measured by student outcomes. It has obliged schools to examine their performance in terms of standardized student achievement and sustained school reform efforts. While student achievement is at the heart of the current accountability movement, Linn (2005) connects two separate tracks in the development of current school accountability systems: a) Federal legislation such as Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 and the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 and b) State testing and accountability policies and legislation. In both cases, Linn argues that federal and state legislative mandates run incongruent with local traditions and cultures that have evolved over time and define student success for its communities.

The basic "grammar" of schooling has remained remarkably stable over the decades and has frustrated generations of reformers who have fought to change these standardized organizational structures (Tyack & Tobin, 1994). Tyack and Tobin state one way to look at this "grammar" of schooling is to understand that it has become congruent over time with general social and cultural changes or the belief that communities know what schools should look like. This traditional educational model in American schools has been depicted as a closed classroom model where administrators lead, teachers teach, and students reflect their knowledge through formal assessments. Cuban (2013) tells us that policy makers have historically viewed schooling as a collection of parts that can be broken down and fixed by way of school choice, standard based testing, new technologies, and accountability measures which are anchored in key assumptions that

these reforms would alter teaching practices and increase student learning. This linear view is no longer viable as we now know educational systems are complex, creating intricate learning cultures sensitive to internal and external forces. Schools operate with interdependent relationships, unpredictable events, and ambitious directives that combine into a web-like system (Cuban, 2013; Sargut & McGrath, 2011; Morrison, 2002). We have made little progress in our ability to operate in these complex systems which defy conventional modeling and challenge traditional management practices (Sargut & McGrath, 2011). What is needed now is for educational leaders, teachers, and other change agents to transform their roles in order to bring about those changes necessary to compete in a global landscape. However, Tyack & Cuban (1995) argue that reform must emerge from the inside out, requiring a new image of teachers. Their work suggests that past reforms have eroded respect for teachers and the profession of teaching and the challenge is how to include teachers as policy shapers in current and future reform efforts. The literature leads us to believe that teachers must become the catalysts for this change process and develop their own capacity for teacher leadership (Fullan, 1993). This inside-out strategy to which Tyack & Tobin refer provides the opportunity in which professional learning communities can develop at the school level thus providing the impetus for emergent teacher leadership.

Teacher leadership has become a key factor in the educational leadership and the professional learning community literature. Although a large body of research exists in the area of teacher leadership, the explicit focus has been on formally recognized positions and roles of additional responsibility for the classroom teacher. However, aspects of leadership in the emergent context of teachers leading other teachers are scant

in the literature. The literature review in the second chapter of this study will address this research related to teacher leadership and professional learning communities and do so within the school framework of organizational, social, cultural, and contextual factors.

Thus, this study was designed to further investigate the complexity of emergent teacher leadership as it relates to professional learning communities and to examine the factors that are relevant for the sustainability of this change. The findings should advance the understanding and nature of emergent leadership and serve educators with practical suggestions for moving forward in the change process in order to create an educational environment for students that will better prepare them for 21st century learning.

Background of the Study

Historically, studies concerning leadership report that there has been a preoccupation with the assumption of ‘principal’ as the only leader effecting change within a school (Heck & Hallinger, 1999). These studies reveal a need to examine the role of school leaders through a more diverse lens. If teachers are expected to contribute to the overall success of educational reform, knowing how to build the learning capacity for this new type of leadership model will be essential to the survival of schools. If teachers are to move beyond their classroom doors and create the knowledge base for leadership capacity, it is important to understand the driving factors behind complexity and change in terms of the emergence and self-organization of human systems, such as schools, into professional learning communities (Morrison, 2002).

Developing new working relationships among teachers is a difficult and complex social, psychological, and organizational problem (Smylie, 1992). Teachers’ professional relationships are changed when taking on leadership responsibilities. Their roles have

traditionally been one of independence, physical isolation, and egalitarian professional status. According to York-Barr & Duke (2004), teacher leadership is a unique form of leadership which is not vested in a formal hierarchy or role description. These researchers argue that “although it is legitimately grounded within the boundaries of several other leadership theories, teacher leadership establishes change agency through the establishment of relationships, sustaining open communication, and effective use of resources throughout the organization in an effort to improve student educational experiences and outcomes” (p. 263).

Educators, however, tend to be resistant to change. Wagner (2001) states three reasons for this. One is risk aversion. Historically, teachers entered the profession due to its high degree of order, security, and stability. Training and work conditions have fostered this with too few opportunities for original thinking and all too often, ‘fads of the month’, in terms of reform measures, were never sustained over time. Wagner states a second tendency in resisting change deals with a teacher’s craft expertise. Teachers enjoyed working alone, developing their expertise, and taking great pride in introducing their subject knowledge to their students. This autonomy left teachers working in isolation as adults and it is this third factor that greatly reduced their capacity for change. Tyack & Tobin (1994) reveal that the appeal of traditional educational procedures steeped in long held traditions and habitual organizational practices allowed educators to reject major changes and that they have learned over generations how to work within these traditional organizational patterns, becoming efficient due to predictability and habit.

Schools are beginning to discover that new ideas, knowledge creation, and sharing are essential to solving learning problems faced in this new century. In the view of such complex school situations, a new form of leadership must emerge (Morrison, 2002). Leaders must now engage more effectively in wider interactions with larger groups of people as demands on school leaders multiply (Beachum & Dentith, 2004). Principals have traditionally had few with whom to share their tremendous responsibility and have regularly kept teachers outside the parameters of significant decision making. Hord (1997) reports the role of principals is crucial in any change effort as they are in the best position to lead change, but once the initiative is underway, it is also necessary to share power, authority, and decision-making with the staff in a democratically participatory way. Teachers are critical to this education reform because they are the ones who have front line knowledge of the classroom (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). It is difficult to imagine improving education without making the teacher central to this process (Tyack & Cuban, 1995).

Problem Statement

Leadership in schools is at a bifurcation point. It is clear that traditional models of leadership are simply not working and that leaders in other walks of life are turning to a theory of complexity to inform their leadership practice (Morrison, 2002). In facing these complex changes, one leader alone, no matter how skilled or effective, cannot be all to everyone. Therefore, a complex challenge requires a whole system and all the people in it to change, as it lies beyond the scope of any individual (Yukl & Lepsinger, 2007). Change, by nature, is complex and as schools emerge into professional learning

communities, this complexity paradigm calls for an innovative shift of thought to defining the leaders as teachers.

Teacher leadership has been argued two-fold. Some find it to be an emergent, collaborative, and democratic influence on learning while others see it as just another oscillating effort in school reform. The literature is looking to find a clearer image of what teacher leadership looks and feels like. This leadership is complex and fluid, making it difficult to model. It requires intuition and a dialectic approach to problem solving on the part of teachers. Teacher leadership means teachers taking the initiative to make their own learning rigorous and relevant and to build the relationships needed to help students participate and communicate in a global knowledge economy (Wagner, 2008). Teachers, however, have not been trained to be leaders or learners but deliverers of curriculum. They have not been expected to model strategies on how to learn for their students. This traditional view of teaching is incongruent with the theories of adult learning and complex learning systems. Teachers are beginning to understand that in order to be more effective in the classroom they need to be active as adult learners themselves. They have, in the past, become more involved in leadership roles helping to bring positive changes to their schools; however, these roles tend to be formal and linear in function. To better understand teacher leadership, its development, and its potential, the literature needs to ask teachers what they do, how they influence others, and explore their emerging leadership capacity as a tenet of professional learning communities. The purpose of this study was to explore the aspects of emerging teacher leadership in the school context and to attempt to answer the following research questions.

Research Questions

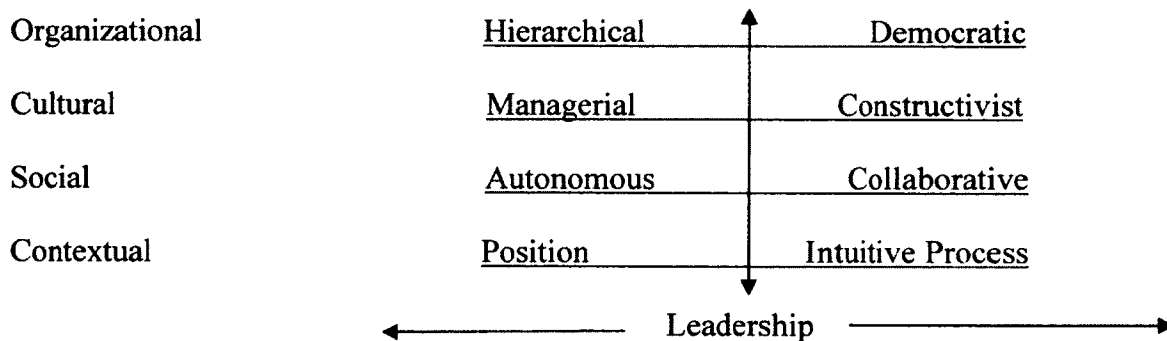
1. In what ways does teacher leadership manifest itself in the context of a professional learning community?
2. To what degree do unique characteristics of the school influence teacher leadership?
3. How do elementary teachers understand their leadership capacity?
4. What personal and professional experiences do elementary teachers perceive as influencing the development of their leadership skills?
5. What do teachers at the elementary school level perceive to be the impact of their leadership skills on instructional practice?

Theoretical Framework

The framework for this study was drawn from the literature on educational leadership. A close examination of the literature identified four areas in which the influence of leadership can initiate change: organizational, cultural, social, and contextual. A concept map (see Figure 1) was designed by the researcher to depict a continuum of influence based on Morrison's (2002) leadership description "from chains of command to webs of influence" (pg.57).

Figure 1.

Continuum of Influence Concept Map



The continuum can be approached both vertically and horizontally. Leadership in the contextual sense can fall along the continuum between that of a formal position to one of an intuitive and emergent process. Looking at the social context, the traditional model of the autonomous school leader is in contrast to the collaboration needed for a learning community. Culturally, the leader moves from one of administrative and managerial to a learning leader which allows the organization to move from a top-down bureaucracy to a more democratic way of doing business. Each area will be further discussed in this study's literature review.

The concept of teacher leadership is based on the theories of adult learning which are useful in understanding the complexity of emergent leadership (Morrison, 2002; Sargut, 2011; Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2005). Change is complex and as the work of teachers is redesigned into collaborative and professional learning models, the role of 'teacher' is redefined. The theories of adult learning and complex change will aid in

informing this study and making sense of the collected data. Not only do they help connect to the context in which teacher leadership emerges, but they can inform us how this leadership can mature and sustain itself through inevitable future school reform efforts.

Adult Learning Theories

The role of ‘teacher’ is a social role... with written and unwritten rules... thus the act of moving from teacher to learner signals the type of transformational learning Mezirow (1978) describes as the process by which adults come to recognize culturally induced dependency roles and relationships and take action to overcome them (Erikson, 2007). As Brown (2006) suggests, the learner, the learning process, and the context of learning form the cornerstone of adult learning. Understanding that adults learn in social contexts and they have the reflective ability to act on their learning forms the theoretical basis for teacher leadership as it emerges in the context of a professional learning community. Theories of adult learning are discussed here as they relate to teacher learning.

Knowles (1972) proposes “the current system of traditional education is progressively regressive in that the procedures for helping people learn, which are congruent with what we know about the learning process that takes place in kindergarten, get progressively worse climbing up the educational ladder” (pg.33). Knowles (1980, pg. 43) defines his theory of andragogy as the art and science of helping adults learn and draws the difference between pedagogy, the art and science of teaching children. This pedagogy is counterintuitive to the way adults are taught and learn, particularly in

professional development areas. He purports that the theory of andragogy is more in line with the needs of adult learners.

For Knowles (1984), andragogy is based on five assumptions about the characteristics of adult learners that are different from child learners:

- Self concept: as a person matures, self concept moves from one of dependency toward one of self-direction in learning
- Experience: a person accumulates a growing reservoir of experiences that becomes a rich source for learning
- Readiness to learn: learning needs are increasingly oriented towards developmentally changing social roles
- Orientation to learning: learning shifts from one of subject-centeredness to problem-centeredness
- Motivation to learn: motivation to learn is internal rather than external

Some adult learning theorists argue that these characteristics can be found in all learners and that some children can be further along on the learning continuum than adults at any given stage (Merriam, 2001). Merriam reports Knowles later moved his andragogy vs. pedagogy position to represent these assumptions on a continuum ranging from teacher-directed to self-directed learning and is considered the most learner-centered of all patterns of adult learning.

Moving beyond the theory of andragogy and proposing a theory of transformational learning, Mezirow (1991) described it as a constructivist theory of adult learning. Brown (2006) states that this transformative learning changes the way people see themselves and their world and attempts to explain how their expectations, framed within cultural

assumptions and presuppositions, directly influence the meaning they derive from their experiences. Mezirow (2000) defines adult learning as the process of using a prior interpretation to construe a new or revised interpretation of the meaning of one's experience as a guide to future action and posited that learning occurs in one of four ways: (a) by elaborating existing frames of reference; (b) by learning new frames of reference; (c) by transforming points of view; and (d) by transforming habits of mind. He named critical reflection as a component of all four. According to Mezirow, adults transform their frames of reference by becoming critically reflective of their assumptions and their contexts; however, they need to justify their new perspective through discourse (pg.20). Rational discourse involves a commitment to extended and repeated conversations that evolve with time into a culture of careful listening and cautious openness to new perspectives. This is not the same as shared understanding in the sense of consensus but rather, deeper and richer understandings of our own biases and how each one constructs meaning from it (Mezirow, 1991). Merriam (2001) argues that critical reflection is a developmental process, rooted in experience and that mature cognitive development is foundational to engaging in critical reflection and rational discourse which is necessary for transformational learning. As one goes through the learning process, meaning is attached to the learning. Transformations often follow ten identified phases of meaning in this process (Mezirow, 2000):

- A distorting dilemma
- Self-examination with feelings of fear, anger, guilt, or shame
- A critical assessment of assumptions

- Recognition of one's discontent and the process of transformations are shared
- Explorations of options for new roles, relationships, and actions
- Planning a course of action
- Acquiring knowledge and skills for implementing one's plans
- Provisional trying of new roles
- Building competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships
- A reintegration into one's life on the basis of conditions dictated by one's new perspective

Other theorists have expanded on the theory of transformational learning and it continues to be a growing area of study within the adult learning arena and these are replacing andragogy as the dominant philosophy of adult learning (Taylor, 2008). Dirkx (2006) reminds us that a holistic approach recognizing the feelings of others, other ways of knowing (intuition), and building important relationships with others in the learning process is key to transformational learning. Recognizing Mezirow's processes of learning, teachers may need to begin with the premise of reflection, being concerned with why they teach rather than how or what they teach (Kreber, 2004).

When investigating the tenets of teacher leadership within the context of professional learning communities, it is critical to understand the need to appreciate the importance of adult learning theory (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2005). They state that all normal adults are motivated to keep growing and developing, but the motivation is frequently blocked by such barriers as negative self-concept as a student, inaccessibility of opportunities and resources, time constraints, and programs that violate the principles

of adult learning. Professional learning communities provide the contextual organization addressing these barriers, thus giving way for teacher learning and leadership to materialize. With this learning, adults must meet and deal with change. Traditional models will not suffice, however change is not easy. The next section will discuss the theory of complex change and its importance in emerging teacher leadership.

Complex Change Theory

Complex systems such as large cities and industry have always existed but due to the information technology revolution of the past few decades, they have filtered into our smaller organizations such as school systems (Sargut & McGrath, 2011). Morrison's (2002) comprehensive book concerning complexity theory as it relates to school leadership, presents the idea that schools are places not only where students learn, but adults as well. Morrison states that if schools are to embody and prepare for emergent leadership, then they need to become learning organizations. He presents evidence from empirical studies that the organizational intelligence of the school is demonstrated in its capacity to identify problems, generate diverse solutions, plan for implementation of several solutions simultaneously, gain feedback, and make appropriate adjustments. In doing so, schools as systems, remain in constant flux rather than in a stable state. The idea is posited that schools must operate in a much more complex way than as an open system. Open systems are deterministic, linear, and tend to be hierarchical, whereas complex systems yield a much more creative and spontaneous outcome to problem solving. Morrison also states those complex systems, as opposed to open systems, connote more of a human relationship; a process of people relating and interacting over time. According to Morrison, a key feature of complex systems is that order emerges

through self-organization; in other words, moments of decision transpire at the concurrence of problems, situations and opportunities. Teams and groups form themselves spontaneously to solve problems with participants (not managers) deciding their boundaries. This leads to the understanding that leadership can not reside in one person; everyone can exercise leadership. So it becomes not one of gate keeping and directing, but one of enabling and empowering (Morrison, 2002). In other words, leader simply is the one who goes first and shows the way. This premise supports Knowles' key characteristics in the transformational adult learning process put forth by Mezirow.

Characteristics of complex systems, whose central feature is emergent, self-organizing behavior, raise questions about the role of leadership in such systems (Plowman & et al., 2007). Complex organizations are harder to manage since no one can predict what will happen because the degree of complexity may lie beyond our cognitive limits (Sargut & McGrath, 2011). Sargut & McGrath continue by saying small decisions that happen early in a chain of events can have unintended outcomes or cause disproportionate consequences by the end, causing the outlier to be more significant than the average. They explain how difficult it is for an individual decision maker to see the entire complex system and to comprehend a highly diverse array of relationships from one location. Leadership, as studied through the lens of complexity theory, is one which provides insight into how leadership happens in dynamic situations (Sargut & McGrath, 2011). This higher emergent type of leadership, however, will need several considerations if it is to sustain itself. Participants will need team development, emotional intelligence, human networking to develop critical relationships, and the type of opportunities needed to tap into the creative side of school (Morrison, 2002).

In describing human systems, such as educational organizations, Stacey (1996) states they are non-linear feedback systems that are coevolving, interacting networks of agents and subsystems whose behavior is driven by schemas, and in the process, they learn. Stacey further states that a system is non-linear when actions have more than one outcome and when actions generate non-proportional outcomes. Human systems can therefore be regarded as complex adaptive systems which are creative learning systems (Stacey, 1996). This creativity lies at the edge of chaos, the point of time between order and disorder, when the system is in the most vulnerable state capable of change (Morrison, 2002). Learning at the edge of chaos has both structure and openness. According to Fullan (2001), for schools, the elements of learning at the edge of chaos include: (a) guidance of moral purpose; (b) understanding the change process; (c) focus on knowledge and data arising from shared problem solving and assessment of results; (d) relationship building; (e) disturbance and coherence. Therefore, learning at the edge of chaos becomes the central convention to creating a learning community, allowing teacher leadership to emerge.

It can be argued that schools be viewed as living human systems whose main role is that of knowledge creation and innovation (Morrison, 2002). Knowledge creation is the capacity to generate and learn new ideas. Complexity theory provides a new lens with which schools can be viewed as professional learning communities. He argues that complexity theory incorporates, indeed requires, unpredictable fluctuations and non-average behavior in order to account for change, development, and novelty through self-organization; thus enabling us to regard school from a dynamic rather than static perspective, understand how schools adapt to external/internal contexts, and find

effective ways to benefit from individual creativity and innovation within the school-wide framework.

There is a need for educational organizations to have a clear and coherent picture of this change process. Change entails new experiences and new learning and it challenges customary practices and beliefs of those in and around the school. It raises potential for unintended circumstances and increases the unpredictability of achieving intended outcomes until they have occurred. Wallace (2003) questions whether we can increase managerial control over such educational changes. He argues that it is unrealizable because complex change, intrinsically, is unmanageable and beyond human capacity for any one manager to achieve full predictability and control over the change process. He contends that the following popular prescriptions of Senge, Morrison, and Fullan are not practical because of this ambiguity: (a) Senge's theory on learning organizations assume that different interests and struggles for control can be eliminated, however Wallace argues this theory belies the inevitability of limited awareness within/between organizations; (b) Morrison's idea of self-organizing where members are to be freed-up to take initiatives in conditions of uncertainty belies the possibility that they make initiatives according to beliefs/values contradicting those of managers; and (c) Fullan posits that it is possible to take charge of change by creating a new ethos of innovation thereby preempting the imposition of change from outside. Wallace argues, however, that choices are constrained by government policies and that all external forces cannot be eliminated.

Goldspink (2007) argues that in rethinking educational reform, we need to consider alternative theories from those previously adopted from managerial and

economic approaches. The research findings from his study suggest that the tight coupling that appears in a bureaucratic/hierarchical model has proven resistant to change. The research documents the efforts of change in South Australia's state school sector through the Learning to Learn Project. The idea of schools as loosely coupled and complex organizations emphasizes the potential benefits of a constructivist approach to reform with a need to focus on people, relationships, and learning rather than structures and centrally determined standards for conformance. This loosely coupled approach parallels that of complexity theory in that they both focus on the understanding of the implications of systemic non-linearity. As such, participants who are compelled to obey bureaucratic rules lose the capacity for independent thought, resulting in trained incapacity (Goldspink, 2007).

Meaningful change is complex. Complexity means change, but specifically, it means rapidly occurring, unpredictable, nonlinear change (Fullan, 2001). The science of complexity, as applied to schools, argues that systems must be adaptive in order to survive. Fullan is unequivocal in his view that all schools, if they are to survive, must understand change and complexity theory as it relates to emerging teacher leadership. Stacey (2001) tells us that power and constraint are realistic boundary barriers in complexity theory and although hierarchies may be essential for short term efficiency and stability, informal and self-organized networks are more needed for change and development.

As professional learning communities evolve, then teacher leadership becomes the defining component to this complex systemic change. Leaders in hierarchical positions now have the opportunity to advance this emergent form of leadership by

acquiring the knowledge, building the relationships, and supporting the capacity for this change. According to Wheatley (1999), change in one part of the system leads to change among all parts, changing the system itself. Hill (2010) reminds us that leading is a matter of harnessing people's collective genius in learning communities that have a common purpose, values, and rules of engagement about how people should interact and problem solve together. Thus, the future of educational change becomes one of creativity and valued relationships evolving through self-organization and self-learning.

Overview of Method

Research regarding the way teachers understand their leadership role in professional learning communities (PLCs) is scant in the literature. Creswell (2003) states qualitative research is exploratory and is useful when the topic is new or has never been addressed with a certain group of people. Qualitative inquiry is inductive and thus relies on a set of criteria by which it is judged as credible and reliable. Therefore, this qualitative study designed to examine the phenomenon of emergent teacher leadership as a tenet of professional learning communities followed criteria as set out by Patton (2002 pg.546) for judging the quality and trustworthiness of qualitative social constructivist research and categories of trustworthiness as defined by credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Participants and Site Selection

A maximum variation sampling of participants was used which allowed elementary teachers from selected schools to voluntarily participate. Interviews consisted of teachers representing grades kindergarten through fifth grade, special education, and specialists in the areas of art, reading, and math.

The four sites chosen were schools identified as the two highest and two lowest performing Title I and Non-Title I schools in the district based on SY 2009-2010 state standardized assessment scores. Teachers from each of the four schools were asked to volunteer to be interviewed.

Data Collection and Data Analysis

Data collection procedures consisted of semi-structured individual interviews, district documents concerning professional learning community reform initiatives, and researcher notes. These interviews were, on average, 60 minutes in length and were audio taped. Transcriptions took place between each of the interviews in order to derive new themes or to elicit data saturation.

The purpose of the data analysis was to report major themes and constructs that emerged from the transcriptions of the interviews, the district documents, and notes from the researcher. The data analysis consisted of identifying relevant text, coding text into repeating ideas, identifying themes, and deriving thematic constructs from the themes (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003).

Significance

Empirically, little is known about how the daily collaborative, reflective, and discursive practices of teacher leaders might create the circumstances necessary to bring about the changes needed in the classroom to address the rigorous and relevant learning required for the 21st century. Teacher leadership is an emergent concept with few studies designed to show what it is like to experience teacher leadership outside of a formal role. This study should provide insight as to how teacher leadership is manifested and its influence on the peers of teachers practicing this type of intuitive leadership.

This study is significant to elementary schools because it examines the influence teacher leaders might exhibit on the professional learning culture of the schools. By gaining information from elementary teachers in a large suburban school district, this study hopes to provide insight as to the organizational, cultural, and social implications for elementary schools and the changes that may occur as a result of teachers leading and learning from other teachers. It examines the influences that teacher leaders have on their peers and the perceived impact their leadership has on building leadership capacity at the elementary school level. The following chapter will examine a review of the literature addressing the organizational, cultural, social, and contextual leadership factors that may influence the emergence of teacher leadership in elementary schools.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter provides a review of literature pertaining to the organizational, social, cultural, and contextual factors that contribute to teacher leadership and its emerging role through the collaborative processes found in professional learning communities. It concludes with a summary of what the literature presents and identifies some of the gaps that are in need of further investigation.

Organizational Change

History of Reform Movements

At times, a new reform involves a major shift or pendulum swing as one ideological camp gains ascendance over another (Linn, 2000). Tyack & Tobin (1994) argue that organizational patterns of schooling are historical products of particular groups with particular interests and values at particular times, making them political chess pieces. O'Day (2002) suggests that the autonomous physical classroom structure of U.S. schools and their inherent bureaucratic accountability policies impede the necessary information sharing needed for teachers to adapt their practice to the needs of their students. Lortie (1975) remarks that cellular organizations in schools create boundaries that prevent colleagues from sharing in the kind of expertise that develops creative thinking, leading to change. Historically, school systems have been affected less by the constraint to modernize than other areas of society (Oertel, 1995). This is based on the view that reforms promote further bureaucratic arrangements and legislative mandates in the area of school organization (Linn, 2000; Oertle, 1995; O'Day, 2002; Cuban, 2013).

Public schools have had the disadvantage by definition of what constitutes ‘schooling’ and U.S. policy makers have proposed various strategies aimed at either enhancing the professionalism of teachers or strengthening the bureaucratic control of instruction (Tyack & Tobin, 1994; Marks & Louis, 1997). Early developers of public education sought to prepare students for civic engagement and to instill social and humanitarian attitudes and skills that shape our democracy (Cuban, 2004). Late 19th century reforms spurred schools to prepare graduates for full participation in the workplace (Cuban, 2013). Cuban points out that throughout the 20th century, business inspired reforms were driven by a deep belief that strong public schools produced a strong economy and that schools needed to copy successful businesses that raised their productivity and profits through efficient management and accountability. He states for nearly a century and a half, U.S. reformers have tried to turn teacher-centered classrooms into more flexible and demanding pedagogies that include substantial intellectual content, collaborative work, and ways of teaching that bridged in-school and out-of-school worlds. However, these first order incremental changes have left intact teaching routines that grandparents visiting today’s schools would find familiar (Cuban, 2013).

Several major reform efforts and organizational improvement models within the public education system and academic circles have advanced during the latter part of the last century. As Cuban (1998) documents, one attempt began in the mid 1970’s with a small number of researchers working to refute the mainstream wisdom that what largely determined a student’s academic performance, as measured by standardized tests, was family background. Research at that time was suggesting that public schools were unable to overcome the effects of poverty on students which led national policy makers to reduce

federal funding of most programs. Cuban reports that with this legislative action, a small group of activist researchers, led by Ron Edmonds, began a reform effort known as the Effective Movement. This essentially stated that regardless of background, all children can learn and achieve results that mirror ability, not socioeconomic background, that top-down decision expertise can improve schools, and that measurable results do count.

More recent attempts came about due to the 1983 *Nation at Risk* report which served as the vehicle for the next wave of reforms known collectively as the Excellence Movement. DuFour & Eaker (1998) report that a *Nation at Risk* had shown that failing public schools were contributing to the United States becoming a globally less competitive economy. Although the reform efforts of this movement offered consistent direction, they contained no new ideas, just more of the same: higher graduation standards, updated curriculum, accountability plans, and attention to teacher performance. Excellence, not equity, became the slogan of the day (Cuban, 1998).

By the end of the 1980's, policy makers were speaking less of 'effective' and 'excellence' in schools and far more of 'restructuring', site-based management, professional teacher development, and systems reform (DuFour & Eaker, 1998). Both the 1986 Carnegie Report *A Nation Prepared: Teachers for the 21st Century* and the 1996 National Commission on Teaching and America's Future's report *What Matters Most: Teaching For America's Future* targeted teachers as key to the reform efforts (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001). The former Bush administration designated a different reform titled The Goals 2000: Educate America Act in 1994 and the federal government began to view reform as national versus school-by-school, incorporating national standards, curriculum and testing mandates (DuFour & Eaker, 1998). As DuFour reports,

those efforts were clearly seen by the public as an attempt by the Federal government to take over public education and to present an ideological agenda. As a result, power and accountability were issued to the states and they were taxed with developing and carrying out higher standards of learning for their students. This localized attempt at school reform became known as the Restructuring Movement (Newmann, F. et al. 1996).

Looking to instill effective and efficient management within each worksite, schools began to look to corporate America for answers. Theories of organizational management arose that based success on the tenets of collaboration and quality improvement. Inspired by W. Edwards Deming's 14 points for management, schools began to implement Total Quality Management principles into the everyday organizational and managerial aspects of education (Deming, 2000). This model of organizational restructuring was based on individual parts, separate from each other in an organization and as Senge (2000, pg.13) warned in the corporate world "we are taught to break problems apart, to fragment the world; when we try to then see the big picture, it is like trying to reassemble a broken mirror...when we give up this illusion, we can then build learning organizations where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire". This philosophy heralded the reorganization of America's schools and connected the desire for professional adult learning to the understanding that adults learn in socially connected ways. This organizational change in work redesign for educators placed teachers and principals on a more horizontal field. Site-based decision making and teacher empowerment grew from this body of organizational research and will be discussed in the next section.

Shared Decision-Making

Much of the research from the last decade of the 20th century focused on the restructuring movement but a good deal of the literature only emphasized certain aspects, such as shared decision-making. Few empirical studies have been documented. According to Taylor & Bogotch (1994), this is because proponents of these reforms are wisely cautioned at the outset that innovations implemented under the rubric of restructuring should not be assessed too early. However, in an attempt to measure the school-level effects of teachers' participation in site based decision making, Taylor & Bogotch (1994) presented findings from their study indicating that participation did not significantly improve outcomes for teachers or students and that teachers did not feel sufficiently involved in decision making despite working in a restructured school district. Their questionnaire data collected from a large metropolitan district were analyzed using multivariate analyses to isolate school level effects of teachers' participation in decision making. The study did report teachers feeling overwhelmingly deprived of participation in all 19 analyzed decision areas. The researchers felt this was troublesome due to the fact the district was implementing reform measures. Their conclusion suggests that restructuring models, characterized by shared decision making, must be reexamined to identify obstacles that are inhibiting the success of these efforts to include teacher input.

In examining the implications of teacher empowerment for improving instructional practice, Marks & Louis (1997) investigated teacher empowerment in schools under decentralized management to observe the effects of decision-making on teachers' commitments and students' achievement. This study used data sources from teacher surveys, student assessments, case study interviews and observations from multi-

state, mostly urban school districts. Results from the with-in school analyses supported a view that contends teachers with actual influence in various domains benefit most from teacher empowerment. Compared to peers with less participatory experience, they demonstrate a greater personal responsibility for student learning. These quantitative results are supported by their case study data from earlier research (Louis & Kruse, et al. 1995) which report teachers who had genuine authority over matters concerning instruction and curriculum fared better than those who felt the decision-making was an empty attempt at inclusion. They concluded that not all forms of empowerment will have the same effect on teachers and students and that empowerment is an important but insufficient condition to obtain real changes in teachers' work.

Teacher empowerment, however, is not the only indicator of potential teacher leadership. In their study of understanding job satisfaction among principals and teachers in urban and suburban schools, Derlin & Schneider (1994) found discrepancies within the empowerment component of school reform. The study examined attitudes and perceptions of teachers and principals in the Milwaukee Metropolitan Public Schools in order to determine job satisfaction. Their findings indicated that in urban schools, teachers' satisfaction could be enhanced by administrators focusing on issues related to students and student achievement, whereas suburban teachers' satisfaction could be increased by attention to issues of teacher involvement and empowerment. This is certainly an indication that school districts may need to reconsider a one-size-fits-all approach to change and that attempts in shared decision making, when channeled through a top-down organizational hierarchy, may not prove to enhance the valid leadership capacity of teachers.

Much of the reform efforts of the past have focused on top-down hierarchical changes. Few models of alternative leadership reflected in the literature have sustained desirable effects over time (Louis & Leithwood, et al. 2010). Since *A Nation at Risk* was published, reform efforts have focused on theories of action which make claim that problems of schooling are due in most part to a lack of direction and low accountability. These theories claim that conditions are best corrected through external regulations and bureaucratic control. However, Smylie (1997) argues that organizational theory and research have long informed us that formal bureaucratic controls, such as standardized work rules and sanctions are largely ineffective in professional and semi-professional organizations such as schools, where work is uncertain, non-routine and requires employee judgment and flexibility.

School reformers have attempted two kinds of changes: first order changes that reflect quality control issues such as improving efficiency and effectiveness of the existing system and second order changes that require significant reorganization of the existing system (Wasley, 1991). However, first order changes have “hybridized the system, mixing old and new technologies, leaving schools still anchored in key assumptions that school choice, standards based testing, and accountability would alter teaching practices” (Cuban, 2013). It is second order changes that need to be addressed if serious reforms are to occur. Schools have tried to alter the structure, the physical aspects, of what they are. Unfortunately, many of the second-order changes now being implemented seem to have little impact on redesign of teachers’ work (Leithwood, Aiken, & Jantzi, 2001). According to their research, this means accomplishing many of the outcomes aspired to by advocates of restructuring are unusually complex, often uncertain

and sometimes unknown. According to Cuban (2013), working in a complex system means adapting to change, dealing with daily conflicts, and constant learning. He argues that reform designs borrowed from bureaucratic organizational structures will hardly make a dent in the daily work of those whose job is to convert policy into action.

Both Smylie and Wasley state that teachers working in bureaucratic systems seldom have the opportunity to work together on professional issues and as such, do not have the impetus to determine the standards by which they are judged. As such, teachers have not had the opportunities to increase their capacity to improve schools by making professional choices. Smylie's work on teacher work redesign shows that attempts to improve schools through a commitment strategy are in contrast to efforts of improvement through levels of career enhancements such as merit pay and formal leadership roles. According to Smylie, such commitment strategies will unleash the energy and expertise of teachers and thereby lead to improved classroom instruction and student learning.

Reform debate leaves unanswered the question of the quality of reform and whether or not changes in schools produce any real improvements (Oertel, 1995). In our society that often expects so much from schools; the teacher often becomes the scapegoat for failure in these reform efforts (Tyack & Cuban, 1995). Reformers and policy makers, in their efforts to "see reform as a complicated set of structures that needed to be overhauled rather than viewing them as a tangled maze of intersecting structures, want teachers to put into practice contradictory goals" (Cuban, 2013). Cuban states that teachers and policymakers disagree on the premise that all students have access to challenging ideas conflicts with each student becoming engaged because students vary in motivation, attitudes, aptitudes, and backgrounds. Larabee (2010) contends there are

incongruencies between expectations of policy makers for teachers and the real life experiences of teachers and their students in the classroom:

Teachers focus on what is particular within their own classrooms; reformers focus on what is universal across many classrooms. Teachers operate in a setting dominated by personal relations; reformers operate in a setting dominated by abstract political and social aims. Teachers draw on clinical experience; reformers draw on social scientific theory. Teachers embrace the ambiguity of classroom process and practice; reformers pursue the clarity of tables and graphs. Teachers put a premium on professional adaptability; reformers put a premium on uniformity of practices and outcomes (p. 158).

Reformers believe their innovation and organizational structures will change schools, but it is important to note that schools and teachers will change reforms (Tyack & Tobin, 1994). They make the case that schools are human systems, and it is humans working in these complex systems that will build and change the organizations into learning communities (Tyack & Tobin, 1994; DuFour & Eaker, 1998; Morrison, 2002).

Summary of Organizational Factors

The future of schools, as educational organizations, is in the transformation from top-down centralized institutions into thoughtful, deliberate, professional learning communities supporting the basis in which teacher leadership can emerge and more clearly defining the direction of Wasley's (1991) second order change theory.

Organizational learning is a complex process of continuous innovation and improvement and a school's capacity for this resides in the ability to collectively process, understand, and apply new ideas about teaching and learning. Senge (2000) states that schools need to emerge as "organizations where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured,

where collective aspirations are set free and where people are continually learning how to learn together ”(pg.13). Fullan (2001) tells us that the professional learning required for this successful restructuring depends on a commitment to experimentation and innovation at the local level and although organizational structure is important, reculturing is how true change can be achieved. This examination of culture and its importance in the transformation of schools into professional learning communities which support emergent teacher leadership is discussed in the next section.

A Change in Culture

Culture of Professional Knowledge

The education field has a history of observing and adapting models from business and industry. Smylie & Denny (1990) state that these attempts to bring about change in schools were grounded in a view that schools are rational, bureaucratically structured organizations that function according to a production factory model. As the new century advances, however, schools can be increasingly seen as evolving into places for the creation of professional knowledge and learning (Andrews & Lewis, 2004).

Twenty-first century science has helped us gain knowledge and insight as to how we, as humans, learn and to know that learning not only involves knowing what to learn, but also in knowing how to learn. When a learning community is developed, a learning culture is created. However, Sergiovanni (1995) reminds us that culture and community are not the same. He states that all educational institutions may have cultures but not all institutions are communities; that the idea of educational institutions as learning communities suggests a kind of relationship or connectedness that resembles a closely knit group such as family or neighborhood. Philosophical and sociological theories of

professional learning communities describe them as organizations in which behavior is shaped by collective goals, shared values, and regular personal contact (DuFour & Eaker, 1994). Senge's (1990) work on learning organizations which focused on organizational learning capacity and creativity has also been shown to have an impact on educational efforts to change. A key finding in the final report of research released to the Wallace Foundation (Louis & Leithwood, et al. 2010) states that when teachers feel connected to a culture of learning through professional community, they are more likely to use instructional methods that are linked to higher student achievement.

Culture of Continuous Inquiry

There is extensive evidence that schools organized as communities promote greater teacher commitment and student engagement in school work. Bryk, Camburn & Louis, (1999) collected survey data from 5,690 teachers in the Chicago City Public School District from 248 elementary schools testing the impact of structural, human, and social factors on the emergence of school-based professional learning communities. It is an important study in that it connected two previously distinct theories together to formulate a new framework for professional learning communities: a) behavior is shaped by shared goals, values, and regular personal contact; b) enhanced teacher professionalism is a prerequisite for student achievement and will occur only when teachers are trained to deal with the complexities of teaching. Measures of the components of professional learning communities were developed using a Rasch rating-scale model. The study concluded that essential factors of professional learning communities featured three core practices of adult behavior. The first of these understands that teachers must engage in reflective dialogue about instructional practice. Professional learning communities are built on

teachers who regularly engage in discussions with colleagues about their work and reflect upon this practice, leading to a deeper understanding of the learning process. A second factor is the deprivitization of practice that takes place when teachers observe each others' practices and joint problem solve. This means teachers move beyond their classroom doors to share and trade off the roles of mentor, advisor, and specialist through strategies such as team teaching, peer coaching, and observation of each other's instructional practice. A final core practice, peer collaboration, happens when teachers and principals engage in actual shared work. This entails more than a mere cordiality among the staff, as it heightens their mutual respect and support for effective instruction.

The Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (SEDL) defines professional learning communities as places where teachers in a school and their administrators continuously seek and share learning and act on that learning (Hord, 1997). The goal of their actions is to enhance their effectiveness as professionals for the benefit of their students; thus this arrangement may also be termed communities of continuous inquiry and improvement. In a review of empirical studies based on continuous school improvement, Hord's (1997) seminal report on professional learning communities through SEDL states that the traditional pattern where teachers instructed, students were assessed, and administrators managed is completely altered. There is no longer a hierarchy of who knows more than someone else, but rather the need for everyone to contribute.

As superintendent of a large mid-west school district, DuFour (1998) discusses the process of his district's change into a professional learning community stating that the most promising strategy for sustained, substantive school improvement is developing the

ability of school personnel to function as a learning community. He characterizes these attempts at learning as professional learning communities and suggests that the term 'professional' is someone with expertise in a specialized field, an individual who has not only pursued advanced training to enter the field, but who is also expected to remain current in its evolving knowledge base. The term 'learning organization' suggests a partnership enhanced by efficiency, expediency, and mutual interests, while 'community' places greater emphasis on relationships, shared ideals, and a strong culture - all factors that are critical to school improvement. The challenge for educators is to create a cultural community of commitment and shared inquiry which functions as a professional learning community.

Culture of Constraints

In an effort to understand how teacher leadership occurs in professional learning communities, Muijs & Harris (2007) presented findings from three case studies of contrasting schools in the UK. In schools exhibiting teacher leadership, actions from head leaders, school culture, and organizational structure were evident in support of such leadership. A culture of trust and collaboration were essential and were labeled as distinguishing factors in the success of continuous improvement. In the schools exhibiting restricted teacher leadership, the researchers described skepticism along with unique internal and external factors as key barriers. The authors conclude that leadership is a fluid and emergent phenomenon with implications for distributed power opening up the possibility of all teachers becoming leaders at various times.

Based on Hord's model, Wells & Feun (2007) reported the findings from their study that tracked the transformation of a high school into a learning community.

Acknowledging the slow and challenging process, the mixed-model analyses documented that participants were focusing on superficial things such as shared materials and resources, however, they were reluctant to delve into critical issues such as data results or best practices. Wells & Feun reported the changes associated with this learning model included both process and content. There were also differences in structural and cultural changes within schools that needed to be addressed if significant and continuous change is to occur. They concluded that research is still attempting to determine whether efforts at implementing professional learning communities will result in the types of changes that make the real difference.

Cameron (2005) exemplifies how difficult this might be. In a case study of a high school, Cameron documented how complex and interrelated tensions can be when teachers expose themselves to a collaborative and shared governance model. Teachers reported feeling emotionally exhausted and conflicted on how best to instruct students. There were feelings that accountability in the classroom superseded creativity. Cameron concludes that these structures of collaboration seem to have the ability to develop teaching practice, group support, and student learning in a rich sharing environment, however, the constraints that exist in developing such an environment balance these potential abilities for school improvement. Glatthorn (2006) supports the difficulty stating that a major challenge in implementing change in schools is to focus on the development of learning communities rather than large, whole-school, comprehensive reform plans.

Bryk, Camburn, & Louis (1999) argue that a school's capacity for change resides in the teacher's ability to collectively process, understand, and apply new knowledge and

ideas about teaching and learning. In their research, Allix & Gronn (2005) explore leadership as a manifestation of this new knowledge. They argue that the phenomenon that is known as 'leadership' may be construed as a knowledgeable activity conducted in an extremely complex reality and that from a naturalistic perspective, the phenomenon conventionally denoted as 'leadership' can be viewed as a manifestation of particular knowledge. In quoting Burns (1978), Allix & Gronn state that there are no clear lines of demarcation between leaders and followers, so that their roles may be exchanged over time and in different contexts, and some people may be both simultaneously. Therefore, a culture must reduce obvious constraints and have present the support for teachers to move in and out of leadership areas based on their professional knowledge and level of inquiry.

Summary of Cultural Factors

All of these studies indicate a need to focus on how school-based learning communities actually emerge and are sustained. Findings suggest that teacher leadership manifests itself differently according to school cultures and structures. They lead us to understand that teacher leadership requires a culture of professional knowledge obtained through shared learning, a level of continuous and rigorous inquiry into improved instruction and student achievement, and operates in an environment that recognizes and moves to eliminate constraints that bar this type of leadership phenomena.

As with most reform efforts, studies report that professional learning organizations might not be sustainable. In their research, Giles & Hargreaves (2006) examined the impact of professional learning communities acting as innovative schools in a district and their influence and sustainability over time. They reported that like all cultures, learning

communities can become victims of groupthink, where members insulate themselves from alternative ideas-turning shared visions into shared delusions. According to Giles & Hargreaves, longitudinal studies of innovative schools point to three common forces behind their eventual demise: envy/anxiety among competing organizations in the area; the evolutionary aging and decline in the organizational life cycle; and the regressive effects of large-scale, standardized reform strategies. Their comparison of three high schools finds that although the learning organization model is capable of providing real resistance to the process of attrition in the change process, it shows signs of not being able to sustain real change over time. They suggest that the future of learning organizations depends not only on building capacity for new types of leadership and change, but to make them more resilient to standardized reform agendas. They warn that the future for schools that will develop the creativity and flexibility needed in the new knowledge economy does not look promising. It was concluded that teacher leadership must be given real support in order to be effective and that teachers be given leadership development to help hone their skills. More longitudinal work is needed in order to determine the importance of each individual factor in play and perhaps annual reviews to add validity to the notion of how success is sustained in the culture of learning communities.

A Change in Social Roles

Social Status

The existence of formal teacher leaders has long been recognized (York-Barr & Duke, 2004) and according to their report on two decades of scholarship, they indicate that notions of teacher leadership are woven throughout discussions of teacher

professionalism (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Their research suggests that between 1983 and 1986, 46 states created some kind of performance-based system such as career-ladders, merit pay, or professional development schools. All showed the need for more active participation of teachers in the leadership and development of educational endeavor. This professionalism movement emerged from concerns about the status and health of teaching as a career and about how state economics are dependent on high-quality teaching and teachers.

Moving teachers into leadership roles, however, began to create disturbance in the social status of teachers among their colleagues. In a year-long comparative case study of teacher work redesign, Hart (1990) examined the expectation that restructured teacher work, such as that found throughout the professional movement, would improve the appeal of the teaching profession and the effectiveness of work in the schools. The findings reported that the influence of the school social unit, however, far outweighed any individual's efforts for formal work redesign. Hart further states that anyone who ever tried to "change the way we do things around here" understands roles and relationships become imbedded in established groups, that this model exists in complex social systems, and the social role one has thus determines where one fits within the system.

Research on teaching identifies norms of equality, cordiality, and privacy are firmly entrenched in the teaching profession. However, changes in the authority and power of individual teachers are being attempted based on the belief that teachers desire more power in critical decision-making and supervision as part of their career growth plans. Hart (1998, Pounder, ed.) states that understanding roles in social systems helps set

the stage for discussion of collaboration among diverse school professionals and contradictions within the body of teacher work research illustrate why the further pursuit of restructuring from a social-systems perspective is important.

In his work on teacher professionalism and work reorganization, Smylie (1994) indicates that this school reform constitutes a commitment strategy on the part of teachers for educational change in contrast to the legislative and regulative methods of the past. He suggests that teacher leadership is effective when teachers are motivated to change and when they are willing to work in collaborative styles. In an earlier study, Smylie (1992) reveals that among teachers in a large metropolitan school district, formal leadership roles may conflict with two important professional beliefs; those of equality of status and independence. The relationships between teachers and teacher leaders, their interactions, and the variables for interactions were analyzed using multiple regression procedures. The study suggests a social-psychological consequence associated with the violation of these norms. The leadership roles created differentiated status among teachers who had previously shared similar professional status. The teacher leaders reported that other teachers tended to interact with them less frequently and with apprehension uncharacteristic of their relationships prior to their new roles.

A two year ethnographic study carried out by Shiu, Chrispeels, and Doerr (2004, Chrispeels, ed.) explored the process of an elementary school participating in a reform effort to implement an Effective Schools Initiative. Qualitative data were collected during the leadership team trainings and analyzed the interactive relationship of the teachers and the principal during shared leadership decision making. Their findings suggested that shared leadership is a hard and painful process. Principals are reluctant to relinquish

control due to accountability reasons and teachers are unsure about their own ability to make high level decisions. The results stated that in order for true collaborative and shared leadership to be effective, norms for decision making need to be clear and specific. A need to build trusting relationships is inherent in the findings. The researchers also stated shared leadership is fragile in systems that still operate in bureaucratic and hierarchical structures.

Research does suggest that inroads are being made in the area of socially accepted teacher leadership. McDonald and Keedy (2004 Chrispeels, ed.) conducted a two year study to look at how three elementary principals conceptualized the sharing of leadership with teachers in implementing the reform mandates of the Kentucky Education Reform Act. This case study involving high poverty schools found that as the teachers and principals worked together as skilled professionals to focus on the curriculum and instructional mandates, the source of expertise did not matter. The researchers argue that the quality of the expertise was a greater factor in determining success. The overall result was that when leadership was shared, accountability for student success became a collective core value in these schools. All individuals accepted the responsibility for the students. The study suggests that these principals realized they need to develop teachers as leaders in order to accomplish change because teachers are closest to the students and know their needs.

Collaboration as Social Impetus

There is currently a national movement advocating the transformation of schools into more collaborative organizations. Barott & Raybould (1998, Pounder, ed.) report the Effective Movement, the Restructuring Movement, the theories of distributive leadership,

and teacher leadership have all been points on the continuum of collaborative organizational structures. Frost and Durant (2004 Chrispeels, ed.) state that although current policy discourse on school leadership is dotted with different definitions such as shared, distributed, and parallel terminology, the differences between them come down to whether or not teacher leadership is genuine or merely something that can be doled out by principals at their discretion. Literature states there might be a tendency for principals to view teacher leaders as contracted labor in order to carry out work through the traditional leadership positions and roles (Lindahl, 2008). The literature argues that long term gains and sustainability depend on a school's capacity to improve based on the personal and interpersonal ability of teachers to increase their professional knowledge, skills, and to build relationships with their colleagues. Frost and Durant's (2003) review of the literature discusses how teachers think about their impact of initiated and sustained development activities showing that teachers are in agreement when they say internal structures of support are crucial in order to maximize the impact of their work for students. Teachers must have a central and active role in the process which means creating the right climate for teachers to engage in professional dialogue and reflective practice with their colleagues.

Barott and Raybould (1998) argue that when we speak about changing schools into collaborative organizations, what we really mean is that "we want to change the nature of relationships, the patterns of relating, and the rules of the relationships, by asking people to share information, participate in shared decision making, and work together to joint problem solve" (pg.29). Teachers tend to have a predisposition for autonomy and professional isolation. According to Barott and Raybould, this professionalism depends

on “principles of conduct and governance of occupations that is client oriented and knowledge based” (pg.29). Professionals need to make judgments about what to do about specific clients and they demand the discretion to act.

There are two types of changes requiring two types of solutions (Barott and Raybould, 1998). First order changes occur when parts of a system change, such as adapting to a new curriculum or hiring a new teacher. Second order changes occur when the entire system itself changes. This is when the school social system’s relationship patterns change as teachers emerge from isolated instruction to professional learning communities. The governance system changes from bureaucratic to democratic, involving other members in the mix. As Barott and Raybould conclude, second order problems require second order solutions and collaboration is a second order solution to a second order problem.

Although the term collaboration is described in various ways throughout the literature, it does seem to hinge on the idea that it means working with others to reach some form of mutual benefit and can be characterized as participating in a complex and sometimes conflictive experience (Connolly and James, 2006). Achinstein (2002) makes the point that collaboration can seem like a process of consensus, shared values, and social cohesion. She argues that in true practice, teachers often run headlong into enormous conflicts over professional beliefs and practices. Her case study of two middle schools enacting in a collaborative reform effort found that the micro politics of collaboration is real and the conflict arising from collaboration defines the boundaries for organizational learning and social change.

It is important for school professionals not to fall into a superficial model of collaboration without defining the need to collaborate. In his article differentiating the five discourses on teacher collaboration, Lavié (2006) raises the notion that in shaping schools into collaborative workplaces, the “how to” is not as important as the “what for”. Lavié remains firm in stating that unless purpose and vision are clearly stated, collaboration becomes just another tool in the rhetoric of school reform efforts.

Summary of Social Factors

The social status of formal leadership roles has shown to cause a disturbance in the egalitarian platform from which teachers have traditionally operated. A few summary of findings indicate that work redesign under the professional teacher movement did little to increase school effectiveness in terms of student achievement and professional fulfillment. The literature reflects a call for a change in leadership potential from a hierarchical bureaucracy to a continuum of influence based on socially acceptable teacher leadership activity found by participating in professional learning communities. The process of transforming schools into collaborative organizations should provide teachers a more effective way to socially communicate, to learn from, and to lead each other. Building the capacity for professional learning and social growth among teachers takes strong will and vision on the part of school participants. These social role changes thus bring about a need to discuss leadership as a context in which this learning can emerge. The next section will discuss these leadership contexts.

A Contextual Change in Leadership

Traditional Leadership Models

The study of leadership has been an important part of traditional organizational science for decades, yet disappointing because of the abundance of leadership theories with no universally accepted theoretical framework for understanding leadership (Plowman, et al. 2007). One of the oldest debates involves leadership traits vs. behaviors. These traits included the physical, social, and mental ability of people who gave directions that were followed by subordinates. Leaders were generally defined as those who exercised intentional influence over people, channeled collective tasks, and met organizational goals through direction and control (Plowman et al., 2007). This Great Man theory of western society is seen as an individual endeavor rather than a collective action.

Management theory has traditionally been linked with theories of leadership and two distinct types of school leadership, transformational and instructional, emerged from those theories. However, Sergiovanni (1995) reports there are two reasons why management theory and practice are limited to achieving minimum, not maximum results. First, the theory is based on bureaucratic and personal authority. Second, its roots are heavily biased in standardization and routinization. Both of these reasons constitute past school organizational practice and play a part in the unsustainability of major school reform efforts.

Instructional leadership developed during the effective schools movement. It viewed the principal as the primary source of education experience. It was aimed at standardizing the practice of effective teaching, supervising classroom instruction, coordinating school curriculum, and monitoring student progress (Marks & Printy, 2003). However, instructional leadership fell short of the ideal because hierarchical orientation

of instructional leadership conflicted with the democratic and participatory organization of schools that emerged in late 1980's with the movement to empower teachers as professional educators. Transformational and transactional leadership models provided intellectual direction and aimed at innovating within the organization, while empowering and supporting teachers as partners in decision-making (Marks & Printy, 2003).

Transformational framework is described as one that inspired subordinates to transcend their self-interest for the sake of the organization and transactional leadership as providing material rewards for efforts; it clarifies the work to be done, uses rewards as motivation, and intervenes when the task is not completed. Plowman et al. (2007) argue that the traditional frameworks of transformational and transactional theories are still deterministic, top-down, and linear forms of leadership that have no future in organizations of the 21st century. Lindahl (2008) agrees by saying that administrators have readily fallen into the trap of involving teachers in shared administrative roles rather than shared leadership because they have not differentiated between the concepts of administrative tasks and leadership activities.

The findings of an exploratory case study of teacher leadership roles in a metropolitan K-8 school district suggest that teacher leadership should be approached as an issue of organizational development rather than one of individual empowerment (Smylie & Denny, 1990). Up until that time, very little research had taken place concerning how and why teachers who assumed their leadership positions defined and performed their new roles and how other teachers responded to those in leadership positions. Smylie & Denny further examined organizational factors such as established career enhancement programs within the district and the responses from teachers in those

roles. They found a discrepancy between the definition of teacher leadership and classroom performance in that most teachers in leadership roles were pulled from interaction with classroom teachers and worked mainly in program development and with administrators. A disconnect from the classroom and from their peers became evident. The researchers concluded that teacher leadership is influenced not only by organizational structure but also by the interactions and negotiations among the participants in a political and normative framework and that these dimensions are interrelated and are likely to be mutually reinforcing.

In a mixed-method study using a national sample of restructured schools, Marks & Printy (2003) found that transformational leadership is a necessary but insufficient condition for instructional leadership; when transformational and shared instructional leadership coexist in an integrated form of leadership, the influence on school performance is substantial. However, Marks and Printy disagree with the findings from the Leithwood & Jantzi (1999) study whereby the results argue that in relation to student engagement in school, the effects of principal leadership were greater than that of teacher sources of leadership. Leithwood & Jantzi surveyed teachers and students in a large Canadian school district in order to compare teacher sources of leadership with those of the principal. Their results suggested that a lack of leadership development provided to teachers and the consequent lack of knowledge about the critical aspects of school improvement processes hampered teacher leadership contributions. In fact, Leithwood & Janzi argue that the notion of teacher leadership does a disservice to both teachers and leaders. As Western culture has long separated leaders from followers, these researchers

ask if we then recognize everyone as a leader, does not the concept lose all value as a legitimate distinction among social and organizational practices.

In a collective case study designed to understand instructional leadership of principals, Ruff & Shoho (2005) argue that instructional leadership is seen as a separate role orientation that typically focuses on the behaviors of teachers as they engage in activities directly affecting the growth of students and implicit in this role is the notion of superior-subordinate relationships. The findings from this study demonstrated differing levels of integration of leadership by three urban elementary school principals as well as variation regarding the conceptualization of instructional leadership in different stages of their careers. It was found that the bureaucratic organization stifles the individual voices either by the aggregation of democratic vote or the authoritarianism of expert opinion. They suggest that for the values of diversity to become actionable, the means to shared understanding must replace the assumptions of the bureaucratic organization. Ruff & Shoho (2005) conclude that as societal pressures transform the organizational structure of public schools, a more precise language for communicating the meaning of leadership must emerge. Thus, the heart of any theory is the language used to describe it and that we should try thinking about schooling as a learning community (Sergiovanni, 1995).

Contextual Leadership

Current research on effective leadership has shown that it need not be located in one person but be dispersed within school and among people (Muijs & Harris, 2007). This idea of collective or teacher leadership consists of teachers who lead within and beyond classrooms, identify with and contribute to a community of teacher learners and leaders, and influence others towards improved educational practice. Teacher leadership

is described as fluid and emergent rather than a fixed phenomenon and in which the distinctions between followers and leaders blend with all teachers functioning as leaders at various times. Morrison (2002) supports this argument by stating that complex organizations have their own internal dynamic which is not always contingent on one leader. Osborne, Hunt, & Jauch (2002) agree. They define leadership as something one does not do by oneself. It emerges from actions and interactions in a subjectively identifiable pattern of influence that appears different, not usual. Leadership is dependent upon the context; change the context and leadership changes. It is embedded in context, socially constructed, and patterns over time. Thus, leadership is the process of being perceived as a leader through the social construction of meaning on the part of the followers. This means that much of what is known from empirical research about school leadership practices is knowledge about teachers' perceptions of such practices (Leithwood & Jantzi, 1999).

Contextual leadership should not be seen as a position of authority, but as an emergent interactive dynamic. Uhl-Bien, Marion, & McKelvey (2007) refer to this type of leadership "as a complex interplay from which a collective impetus for action and change emerges when heterogeneous agents interact in networks in ways that produce new patterns of behavior or new modes of operating". This contextual model makes a distinction between leadership and leaders in which leaders are individuals who act in ways that influence and support leadership as an emergent, interactive dynamic that is productive of adaptive outcomes; they lead others in adaptability, knowledge, and learning. Osborne, Hunt & Jauch (2002) support this by stating leadership is not an isolated event performed by a unique actor. They see leadership as a series of attempts,

over time, to alter human actions and organizational systems. Hence, they claim leadership is an emerging social construct embedded in an organization-it is contextual leadership.

An Intuitive Process

Teacher learning and leadership are associated with the implementation of planned change and are key links between school restructuring and the classroom. According to Buckner & McDowelle (2000), teachers' daily contact with students, other teachers, and the instructional program place them in a unique position to influence change. Teachers are viewed as leaders and think of themselves as primary change agents when they can systematically inquire into present practices, consult outside expertise, and reflect on what they learned by engaging in conversations with each other (Eaker, et al. 2002; Wood, 2007).

Teachers are changing how they think about their work with students. In a mixed model study comparing low and high performing schools, results showed that over time, teachers became more positive towards their students, connected to the community culture easier, and shared enthusiasm for learning new strategies when engaging in professional collaborative work (Hollins, et al. 2004). Andrews & Lewis (2004) describe a type of leadership in which teachers and principals work "parallel" to each other. Those observations draw from their shared studies and experiences with the Australian schools engaged in a teacher-centered process of whole-school renewal known as IDEA (Innovative Designs for Enhancing Achievement in School). They conclude that through parallel leadership, new and powerful forms of knowledge can be stimulated and challenging new professional roles for teachers can be activated. Harris (2004) explores

distributive leadership as ongoing expertise that takes place wherever it exists rather than in formal positions or roles. Her findings document the accumulated data from two in-depth case studies of schools in Britain conducted in order to explore leadership practices. The first study included twelve schools demonstrating successful and continuous improvement. The data showed that the leadership style of the head leaders was inclusive, collaborative, and distributed through joint work. The second study included a group of ten schools designated as “schools facing challenging circumstances”. The head leaders in these schools confirmed that their autocratic style of leadership did not lead to sustained school improvement. The studies suggested that distributed and shared leadership implies a social distribution where the leadership function is stretched over the work of a number of individuals and where the leadership task is accomplished through the interaction of multiple leaders.

The literature suggests that teacher leadership development comprises three waves that progressively delink the idea from formal organizational hierarchy (Pounder, 2006). Pounder traces teacher leadership first as a formal role function helping to manage their fellow teachers, to then working as team leader with a broader emphasis on the instructional dimension, to that of teacher integrating classroom teaching with an intuitive process of learning and professional growth. In their comprehensive work on teacher leadership covering the past two decades, York-Barr & Duke (2004) describe teacher leaders as teachers demonstrating high levels of instructional expertise, collaboration, reflection, having a sense of empowerment, and were allowed by their peers to lead. In a culture of tight normed ideals of teaching such as privacy, egalitarianism, and isolation, it is powerful to know that teacher leaders are catapulted by their peers to a position of

influence. They are teachers intuitively drawn to leadership due to achievement, are learning oriented and willing risk takers. They tend to be facilitators, regarded by their colleagues with trust, high respect and positive relationships.

It is common practice for teachers to be evaluated on the basis of how successful they are in getting their students' tests scores to rise, however Barth (2001) questions whether it might be better to examine how helpful teachers are, as members of their school community, in providing leadership that will improve the culture of the school "for as we know more than anything else, it is the culture of the school that determines the success of the teachers and the students alike" (pg.48). Teacher leadership, however, has not proven to be easy or quickly accepted. Barth remarks that the culture of most schools provides little support for teacher leadership simply because teachers who step in and assume leadership violate a basic us/them taboo and pay the price in a breakdown of social networking. Smylie (1992) reports that teachers seem committed to norms of privacy and autonomy and those that step out of that professional equity, render the social and psychological consequences. In an ethnographic study designed to explore teacher leadership, Yendol-Silva & Dana (2004) state the reason teachers have trouble sharing their ideas with others is connected to the micro-politics of their existing culture. Teachers use their own versions of micro-politics to silence each other using overt and covert processes to promote or protect self-interests. Teachers reported being worried that their colleagues' inquiries might ultimately alter their own classroom space. Teachers were also unwilling to challenge the traditional pattern of power such as disagreeing with the decisions made by the principal. The researchers concluded that teachers need time to

imagine the possibilities that renewal can have for their work and the collective power their voices can garner.

Harris (2003) is optimistic that despite barriers, teacher leadership can occur if certain prevailing conditions are in place. Time being set aside for leadership tasks is a crucial element. Rich and diverse opportunities which focus on professional development can enhance leadership knowledge for teachers. The self-confidence of teachers to take on leadership can be improved through the collaborative model.

Beauchum & Dentith (2004) report that teacher leadership may help dissolve the dichotomous debate that has placed management and leadership theories in opposition to one another. In their ethnographic study of 25 teacher leaders, they suggest both perspectives are needed and should be distributed among a wider group of participants which promotes shared responsibilities. They found that schools promoting teacher leadership do not segregate leadership and management. Both functions are performed by all and delineated in a way that promotes shared responsibility and action. A constructivist approach to intuitive and emergent leadership “creates the opportunities to surface and mediate perceptions to inquire about and generate ideas together, to seek to reflect upon and make sense of work in the light of shared beliefs and new information, and to create actions that grow out of the new understandings-it is teacher leadership in action” (Harris & Muijs, 2005).

Summary of Contextual Factors

Schools of today face new and difficult challenges and much of the educational leadership research documented in this literature review has been focused on the expanding roles of teachers. Studies on leadership, in the context of hierarchical positions

of leader and formal teacher leader roles, have shown that traditional models have not proven to be sustainable when addressing school reform efforts. The concept of emergent teacher leadership has become increasingly embedded in the language and practice of continuous school improvement and the review of literature indicates that further investigation be paid to the patterns of power, practice, and personal belief of teacher leaders and the effects on their performance. The increased recognition of teacher leadership as an intuitive process, visions of expanded teacher leadership roles, and new hope for the contributions that these expanded roles take, lay the foundation for what the literature refers to as professional learning communities (York-Barr & Duke, 2004).

For discussion, there is a need for further research and study to identify how the factors of social, cultural, organizational, and leadership contexts affect the emergence of teacher leadership. Many of these studies were quantitative or mixed-method in design. This study took quantitative interview data from teachers to understand their experiences with and perceptions of teacher leadership. This study examined the influence factors to determine how these areas are influential in contextual leadership. The findings from this study hope to add to the growing body of research and more clearly define the complex theory of teacher leadership.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This chapter describes the methodology used to examine how teacher leadership is manifested, what organizational, social, cultural, and contextual factors are in play, and to what extent teacher leaders influence their peers. It includes the research design, a detailed description of the participants, measures, data analysis, followed by the procedures.

Design

This study used a social constructivist (Patton, 2002, p.96) approach with thematic and construct analysis (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003) to qualitatively study emergent teacher leadership. This study explored the extent to which the tenets of adult learning theories and change theory might provide a theoretical framework for understanding how teachers emerge as leaders through the context of professional learning communities.

Qualitative Research

Qualitative researchers, as main instruments for data collection and analysis during their study, must systematically reflect on personal self and be sensitive to personal biography and how it shapes the study (Creswell, 2003). Bogdan & Biklin (2003) make two points concerning the role of researcher. One, the researcher's goal is to add knowledge to the field, not pass judgment. Researchers understand that situations are complex and their role is to portray many dimensions. Two, the researcher must constantly confront personal opinion and prejudice against the data. Therefore, it is critical to address my role as researcher and my personal connections to this topic as a

former teacher leader and current elementary school administrator within the school district in which the study is carried out.

Social Constructivism

Social constructivism is based on a philosophical paradigm that embraces perspective and encourages dialogue among its perspectives rather than aiming at singular truths and linear predictions ((Patton, 2002). Rodwell (1998) states, constructivist inquiry, meaning, and reality is constructed in a way that is reflective of all participants and their views of their world and what they think about the investigative phenomenon becomes the data for the construction. Social constructivism emphasizes the importance of culture and context in understanding what occurs in society and constructing knowledge based on this understanding; it is based on assumptions about reality, knowledge and learning (Kim, 2001). Kukla (2000) defines reality as constructed through human activity and that members of the society together invent the properties of that world. Kukla further states reality cannot be discovered as it does not exist prior to its social invention. Prawat & Floden, (1994) inform us that knowledge is a human product and socially and culturally constructed as individuals create meaning through their interactions with each other and their environment. Social constructivists view learning as a social process when individuals are engaged in social activities together and not shaped by external forces (McMahon, 1997). Creswell (2003) affirms by stating individuals seek understanding of their world by making subjective meanings of their experiences and that learning is a process that takes place through these experiences.

A social constructivist perspective is compatible to this study because professional learning communities consist of a group of socially interacting participants constructing a

consensus of what learning and leading is and should be. Teachers are the ones experiencing these constructed truths and are informing their colleagues and peers. This study attempts to examine then, using a qualitative approach, the processes by which this learning is constructed and the influence it has on the other members of the learning community.

Research Questions

1. In what ways does teacher leadership manifest itself in the context of a professional learning community?
2. To what degree do unique characteristics of a school influence teacher leadership?
3. How do teachers understand their leadership capacity?
4. What personal and professional experiences do teacher leaders perceive as influencing their development of leadership skills?
5. What do teacher leaders at the elementary school level perceive to be the impact of their leadership skills on instructional practice?

Participants

This study relied on interview data collected from 14 teachers from four high and low performing Title I and Non-Title I elementary schools located in a large urban school district in a southeastern state based on SY 2009-2010 standardized state assessment scores.

The sampling of participants for the interviews was a maximum variation of elementary school teachers representing grades K-5 and specialists from the identified schools. The goal of this study was to have four teachers representing each of the four schools. The final number of participants was 14. Maximum variation sampling was used as teacher leadership issues may factor on differences in accountability measures, time constraints, and entrenched behaviors unique to each school's culture. Each participant volunteered to be interviewed. Anonymity was crucial to the confidentiality of the study. As such, participants are not named.

Tables 1-4 depict the number of teachers from each school and their designated position of instruction. Each grade level in the district's elementary schools is represented. Resource positions consisted of art teacher, reading specialist, and math coach. Special education was represented as well. The names of the schools were changed to ensure confidentiality.

Table 1

Title 1 High Performing School: Seaview

<u><i>Teachers</i></u>	<u><i>Position</i></u>
Teacher 1	1st grade
Teacher 2	5th grade
Teacher 3	Resource
Teacher 4	Resource

Table 2

Title 1 Low Performing School: Cityside

<u><i>Teachers</i></u>	<u><i>Position</i></u>
Teacher 1	4 th grade
Teacher 2	5 th grade
Teacher 3	Resource

Table 3

Non-Title 1 High Performing School: Riverview

<u><i>Teacher</i></u>	<u><i>Position</i></u>
Teacher 1	Resource
Teacher 2	3 rd grade

Table 4

Non-Title 1 Low Performing School: Valleyside

<u><i>Teacher</i></u>	<u><i>Position</i></u>
Teacher 1	5 th grade
Teacher 2	5 th grade
Teacher 3	Kindergarten
Teacher 4	Special Education
Teacher 5	2 nd grade

District Demographics

The school district was conveniently chosen because the researcher is an assistant principal in the district. The school in which the researcher is an administrator was not involved in this study. Currently, there are approximately 15, 183 employees and 69, 282 students within the district's 85 schools, administrative buildings, and specialty centers which include 56 elementary, 14 middle, and 11 high schools. There are 5, 306 teachers in the district with approximately 15.1 years of experience and 53% hold graduate degrees. The diversity breakdown of staff is 74.8% Caucasian, 18.5% African American, 3.6% Asian, and .54% Native American. Of the student body, 48.9% are female, 51.1% are males and the ethnic descriptors are 52.7% Caucasian, 24.1% African American, 9.3% Hispanic/Latino, 7.5% multi-race, 5.6% Asian, and .5% Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander. Approximately 29.9% are economically disadvantaged, 11.8% are identified gifted, 2.0% are second English language learners, and 10.6% are identified students with

special needs. The graduation rate is 86.6% while the dropout rate is 14%. The average SAT Reading score is 504, the average SAT Math score is 504 and 7,212 Advanced Placement tests were taken. The district had a per pupil expenditure of \$10,722 for the school year. The school district's strategic plan states: Recognizing that the long range goal of the district is the successful preparation and graduation of every student, the near term goal is that by 2015, ninety-five percent or more of our students will graduate having mastered the skills that they need to succeed as 21st century learners, workers and citizens. Our primary focus is on teaching and assessing those skills our students need to thrive as 21st century learners, workers, and citizens. All students will be:

- Academically proficient
- Effective communicators and collaborators
- Globally aware, independent, responsible learners and citizens
- Critical and creative thinkers, innovators, and problem solvers

School and Participant Demographics

The district was selected because the researcher had taught and is currently a school administrator in the school division described in this study. The state's geological and physical attributes were used to provide pseudo names to the participating schools.

Cityside Elementary School

Cityside opened its doors in 1961, filling the need for a neighborhood school for the growing population of African Americans in the city. It was named after a prominent African American educator in the area and currently houses grades 4-5. It is a low performing Title I school with a mobility rate of 23% and averages a 96% attendance rate. The student body of 437 consists of 82.8% African Americans, 6.9% Hispanics,

4.1% specified as other, 3.2% Caucasian, and .2% American Indian with 46.9% of the student population recorded as females and 53.1% as males. Approximately 78.5% are economically disadvantaged, 4.1% identified gifted, 1.4% English language learners, and 12.1% identified as students with special needs. There are 46 instructional staff members at Cityside. Each have approximately 11.8 years of experience, 63% carry graduate degrees, 10.9% are new to the system, 4% are teaching with provisional credentials, 78.3% are females, 21.7% are males, while their ethnicity breaks down as 21.7% African American and 78.3% Caucasian. Table 5 displays descriptive information about the three participants from Cityside.

Table 5

Cityside

Participant	Gender	Years in District	Total Years Teaching
4 th grade teacher	M	9	10
5 th grade teacher	F	5	13
Reading Specialist	F	10	12

Table 6 displays Cityside's math and reading standardized state assessment scores in percents for grades 4-5 in SY 2009-2010.

Table 6

Cityside Standardized State Assessment Scores

Grade	English	Math
4	82	86
5	86	75

Valleyside Elementary School

Valleyside opened in 1959 as a much needed neighborhood school to serve students in the then sprawling suburban area of the city. The original building was replaced with a newly constructed building and reopened in 2002. It is a low performing Non-Title I school with a mobility rate of 18% and averages a 95.9% attendance rate. The student body of 502 consists of 38.8% African Americans, 7.4% Hispanics, 3.2% specified as other, 45.8% Caucasian, 3.4% Asian, 1.2% Native Hawaiian, and .2% American Indian with 46.6% of the student population recorded as females and 53.4% as males. Approximately 40.4% are economically disadvantaged, 4.8% identified gifted, 1.0% English language learners, and 9.2% identified as students with special needs. There are 36 instructional staff members at Valleyside. Each have approximately 18.3 years of experience, 55.6% carry graduate degrees, 2.8% are new to the system, 88.9% are females, 11.1% are males, while their ethnicity breaks down as 2.8% African

American, and 97.2% as Caucasian. Table 7 displays descriptive information about the five participants from Valleyside.

Table 7

Valleyside

Participants	Gender	Years in District	Total Years Teaching
Kindergarten teacher	F	11	17
2 nd grade teacher	M	5	13
4 th grade teacher	M	9	10
5 th grade teacher	F	18	18
5 th grade teacher	F	2	9

Table 8 displays Valleyside's math and reading standardized state assessment scores in percents for grades 3-5 in SY 2009-2010.

Table 8

Valleyside standardized state assessment scores

Grade	English	Math
3	91	93
4	90	82
5	91	76

Riverview Elementary School

Riverview was opened in the year 1956 to accommodate a growing number of people living around the waterways in the northern part of the city. It was named after a gentleman farmer in the area who participated heavily in educational matters at the time. It is a high performing Non-Title I school with a mobility rate of 16% and averages a 96% attendance rate. The student body of 769 consists of 7.4% African Americans, 4.8% Hispanics, 2.1 % specified as other, 81.7% Caucasian, 3.3% Asian, .4% Native Hawaiian, and .4% American Indian with 48% of the student population recorded as females and 52% as males. Approximately 16.8 % are economically disadvantaged, 7.7 % identified gifted, 3.4 % English language learners, and 9.1% identified as students with special needs. There are 51 instructional staff members at Riverview. Each have approximately 14.9 years of experience, 60.8% carry graduate degrees, 5.9% are new to the system, 90.2% are females, 9.8% are males, while their ethnicity breaks down as 2% African

American, 2% Hispanic, and approximately 96% as Caucasian. Table 9 displays descriptive information about the two participants from Riverview.

Table 9

Riverview

Participants	Gender	Years in District	Total Years Teaching
Art Specialist	F	17	17
3 rd grade teacher	F	1	1

Table 10 displays Riverview's math and reading standardized state assessment scores in percents for grades 3-5 in SY 2009-2010.

Table 10

Riverview Standardized State Assessment Scores

Grade	English	Math
3	92	97
4	98	96
5	99	99

Seaview Elementary School

Seaview opened its doors as a 2 room school over the county jail in 1905. It was named after an involved member of the local school board. It celebrated its 100th year anniversary in SY 2005-2006. Seaview is a high performing Title I school with a mobility rate of 54% and averages a 96% attendance rate. The student body of 662 consists of 15% African Americans, 11.9% Hispanics, 9.7 % specified as other, 60.6% Caucasian, 2.7% Asian, and .2% American Indian with 46.7% of the student population recorded as females and 53.3% as males. Approximately 46.5% are economically disadvantaged, 5 % identified gifted, 2.7 % English language learners, and 10.9% identified as students with special needs. There are 56 instructional staff members at Seaview. Each have approximately 15.1 years of experience, 57.1% carry graduate degrees, 5.4% are new to the system, 94.6% are females, 5.4% are males, while their ethnicity breaks down as 3.6% African American, 1.8% Asian/Pacific Islander, and

approximately 94.6% as Caucasian. Table 11 displays descriptive information about the four participants from Seaview.

Table 11

Seaview

Participants	Gender	Years in District	Total Teaching Years
1 st grade teacher	F	6	6
5 th grade teacher	F	11	11
Math Coach	F	30	30
Math Coach	F	12	14

Table 12 displays Seaview's math and reading standardized state assessment scores in percents for grades 3-5 in SY 2009-2010.

Table 12

Seaview Standardized State Assessment Scores

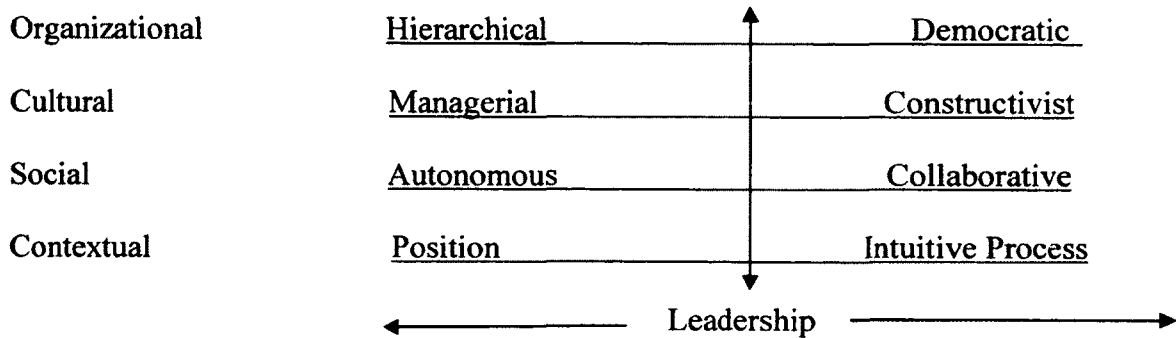
Grade	English	Math
3	91	96
4	93	96
5	98	95

Measures**Interview Instrument**

This study utilized semi-structured interviews to gain insight to teachers' understanding of how social, organizational, cultural, and contextual factors influence the emergence and development of teacher leadership. Twenty four questions and probes centered on the four factors of influence and were developed based on the review of the literature. A blueprint (Appendix A) was designed based on the Continuum of Influence concept map (Figure 1). It aligns the research questions with the influence factors and functions as a guide to the development of the interview questions (Appendix B). Background and open ended questions were included in order to gain more in-depth responses. Appendix 3 contains the interview protocol.

Figure 1.

Continuum of Influence Concept Map



The instrument was piloted and a few changes were made. The first question was originally designed to gain insight to the participants' understanding of teacher leadership and professional learning communities. Pilot participants consistently referred to teacher leadership only as a role or position within the school such as grade level chair. Probes were developed to help participants more clearly understand teacher leadership as both formal roles and behavioral traits. One question was removed from the original protocol as the replies did not provide responses that informed the research questions. Two additional questions were added to ensure participants had the opportunity to include information not covered by the set of interview questions in the protocol. Background questions were also added in order to collect demographic data.

Procedure

Interviews

After the University's Human Review Committee approved this study, the proposal was sent to the school district to gain permission to conduct research. When the district approved the proposal, principals of the four selected schools were contacted via letter asking permission to speak to their faculty. All four principals agreed and quickly set times convenient for their staff. The researcher met with either the full faculty during a scheduled faculty meeting or with a leadership team during their scheduled meeting with the principal. The researcher explained the study and read the Interview Protocol and Consent Form found in Appendix 3 to the assembled faculty members. The researcher asked for 4 volunteers from each school. A one week timeline was given in order for volunteers to contact the researcher. Reminders to each of the schools were sent after one week in order to enhance participation. Interviews were scheduled for the volunteers at a time convenient for them. Prior to each interview, the participant was given a letter describing the study and the confidentiality of their participation. The participants agreed to the interviews being audio recorded and signed consent forms. Gratuity for participating in the interviews was given in the form of local vendor gift cards. The interviews lasted from 55 minutes to 2 hours and 26 minutes in length. The average length of the interviews was 60 minutes. Riverview School initially had 3 teachers volunteer to be interviewed. One of the recordings from an interview at that school had technical difficulties and could not be used. After multiple reminders, a total of 3 teachers volunteered from Cityside. Seaview had the required 4 teachers and Valleyside

had 5 teachers volunteer for the study. This resulted in an 87.5% sampling frame for the 16 interview requests.

Data Analysis

Figure 2. Data Analysis Flow Chart

Raw text → Relevant text → Repeating ideas → Themes → Thematic Constructs → Narrative

Responses from the audio taped interviews were transcribed and read by the researcher during the initial step of the data analysis. Participants were given the opportunity to review interview data for member checking. Interview data were analyzed to identify relevant text, repeating ideas, themes, and thematic constructs across themes. Additionally, patterns across thematic constructs were identified. Figure 2 diagrams the coding and analysis process. In doing so, relevant text was first extracted from the raw text of the transcripts and initially coded into categories for the four factors: organizational, social, cultural, and contextual. Next, relevant text was extracted from the original raw text and coded for each of the five research questions. In reading through the relevant text, further data analysis resulted in the identification of repeating ideas within the relevant text for each of the four factors and the five research questions. In coding and analyzing these repeating ideas, if they had something in common, they were grouped together to form themes. These repeating ideas and themes were hand coded by the researcher so the text could be arranged and rearranged manually. Outlier text was initially grouped on its own. Through the coding process, some of the text originally set

aside as outliers were inserted into relevant text and themes. Researcher notes and district documents were read and relevant text from those data sources were coded into the emerging themes as well. Likewise with the repeating ideas, themes were organized into larger, more abstract ideas called thematic constructs. These thematic constructs formed the foundation for the narrative discussed in Chapters IV and V. This narrative bridged the researcher's concerns of emerging teacher leadership as a tenet of professional learning community with the experiences and perceptions of the participants in this qualitative study.

The procedures for data collection, coding, and process of analysis were documented and reviewed by a research expert to determine trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) as judged by credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. The semi-structured interview protocol was designed with blueprints aligning the questions with the four influence factors and five research questions. The protocol was piloted and changes were made to the original set of questions. All participants were given chances to read and respond for clarity. Direct quotes were used to enhance the transparency, communicability, and coherence of the findings. The issues concerning the biases and assumptions of the researcher were addressed.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Research Question 1: In what ways does teacher leadership manifest itself in the context of professional learning community?

Construct 1: Awareness of Paradigm Shift

- Theme A: Teacher leadership as influence
- Theme B: Professional learning communities as purposeful collaboration
- Theme C: Distorting dilemmas
- Theme D: Building competency
- Theme E: Shared understanding leads to change

Interview questions that addressed this research question were designed to elicit participants' understanding of the terms teacher leadership, professional community, and collaboration and to determine if they felt all teachers could or should be leaders. They were asked to inform the researcher on feelings of peer observations and to identify the major source of professional influence on their instructional practice. Construct 1 was formed based on five themes that emerged from the relevant text addressing this question.

Construct 1: Awareness of Paradigm Shift

Due to the district's recent effort to move towards the use of professional learning communities in schools with the focus being on improving student achievement, the terminology of Professional Learning Community (PLC) and Teacher Leadership (TL) was not new to the participants. However, the four schools involved with this study had a variety of experiences with the concept of collaboration and how it connected to PLCs and TL. These perceptions and experiences are discussed under the themes that emerged

from the data analyzed for this research question and help to understand the ways in which teacher leadership is manifested in the context of professional learning communities. Teachers, administrators, and central office personnel were aware of reforms mandated by the school district. Low performing schools did have distinct challenges due to student population, low test scores, and administrative styles of principals, however all school groups were beginning to extend their experiences with collaborative learning while working with peers. Data also revealed that teachers were able to define PLCs as a context for that professional learning and as a center for their influence. What they were not prepared for were the expectations of administration for them to share their practice so openly and willingly and to participate in rich and difficult conversations about their practice without some training and support in this area.

Theme A: Teacher leadership as influence. Overall, teachers from all 4 schools defined teacher leaders as those who inspire, create change, learn, and impact others over time. The concept of teacher leadership was not as easily identified. Teachers from the high performing schools interpreted it in terms of formal and informal roles. One teacher from Seaview described teacher leadership as “a teacher taking on role as leader by working with others, but it is difficult because it may be misunderstood. It is scary, but I tell myself I will do my best.” Another teacher remarked that “teacher leadership means you take on a role of leader in a broader spectrum by working with the whole school and community.” Leadership can be misinterpreted because there are teachers who exhibit traits and behaviors of leadership without having a designated title. As one teacher from Seaview explained, “Teacher leadership is about behaviors. People with titles don’t necessarily exhibit leadership.” Several teachers acknowledged that they have been

influenced by teachers that are not always the ones picked by the Principal to be designated leaders in formal roles. Sometimes teachers are chosen to lead committees and projects for their organizational and managerial skills, not because they inspire others. Participants were aware that there were silent leaders that were not performing in leadership roles and that leadership had no designated boundaries. One teacher shared that she looked up to teachers in her building that “impact their colleagues in a way that make them change.” As one teacher from Riverview stated, “These were teachers that demonstrated reflective behaviors and were constantly taking the initiative and responsibility to make sure their students were learning and achieving.” These “silent leaders” were interested in finding what worked and passing it on to their peers. One teacher defined teacher leadership as “teachers that were learners themselves and were able to work with others to create change.”

Several teachers from low performing schools were unsure what teacher leadership might look like. Cityside teachers generally regarded teacher leadership as a role in which the structure and format is evolving. As one Cityside teacher remarked, “I didn’t realize it was an actual term, but I see teacher leaders as those you look up to and are inspired by their actions.” Cityside teachers felt that teachers demonstrating leadership could be those that listen, mentor, and make themselves available for others. Valleyside teachers had similar concerns about what teacher leadership might be. One teacher shared, “We need a model because we are not sure what it looks like. It should not be a role, but teachers sharing great ideas.” Others stated that teacher leadership is “a function of your job” as “when the administrator asked you to step up.” One teacher explained how she described herself as teacher leader. She said it was developed over

time as she was asked to take on roles and responsibilities by her principal. “I step up when needed or when he calls on me.” Some argued that it was difficult because others in the building may not agree on who was appointed to take on the role.

Making the connection of teacher leadership to student learning is still questionable for some. As one Valleyside teacher stated, “teacher leadership is about leading within the school. It is not so much about teaching, although that is the center purpose of why we are here.” The historic isolation of teaching has perhaps been the culprit for the disconnect in recognizing teacher leadership as a means to increased professional learning and improved student achievement. Teachers have been underexposed to the concept of teacher leadership; however the statements from the resource teachers in all schools seemed to be more hopeful and positive. Collectively, they regarded teacher leadership as one of mentoring, sharing, and modeling for other teachers. As one resource teacher stated, “Teacher leadership is really needed in the school. Teachers need to think about how this is working not only for my own classroom, but how can I contribute this to the larger group and help make a better change; to see how their work can affect other students.” Since the school district tends to pull subject related resource teachers together citywide to share ideas, create curriculum, and teach professional development classes for other resource teachers, they are, as a function of their position, better able to have access to other teachers and to support and model in the classroom. They are in a prime spot to help break the ice in terms of teachers learning and leading each other.

It was generally stated that most teachers look up to the silent leaders as those that have the most influence over their teaching practice. Teachers, who quietly and over

time have successfully adapted to years of mandated change, community expectations, and student responsibilities, will be regarded as those with true teacher leadership and influence. It will be these leaders that will help bridge the shift from isolation to purposeful collaboration and will be discussed under the next theme.

Theme B: Professional learning community as purposeful collaboration.

Teachers collectively from the four schools defined professional learning as teams of teachers collaboratively working together with a focused purpose. Everyone was able to discern the difference between traditional group work and collaborative learning. A resource teacher from Riverview stated, “Professional learning communities are different than group work in that it is ongoing, progressively coming together to work on continuous issues.” As one teacher remarked, “Professional learning communities are professionals coming together, they are more purposeful. It is what we should all be doing, it is student centered.”

Generally, they all recognized that group work tended to mean routine administrative work and information sharing, or ‘dumping’, among school members while collaboration with a purpose was the focus of learning communities. The breadth of collaboration in learning community was understood differently among specific teachers. One Valleyside teacher explains, “Professional learning communities are when teachers on the same grade level, teaching the same subject, collaborate to solve problems.” Several teachers said PLCs served to help teachers look at student work and create assessments. Other teachers had a more expanded view of professional learning communities describing them as “opportunities for rich discussion”, “providing places for best conversations to open up thinking”, and “helping to build communication”.

Although principals have been expected by the district to create professional learning communities in their perspective schools, there have been some anticipated growing pains. As with all new reforms, communication and support are critical. The school subgroups experienced the changes in very different ways. A resource teacher in one of the lower performing schools shared her experiences working with two different grade levels and their approaches to collaborative work. “I lead the 4th and 5th grade Language Arts teams. They are very different. In 4th grade, all they want from me are ideas to go back into the classroom and for me to do lessons for them. 5th grade are more willing to listen to each other, presenting a need a student has, asking what more can we do? The 4th grade team is really resistant to change. When we say PLC in 4th grade, we are just using an acronym. They have really strong personalities and are very difficult to budge into some kind of learning. The 5th grade team is much more flexible.” It is her opinion that teachers need more support and guidance from administration on the purpose and structure of these learning communities. A teacher from another low performing school expressed similar views, “The learning curve is huge. I think the city and the people in leadership need to model more for us so when Curriculum and Instruction (C & I) come in and say you are not doing this right, we could say, oh yea, you are right because you showed me how to do it, I just didn’t do it that way. There needs to be more modeling because we know what is expected and we know the direction in which we are going, but sometimes we are just left out in the cold as far as how to get there and how to get to that point.” Teachers from all schools seem to indicate the change was difficult without principal support. They needed the principals to help them connect to the bigger picture and to instill teambuilding and buy-in. One teacher lamented, “He doesn’t push

'team'. He just lets everyone do their own thing." Several teachers stated that principals are needed to help teachers see the value of learning communities and collaboration. They felt teachers are overwhelmed and don't have the time to devote to setting up a new structure on their own.

Overall, teachers understood they were being asked to open their doors and work with others to create a sense of team among their peers for the purpose of student improvement. One teacher mentioned that working in a professional learning community has called on her "to grow, do research, and learn". Most teachers identified learning communities as collaborative efforts to focus on student achievement. Data indicated that teacher leadership is emerging from these learning communities. "I would say there are plenty of people that are not given leadership roles but definitely show that behavior and end up being good role models for each other...and try to push us all in the same direction." One teacher, reporting on her own recent research of learning communities stated, "What I have read about PLCs is that in order to mesh together, you have to have a growing period of losing your separateness so you can be a team." A math coach from a high performing school related her experiences with professional growth. "There are four stages: forming, storming, norming, and performing. When the second grade team got to the storming, they got out of it for a little bit. When they came back together the next year, they were able to do a lot more together... they had already built the relationships and were able to move on [and perform]." Central to this idea of professional learning communities is the notion that teachers will emerge from this paradigm shift with the experiences of collaboration and team building and will begin to lead each other. A second grade teacher summed it up by saying, "PLC is our way as teachers to get

together to find out what we are teaching and how we are going to meet the needs of our students.”

Although teachers and administrators are recognizing the significance of purposeful collaboration, the system was not prepared for such a dramatic shift. This recognition of systemic barriers will be addressed under the next theme.

Theme C: Distorting dilemmas. When the participants were asked if they saw themselves as teacher leaders and if they felt all teachers should be leaders, three very distinct dilemmas emerged: lack of preparedness, lack of understanding, and lack of self-awareness. First, due to the mandates and school district reform policies, teachers overall did not feel ready for the change and some exhibited resistance. It was assumed that teachers and administrators understood the terms collaboration and professional learning community. One teacher from Seaview remarked, “The terms teacher leader or PLC is different at every school that you go to. So trying to have a common vocabulary and definition of what it is would be very helpful.” Another teacher from Seaview made the remark that schools, in comparison to hospitals, have not changed much over the last 100 years. “Do you want the teacher from 100 years ago? Schools do not look much different. Yea, there is some new technology in the room, but outside that, the actual teaching practice has not evolved and changed.” A teacher from Valleyside lamented, “We have been beat down all year. This is just another thing on our plates.” Most teachers, when asked to collaborate, were unsure how to proceed. After most of the year, some teachers were still running meetings as they had always done and were getting frustrated when told they were wrong. As one coach stated, “Some grade levels started off great and had their conflicts later on. Others started with conflicts. They just don’t get it. They think

sharing is collaboration and they just can't get over that. We are constantly trying to model for them...some of it is competition, they are scared, and they have their own insecurities. Some of the best teachers here freak out over having a learning walk. I am like, you are fabulous, get great evaluations, we tell you how wonderful you are, but you are so insecure." A fifth grade teacher from Valleyside agreed, "I think teachers can be intimidated by the group, but when you meet with them individually, you say, wow, that is a great idea, you should bring it to the group. They just don't feel as skilled as others." As one teacher stated, "Some of the brightest people I know just don't like to speak up or are scared their ideas will be shot down. They don't want to take the risk I guess to put themselves out there."

Lack of training in collaboration exacerbated the feeling of not being prepared and played a big part in the resistance of teachers. As one teacher stated, "We are expected to be working in a collaborative model. It is not successful at all. Every planning period is taken up by a meeting so when you meet to death, the last thing you want to do is collaborate, you just want to sit down and complain." A teacher from Cityside expressed her thoughts, "We have had no formal training; these are the things we have fallen short on." On the other hand, specialists and coaches had training as a function of their job. Conflict resolution and facilitative strategies are part of their everyday work. A math coach explained, "We had training as math coaches, leadership classes, and we worked together as a collaborative team. We were embedded all the time and talked about conflict resolution and collaboration." As a result, specialists and coaches were more ready to take on the challenges of work redesign. All schools in the study were assigned instructional specialists from central office (C & I) as part of an

effort to increase student achievement for various reasons. These instructional specialists had opportunities to work with teams of teachers on many occasions. Some teachers felt the experiences with central office staff did help in terms of learning some effective methods when working in collaborative teams. Others felt central office staff were there in “collaborative name only” as they tended to tell teachers what to do and how to do it. All subgroups expressed a need to have more formal training in the process of collaborative meetings.

A second concern that emerged from the analysis found the majority of teachers, when asked to state whether all teachers should be leaders, felt all teachers should not be leaders for various reasons. Table 13 displays the breakdown by high and low performing schools.

Table 13

Should All Teachers Be Leaders?

<i>Yes</i>		<i>No</i>	
<i>High</i>	<i>Low</i>	<i>High</i>	<i>Low</i>
5	1	1	7

Overall, leadership was not understood as a knowledge or learning activity, but one of role or position. Most saw leadership in the overt sense displaying traits and behaviors

associated with traditional leaders. A resource teacher from Riverview stated, “Not all teachers should be leaders. Some people are natural leaders, Type A personalities, who take on the roles in school. There are quieter ones who are leaders in their classrooms, but they need to be a little more aggressive and outgoing.” Several teachers stated that a lot of teachers would make ineffective leaders because they don’t have the drive or personality. One teacher announced new teachers cannot be leaders because of the lack of experience. Unfortunately, one teacher from Valleyside remarked, “Not every teacher works to be better for students.” A resource teacher from Cityside felt that if all teachers were leaders, we would all be going in different directions. She believed that perhaps some would lead ignorantly, take them in the wrong direction, and lead without commitment. A Valleyside teacher made the statement, “Our school is not at that point, with low morale...they don’t want to do anything else. They just want to do it, be done with it, and leave.” Other teachers agreed with the notion of these “non-leaders” needing some experience and guidance to build their self-confidence and leadership capacity.

A third concern derived from the data suggested that even with the majority of teachers feeling all teachers were not ready to lead as shown in Table 13, they were aware of the need for all teachers to step up and take ownership and share leadership responsibilities for the sake of their students. Most of the participants either recognized themselves as teacher leaders or were not sure. While they were able to identify teacher leaders within their schools, it was not as clear cut when identifying themselves as leaders. Of the 14 participants, 7 identified themselves as leaders with the other 7 either not sure or not declaring themselves as leaders. Table 14 displays the breakdown by high and low performing schools.

Table 14

Are You a Teacher Leader?

<i>Yes</i>		<i>No</i>		<i>Not Sure</i>	
<i>High</i>	<i>Low</i>	<i>High</i>	<i>Low</i>	<i>High</i>	<i>Low</i>
4	3	0	2	2	3

Although the participants did see themselves generally as team players and having the initiative to step up, some acknowledged they had not been offered the opportunities to lead in the same way as more prominent teachers in the building. This third concern brings up the concept that teacher leadership should not be strictly seen as teachers taking on formal roles, but acting covertly as quiet leaders in their classrooms and among their close peers. As one coach from Seaview remarked, “I set high expectations for my students as well as the teachers. Everyone can have buy-in, ownership, when they fully participate and lead in the collaborative process.” A first year teacher from Riverview said, “I think if we don’t feel a sense of leadership in ourselves, we could fall through the cracks, we wouldn’t hold ourselves accountable. I try to be a leader in my classroom, but even though I am new, I try to be a leader with my team. I try to take the initiative and become a leader within my group to help everybody.” Most teachers interviewed acknowledged that each person possesses unique talents and gifts and at some point can

be considered “expert” on an issue. As stated by a teacher at Valleyside, “Some people are not born leaders...but they can be called on as experts in certain areas. They can be leaders in that way, a minor way.” This idea of teacher leadership being fluid and emergent in which some people are moving in and out of leadership responsibilities as they are seen as expert is key to more narrowly defining the term. A math coach at Seaview was adamant in her belief that until they take ownership and leadership responsibilities, teachers will not get the respect they deserve.

It is not easy to find the opportunity to take on such responsibility outside the classroom. Two Valleyside teachers reported they had not taken on leadership opportunities and did not see themselves in that role currently. One of those teachers felt torn between sharing his time between his special education team and his grade level teams. “Trying to be at 3 different meetings for three different grade levels I figure I am always the last one to know. I would like to think I am [a leader] in terms of special ed, but as far as being a part of each grade level, I am sorry to say I am not.” When asked if she thought of herself as a teacher leader, the other Valleyside teacher replied, “I think I could be but I haven’t stepped up and done that to the best of my potential.”

Those self reporting as Not Sure felt they were strong teachers and were leaders in their personal lives, but were not sure if their colleagues saw them as leaders in school. They generally saw themselves more as team players than leaders. One Valleyside teacher remarked, “I hate telling people what to do. I wouldn’t be able to come in and say do this and this. I would be, this is what we need to do, what do you think?” Another teacher from that school said, “I think I am a leader, I am not afraid to take a risk. I am learning to speak my mind in a more respectful way because I don’t want to step on

anyone's toes. I don't think I have been given a chance for people to learn from me, maybe on my grade level but not outside of that. I was chosen to do SAIL and was supposed to speak in front of our staff, but I was never given that opportunity. No one has ever put me in the spotlight." One Seaview teacher described herself by saying, "I have never seen myself as a leader. You have to lead by example, though. I will say to others, this has worked for me, let's try it. This [collaboration] is what they want us to do so let's work together and do it. I don't see myself as standing on the hill saying 'charge'. I see myself as saying 'let's go'." One teacher from Seaview had been given many honorary awards but still did not see herself as a leader. "I have never considered myself a leader, but others tell me I am. I don't need the limelight. Leaders don't need the limelight, they will do it anyway. They are like pioneers." A teacher from Cityside felt others turned to him because he was a male on the grade level. "I am loud, I have different ideas, and I am a little more vocal. Growing up, I was always the louder one in the group. I have always been the person everyone turned to, even with family. I was never class president and never good enough to get off the bench in high school sports, but I am the leader of my family."

Teachers describing themselves as leaders have all played important roles in and outside of school. They are involved and take initiative to get things accomplished. One teacher from Riverview stated, "As far as leadership in my field, I do teach a lot of classes for teachers. I have been asked to sit in on the committee for 21st century learning and the assessment workshop for this year. Only certain teachers were invited. I hate to sound prideful, really, but I think my program and what I do in the classroom, I have been there a long time, and I think it is respected." A resource teacher at Cityside feels

she leads by telling the truth and being honest with her peers. “I do say the truth, like when the 4th grade teachers were so bitterly opposed to all the changes. I said to them, I have made a decision to stay in public education here at this school. If you can’t accept these changes, there are places that are more traditional. You have to make that decision because you can’t stay here and complain.” One of the coaches at Seaview reflected by saying, “I think I am a leader. That is my job. The only reason I do is because teachers come to me and shut the door and have conversations and ask for advice and things like that. I don’t know if that would have happened five years ago, but now, yes. I think leadership comes to you.”

Reducing the distorting dilemmas will create an environment in which teachers will be more willing and able to take on the notion of informal and emergent leadership. Building the competency to do so will be addressed under the next theme.

Theme D: Building competency. It became evident from the interview statements that teachers were becoming more willing to take risks and move from an autonomous teaching setting to one of a more collaborative and open approach. Even though there were teachers admitting to being scared for others to observe their teaching practice, many were accepting the challenge to open their doors and share with their peers.

Teachers across all schools in this study found out about the instruction of their peers through both formal and informal methods. Teachers felt that they learned most about their peers from informal meetings and casual conversations. One teacher at Riverview shared how she found out about the instruction of her peers. “At our meetings, we will share ideas and plans. Recently, we are loading things up to SharePoint for others to have.” Another teacher said, “You learn by what and how they say things at meetings,

about how they speak about their students.” One teacher at Seaview found she learned about her peers from informal and casual conversations such as, “Hearsay, from principals, other people in the room. Sometimes you just see them in the hallway and get a feel for them. Usually in the hall, with someone you feel safe with, you might say, I have been thinking about this, what do you think? Some of the best stuff comes out of these hallway conversations.” One teacher very sincerely stated that she gets a sense of how others teach just by walking by their classrooms and seeing if the students are happy. Some teachers relied on resource people to share what was going on. Resource teachers usually have been in most rooms and have a feel for what is going on in the building and readily share best practices.

Most teachers admitted it was difficult to know what their other grade level peers did in terms of classroom practices. Principals, due to district requests, were beginning to expect teachers to go on more formal ‘learning walks’ to gain access and knowledge of each others’ instructional practices. A first year teacher at Riverview felt this was a positive thing when she learned her grade level would participate, “They start in January, I am not sure if we do them just with our grade level or we get to see other grade levels. I would like to see someone from another grade, see their instructional strategies and rapport with the kids.” A fifth grade teacher from Cityside recalled, “Science teachers had a lot of questions about the new curriculum. They worked together with lesson units and then invited us in to observe. I wanted to visit a 4th grade class with literature circles. Another teacher visited my room for word study.” This expectation to visit others through learning walks and to participate in peer observations has erupted into stressful times for some teachers. Generally speaking, teachers are still nervous and uncomfortable with

peer observation. Self-examination and feedback from peers has resulted in fear in some instances. As one teacher explained, "Nobody has said verbally I don't want anyone coming into my classroom. It depends on who the observer might be. Some people might be intimidated by an unannounced visit, whether from a peer or someone else." A specialist from Riverview exclaimed, "Oh, I hate being observed. It is intimidating. I like to do my job well and I really care about what I do and I would hate for anyone to see me fail or make a mistake. I am very flattered that others want to come in and once I get into my groove, I am comfortable, but my initial response is I hate being observed." Another Riverview teacher put it this way, "You are never sure what teachers look for when they come in your room. Teaching shows a lot of your personality; you have your own way of handling your class, and what works for you may not work for someone else. I don't want to be judged. It is about our relationship with our students. It is very personal." A kindergarten teacher stated, "You worry about being judged. I think we are all afraid of inadequacy, of feeling we have not done enough." "Some would rather just shut their door when they get back to their classroom from collaboration. That is their safe place and that is where they would rather be. A lot of it is fear of failure, being perceived as not doing their job adequately. That fear of exposing themselves in front of their peers is just overall nervousness." A math coach at Seaview remarked very intuitively about her experiences when first doing learning walks as a function of her job. "When learning walks first came down the pike, it was voluntary but I encouraged my teachers to do. When you get into a position like mine, and you leave the classroom, you have been friends with other teachers and you think they are the best teachers in the world. Then

you go into their rooms and oh my. You find out differently. That is what I meant when I said when we were isolated, there was power in it.”

However difficult and scary deprivitization may be, there are pockets of teachers across all four schools providing the modeling and helping to build the relationships and trust needed for positive widespread peer observations and specific feedback. At Riverview, the principal asked one grade level to do learning walks. A specialist from that school stated, “That was the only time I had the opportunity to sit in her classroom and see what she was doing. Prior to that, I didn’t have the time. We compiled a list of what we saw and gave it to the principal. I liked how her room was set up. Naturally, I was watching the teacher and I did pick up a lot of ideas, more classroom management and things I could take back into my room.” Seaview has put a lot of emphasis on learning walks and collaborative planning. A first grade teacher at Seaview talked about wanting feedback when she was observed by peers. “I want feedback even if it is bad. As least I know what you thought, next time I can change as opposed to just you learning and not me.” A math coach at Seaview talked about how she is building a risk tolerant group of teachers. “I have taken some of the teachers on different learning walks to watch how different components of a lesson are taught and we debrief later. But the funniest thing is, a lot of teachers that ask to go don’t want others to come into their room. I will say, that is not fair, we are trying to learn from each other. So one thing I have done to make them more comfortable is letting them video themselves first, go home and watch it, then we talk about it before anyone comes in. That has made a big difference.” A fifth grade teacher at Cityside simply stated, “I have an open door. I say that to parents and colleagues. Come see me do my job.” Valleyside has experimented with the concept of

lesson study under the guidance of central office staff and is working on incorporating that collaborative model with more teachers volunteering to be observed.

Most teachers in this study would support the idea that learning walks, collaborative planning, and peer observation build leadership competency and are exciting professionally, yet they are uncomfortable on a personal level at this time. They know they are on a path to change and that concept is discussed under the next theme.

Theme E: Shared understanding leads to change. When asked who provided the most influence on their teaching practice, teachers stated three common groups of people: peers, principals, and central office curriculum instructional specialists. Of the three, central office personnel (C & I) brought about the most negative feelings. All schools in this study had instructional personnel involved in systematic planning and instruction of students. Cityside and Valleyside were dealing with low state assessment scores while Seaview and Riverview were working with a district mandated instructional initiative and central office personnel met regularly with the staff from each of the four schools for these reasons. As one teacher from Valleyside remarked, “Central office to me is just the place that is giving us orders as to what to do.” Frustration was shared by another Valleyside teacher who said, “When I got my feedback from C & I, I was not a very nice person because I kept saying, very nicely, that I was not being respected. I usually don’t have problems getting along with anybody, but I walked out and slammed the door that day. I kept saying I hear what you say, but I don’t agree. I kept saying to her, look at my scores, I must be doing something right. She was not accepting of anything I said.” In discussing feedback from a lesson, another Valleyside teacher explained, “If the feedback had come from a teacher, she wouldn’t get offended, but if it came from C & I, it would

feel like you were being attacked.” A third Valleyside teacher agreed when he said, “Feedback from C & I is an extra fear, a fear factor, the unknown.” One teacher from Cityside stated that C & I can be too demanding, with no negotiations.

Teachers in all schools had high regards personally for their principals. However, the way in which principals were viewed in terms of influence, was significant. Most teachers did not feel principals spent enough time observing in their classrooms. They would like to have more frequent informal types of classroom visits. In that way, teachers felt principals would have more of a handle on what was happening and could offer more constructive advice. A resource teacher from Riverview stated, “The principal only observes one time a year and some of her suggestions don’t make sense to me.” Others see the principal as a conduit between the classroom and central office, “just someone who tells us what downtown wants us to do.”

The overwhelming majority of teachers stated the most important area of influence for significant learning and change comes from their peers. As one Valleyside teacher explained, “My peers, for sure. They are in the trenches every day. just seems like the best place to go.” One specialist from Cityside stated, “It has been my partner. We talk about the students, what we see happening with the kids, so that has been the best. She plays devil advocate a lot which is good. She will be very honest and we have a good relationship with each other that way.” A first grade teacher from Seaview said, “It is going to come more from discussion with peers and observation of peers. That is to me where you find out if it really works or not; either watching someone try to do it, or listening to someone talk about how they did it, works for me. I think this is where some of the anger gets bred when downtown is saying theirs is the best way, and we say well

how do you know, you never tried it? So for me, it is discussion with peers and learning from them.” Excitement about shared planning was explained by a teacher, “One of the things with collaborative planning is we were so excited about how we taught a lesson that we could not wait to talk with each other about the results of the lesson.” A new teacher from Riverview depends on her inclusion teacher partner. “She is in my room all the time; she knows the students as well as I do. I learn from her.” One teacher from Valleyside summed it up when he said, “In terms of what is expected, it would have to be the principal. Pacing, curriculum, I guess that would be downtown. In terms of guidance, recommendations that would lead to changes, I would have to go with my peers, my fellow coworkers.”

Data from the interviews suggested “teachers will need to lose their separateness and individualism to a certain degree in order to evolve as a team.” Areas of self-reflection, examination, and changes in identity from autonomous classroom teachers to those who fully participate in teacher leadership as a function of the job are causing some dissidence and dilemma among these teachers. Push from the top has not brought about the depth and pace of change needed. It will be from the inside out, from one peer influencing colleagues to acknowledge the change is needed. Building the necessary leadership capacity will more likely come from peer influence. Teachers are sharing this paradigm shift, they understand more than anyone else what it takes to change, learn, and grow together. It is out of this shared experience of participation in professional learning and collaboration that their capacity for teacher leadership might emerge.

Data would also suggest that as these teachers are given more opportunities to gain experience and knowledge from collaborative conversations with peers, their power

base expands from the isolated classroom to the professional learning community. With the awareness of their paradigm shift, they are recognizing the challenges and through shared understanding, leading a path to sustained change. Some of these challenges relate to traditional forms of leadership structures and will be discussed in the next section.

Research Question 2: To what degree do the unique characteristics of your school influence teacher leadership?

Construct 2: Dichotomous Leadership Structures

- Theme A: Systemic opportunities exist for teachers to learn and lead
- Theme B: Breaking traditional leadership barriers
- Theme C: Leadership in flux

Interview questions that addressed this research question were designed to examine the unique character of each school. Participants were asked to inform the researcher on the current learning culture and leadership practices specific to their school. Construct 2 was formed based on three themes that emerged from the relevant text addressing this question.

Construct 2: Dichotomous Leadership Structures

A summary of themes that emerged as a result of the collected data show that due to unique community and staff characteristics and needs of each school, the leadership and decision making tended to be in flux. Some teachers were more comfortable with the traditional chains of command and needed the principal to be the overall instructional leader and decision maker. There were pockets of teachers in each school, however, who were self-motivated and had begun to experience informal teacher leadership in some

form. Where it was successful, training and modeling had been provided for teachers by in-house coaches and external central office staff. This organizational piece proved crucial to their success.

Theme A: Systemic opportunities exist for teachers to learn and lead. All four schools operate with district specific leadership structures. Each school has designated grade level chair people, Principal's Administrative Committee (PAC) representatives, School Planning Council (SPC) representatives, and leadership teams. Also in place are various committees that are typically headed up by teachers or resource specialists. There are opportunities to participate in district and state wide committees. Collaborative planning groups are also in the process of being formed, based on the district's mandate for PLCs. Each participant interviewed has had experience with these school-wide structures. Several have formally led these groups at some point in their career. These formal leadership positions are set up to disseminate information to and from all stakeholders.

These structures produce some procedural issues that generated in both high and low performing schools studied. A teacher from Seaview shared her experience. "It [formal lead role] is usually based on money. I don't want to be school improvement coordinator anymore. At the end of the year, the principal puts all the paid things on paper for you to choose. I didn't put anything down. Somehow my name got on it because no one else wants it." Another teacher from Seaview stated, "You will see a group of teachers that will do everything, you could rattle their names off, like the Top 10. I mean like the top 10 go-to people that will step up for everything. No matter which administrator walks into this building, they can figure out those people with-in the first

month. It is sad, some people do everything.” One teacher from Cityside maintains that her administrator “does a very nice job to even the playing field so to speak, to share leadership positions so they are not concentrated with certain people. The problem is that in an effort to do so, some thing gets lost. Some of those people don’t share or bring back things to the table. The way the information could be disaggregated and used gets lost.” A teacher from Valleyside agreed with the notion that formal meetings can be insufficient. “Our grade level meetings are far and few between because we are all pulled in 900 different directions. We did have some but they were mostly informational [dumping].” A Valleyside teacher shared, “A lot of our roles are rotated but there are a few times where it is the same people every year, such as the reading resource teacher. It seems that everything having to do with language arts she becomes the leader of it and she is stretched thin. She could use other people to step up and help out.”

According to the interview data, there are in-school and system-wide designated formal leadership roles in which teachers can explore their leadership capacity. As of now, there does seem to be some issue in how those positions are filled and executed. Teachers are beginning to see opportunities for a different way of carrying out their leadership needs through informal paths and these will be discussed under the next theme.

Theme B: Breaking traditional leadership barriers. This notion of responsibility to peers may be opening the eyes of teachers to the prospect that traditional leadership roles and positions are necessary but are not the only ways to fulfill leadership needs. A math coach from Seaview stated, “I don’t know if the other teachers don’t care, don’t want to, don’t have time, or are just not interested. I think it is a little bit of it all. Some of

them want to. You should step up to the plate. I mean take on what you can. You want to be the leader of something. It just might not be the magnitude of someone else.” Her colleague remarked, “Our principal does a good job of trying to build us to that. She has been pushing me by saying you need to do this or that, if you want to be more of a leader, here are some things you can do. She gives us the opportunities. People are timid because they are your colleagues so it can breed anger amongst each other if you are not ready for it. It takes a while, it is coming, it is baby steps here.” As one teacher explained, “I think we are just beginning to skim the surface of professional learning leadership capacity.”

Unique opportunities are becoming available to teachers and they are taking action to experience leadership in new ways. This is creating a break from the traditional role of what we understand ‘leader’ to be. “We have lots of opportunities to grow your leadership here. I had the opportunity a few years ago to write a grant to start a student club. You are in a leadership position because you are doing something that hasn’t been done in the school before. I also volunteered to go to a conference on technology and be one of the classrooms that would use it 75% of the time. Through that I got the opportunity to learn more.” A Valleyside teacher remembers how it felt to share her knowledge of new and upcoming technology resources with her peers. “Our CRS chose us to be the go-to people on each grade level for the Promethean Board. We learned things before the others. He felt like it should come from us and not him. We would meet as a team and decide what the teachers would need to know. We would take it back to them. This was very effective; there was no other structure like it.” A first year teacher from Riverview shared her experience,

“I think everybody works well together and brings each other up. We have created our own learning community that I am on and we were not being told to do it. We went to a conference and learned a lot of great new things about how teaching is changing. We can tell with some teachers it might be hard to uproot what they have learned and introduce this. We decided to form a group to decide what we can do for next year, how to close the gap by bringing in the other teachers that might not be comfortable with uprooting their ways. I felt like more of a leader because I am the only one on my grade level in this group, that will help my leadership and with my school. I will help to teach the other teachers.”

Knowing there are many informal opportunities to stretch leadership capacity building has given some teachers the will to take that risk. Power structures unique to each school have proven to either hamper or ignite those opportunities and will be discussed under the next theme.

Theme C: Leadership in flux. Although different leadership opportunities exist across all four schools, data from this study show that the traditional roles and emerging teacher leadership opportunities appear to be in conflict. Decision making in the higher performing schools tends to be more collaborative and democratic with lower performing schools finding it more difficult to find the balance of shared responsibility. Teachers in both school groups are displaying resistance to central district personnel. The styles of each principal tend to have a mark on how each school is reacting to mandated reforms. Changes in administrators at each school due to district-wide movement have impacted

the feelings of teachers in these schools. Teachers described the demographics of the school as playing a part in the decision making of the principals. Both Riverside and Seaside schools have populations from the upper socio-economic neighborhoods. Teachers felt that the principals made decisions based on how those decisions would be perceived by the community. The principal at Cityside does not want to ask more of the teachers than they already give, given the fact that the school pulls from a very low socio-economic area and the teachers work extremely hard to keep up with demands.

The principals from the high performing schools are strongly connected to the city and to the community at large. They are described as “being the head of the family” and “running a tight ship”. Riverview’s principal is described in this way, “The administration is there to listen and to see what is going on, very supportive, making sure I have everything. They are very open to us. They are very fair.” Another teacher described her as, “She likes things a certain way, but she is very supportive and approachable. She just knows the parents, she knows how they think, and she has been there for us a thousand times. She has so much knowledge and experience.” However, due to her extensive understanding of the community, decisions are not always shared. “Some decisions are made for us. If it is not what she has in mind, it has to be redone and you kind of have to figure things out. When things are decided for us, we usually have the opportunity to come back and work things out. If you are not used to that kind of clientele [parents], it can be very tough.”

The principal at Seaview has been there for three years and brought about a change in administrative style. A teacher from Seaview shared her view about the principal. “She is the one we talk to. I feel she listens to us, she hears what we are saying,

even if it is the most impossible thing, she is listening and she is going to give us her honest opinion. If it is something that can happen, she will help us make it happen.” Collaboration is stressed at Seaview. “The first thing in your interview, you were told we collaborate and that’s what is expected in our culture.” Even though teachers felt she listened and was fair, there were some who felt she might be unapproachable. “I think she tries to have an open door so you can go to her. The biggest problem is that not many people feel comfortable enough to go to her. Those that can get over it and get in there know their voice is heard. The teachers with the most problem are the ones that were here when our other principal was here. He was such a warm, fuzzy teddy bear so you could say anything, perhaps too much so.”

At Valleyside, decision making was not shared as democratically in many ways. One teacher explained, “We have had a lot of changes in the past 2 years with assistant principals, big changes with teachers being shifted to other grade levels, and that was a great change with a lot of stress on a lot of teachers. We weren’t asked if we wanted to change, we were told. We were never given a sufficient answer as to why. At our school, for the most part, our concerns are heard, that is the key word, heard, but easily left at that.” Another teacher from Valleyside reflected on a time when major scheduling was to be decided by a leadership team. “We have been exposed to the term PLC yet I am not sure our administration knows what it should be at this point. When we had our meeting, we were under the assumption we were going to do this together and to go back to our grade levels and get some ideas about scheduling. When we met last week, it was basically, here is your schedule, look it over. That is not what we thought it should be.

This is no professional learning community.” One teacher described the administrative decision making as “like a dictatorship”.

Generally, the teachers at Cityside felt they had more control over their decision making, but this may have led to a lack of focus and communication. As one specialist stated, “I wouldn’t call us a learning school because we have not had the formal ‘I want you to learn this, I want you to try this, I am expecting to see this when I come into your classroom’. That hasn’t been done. I think a lot of our teachers think, well, I am ok with what I am doing, what I am doing is good enough. So after 4 years of no formal training in instructional strategies, and the looseness with which teachers are allowed to teach, this is a big factor. The reason we don’t have training is because he doesn’t want us to stay after school for meetings. He wants to make our lives easier because he knows how hard we work, but in doing that, it’s harder because we have to catch up.” Another Cityside teacher corroborated by saying, “I know he is extremely protective of our time and our burdens. He doesn’t want to overburden the same individuals constantly and that is a good thing but in the same sense it misses information getting back to the staff. We have one person who went to the (citywide) forum and was supposed to share back. I had no idea the role existed or that the information was supposed to be shared. We have one person on our Literacy committee and we have not heard about it and I am a Language Arts teacher.” Subject specific teachers do get a chance to meet regularly and make grade level decisions on their own. “Our 5th grade group, we have the opportunity to take data, common assessments, and get an idea of where we need to go. We share those ideas and refine those ideas. Our administrators are there, but it is definitely our needs that drive what gets done.” One grade level meeting was described by a reading specialist in this

way, “The last meeting we had we said we have this new thing we want to try and they said NO. There wasn’t one positive word from anybody. They were really mean to us. The principal wasn’t at that meeting, he probably should have been. They didn’t want any part of it. It is something they weren’t familiar with. [Teachers feel] just leave it the same and don’t tell me what to do.” One teacher summed it up by saying, “I don’t like it. I wish the principal would take more of an instructional leadership role in making decisions because there is so little we can do and we have lost focus in what we should be doing.” This lack of focus and participation on this principal’s part may be due to the fact he was scheduled to retire at the end of this school year. “I don’t think he gets it, which is why he should retire. I love him, he is a great man, he will bend over backwards to help you as a person. He cares about the kids, the teachers. In my mind, if you care about the kids, you are going to see that they get the best instruction. We don’t have the same understanding of that kind of care.”

Both Seaview and Riverview have been a part of a district-wide curriculum initiative. Both Valleyside and Cityside have school-wide initiatives to increase chronic low state test scores. This has caused central office instructional specialists (C & I) to be involved with planning and decision making at all schools in this study. Findings reveal this has added some pull on leadership attempts. A Seaview teacher explained, “From my understanding, we were asked to do this and when the principal agreed to do it she is not going to do it halfway. She is very dependent on C & I and calls them all the time. If we ask her a question, it is trickle down from her but it is really from higher up.” Another Seaview teacher explained, “The function of this committee is to do curriculum initiative stuff, to go to the meetings...and disperse the information from people who are bigger

than the school.” The teachers at Cityside worked with C & I as well. “We had this person come in and talk to us about PLC. She said to us that we have been doing this all along, we were just going to structure it up a bit and our expectations were to make the most of it. I don’t know the behind the scenes part. I would guess she just worked with our principal and we were all told this is something we just have to do.” One math teacher from Valleyside felt her teacher judgment was taken away when working with C & I. “You have our math coach saying one thing and C & I saying something else. There are a lot of mixed messages. C & I are in our building and I have spoken with them, but not in a collaborative way.” In discussing the ways in which central office instructional personnel affected decision making and curriculum planning, a Valleyside teacher explained, “We are professional, and we know what works. We don’t need, and this is what is really difficult for a lot of us, we don’t need for someone to come in and open the book and say this is what you need to do. We could have used the time more wisely collaborating as a grade level.”

These unique challenges specific to the schools in this study relating to traditional leadership structures have been found to hamper the ability of school personnel to benefit from the power that comes from true collaborative and reflective work found in professional learning cultures. Given all the barriers traditional structures have presented to these teachers, small pockets of emergent teacher leaders are creaming to the top. The next section will attempt to describe how these teachers can begin to understand their capacity to lead.

Research Question 3: How can teachers understand their leadership capacity?

Construct 3: Influential Teacher Leaders Seek Culture of Working with Others

- Theme A: Teacher initiated learning through small, peer-led projects
- Theme B: Peers lead with quiet influence
- Theme C: Leadership capacity was developed over time

Interview questions that addressed this research question were designed to find out ways in which professional learning was initiated in each school, to identify qualities of influential peers, and to examine personal traits of leadership experience and influence. Construct 3 was formed based on three themes that emerged from the relevant text addressing this question.

Construct 3: Influential Teacher Leaders Seek Culture of Working with Others

A summary of themes that emerged as a result of the collected data on leadership capacity showed that small pockets of teacher initiated learning are beginning to appear. It is a fact of the bureaucratic school system that mandated reforms and initiatives are a part of the way schools operate. Within these, administrators are fully responsible for making sure they reach set goals. These systemic professional mandates place a lot of demand on the time and energy of teachers. However, teachers are beginning to rely on their own intuition, gifts, expertise, and professional know-how to teach and learn from each other for the sake of student success. They are heavily influenced by peers who demonstrate intuitive knowledge and model student centered practices. As such, teachers are beginning to recognize each other as emergent leaders of learning. Teachers identifying themselves as leaders have evolved over time due to personal and professional experiences with leadership activities. These activities have built their knowledge capacity to understand themselves as leaders.

Theme A: Teacher initiated learning through small, peer led projects.

Consensus from participants in all schools was that professional development was largely driven by the administrators in each school. This was in part due to reform mandates, curriculum changes, and the need to raise test scores. Schools worked closely with central administration and C & I in professional development, curriculum planning, and assessment design. When asked how professional development was organized in her school, a Valleyside teacher explained, "It is from the top-down. Basically, it is almost like a set of rules. This is what you should be doing. It is still very dictated. It is very scripted what we should be doing. I am not sure what a PLC should look like, because what we do is so much dictated from the top."

These mandatory learning situations created a demand on teachers' time and lessened enthusiasm for personal learning initiatives. A math coach explained her experience wanting to start a math learning community, "Some people were okay [with starting a PLC] and then all these things come from the city, from curriculum initiatives, and Promethean Board and you look at the teachers and their eyes are swelling with tears. They want to help you but there is not enough time. So I backed off. The only way you could come into our school and start a PLC is if something huge was taken off their plate, but what?" When asked about being assigned to mandated learning groups, a Valleyside teacher stated, "It happens and from what I've seen you don't always have as much enthusiasm going into it when you know you're being told to do it. We are all professionals and we usually get it done, but not without some griping and some negative thoughts."

Given all that was on the plates of the teachers in each school, there was strong evidence that small pockets of learning communities initiated by teachers were beginning to take hold. “Some of the bigger stuff does come from the top...little projects, ideas that are geared just for our school; we can do it [on our own].” One coach described her attempts to work with teachers using a specific instructional strategy, “You do need passion. I had a passion with ‘accountable talk’, I said just try it. I videotaped it being done and showed it to everybody. We did that at grade level meetings. It was easy. Everybody is talking the same language.” Another teacher stated, “We talked to the gifted resource teacher who was the person that brought us Habits of Mind and we wanted to learn more about it. She started a book club and teachers volunteered for it...at one time we had 16 teachers participating. Believe me, with all that we have going on, that is quite a bit. We learned more about the Habits of Mind and how to instruct and how to embed them into our lessons. It was quite good.” A specialist from Riverview shared her experience, “Right now the gifted resource teachers and myself will be starting a program that is a year-long project. We are getting that together right now, so there is a team working in it.” A teacher from one of the lower performing schools shared how the computer resource specialist and math teacher got together to form a lunch club for specific students not doing well in math. A reading specialist from Valleyside stated, “The [language arts] teachers have initiated word study this year as something that will be a school wide focus. I think that has been the first teacher initiated professional development. They started to see the need.”

Data showed that even though teachers recognized their time was valuable and limited due to mandated initiatives, they were willing to make time for small projects that

had specific meaning to them and their students. Teachers leading these groups were typically those not found in formal leadership roles. Those leading the charge were influential in their own way and are discussed under the next theme.

Theme B: Peers lead with quiet influence. Participants were asked to describe peers that have made the most influence on their teaching practice. Overwhelmingly, teachers reported that those having the most influence are student centered and demonstrate an intuitive mindset. As one coach reflected, “She volunteered to work with the interactive garden club, goes around making the building a more pleasant place by putting flowers in the restroom, and at any given time when called on to help, she will. She is not outspoken or a loud, boisterous person, but when you need her she is there. Her grade level loves her, parents feel welcome, her students love her and she gets the best out of them and the other staff, too.” A Seaview teacher described her influential peer in this way, “She is reflective, has a passion for the job, will seek others, lifelong learner...humble, not pushy. She is truly committed to growing as a teacher, wanting to provide the best for her students. When you put someone up there, others question how did that person get there? I am just as good as they are. But what they need to understand is they are not as open. You have to be open to new ideas and possibilities.” A specialist at Riverview talked about her influential peer in this way, “This teacher is a leader with children. She is the most passionate, wonderful teacher. She may not be on every committee, but her life is in the classroom. It is her nature, her patience, which I try to model. She inspires me to be a little more like that.” A first year teacher at Riverview shared how her influential peers make her feel on a daily basis. “My grade level chair has made me feel more confident because I will go to him with questions and he has made

me feel included and valued. The fifth grade teacher makes me feel successful because when I bring stuff to the word study PLC, I feel like I am valued and taken positively.”

A fifth grade teacher is heavily influenced by the reading specialist, “We work very well together. We collaborate outside our regular meetings to talk about the needs of my classroom. She is creative and helps me with that piece of my instruction. In one word, she is knowledgeable.” Peers acting as models have a great influence on teachers as stated by this Valleyside teacher, “This person has had a pretty profound effect on me. Early on, I tried to model the way we were planning together. I have tried to spread that on to the new teachers I work with. I see the value in her stuff.” Another teacher talked about a role model in this way, “Whether it is curriculum based, or assistance with behaviors, she is calm and steady; you know she wins the race. I think that shows a lot of leadership. She is never frazzled and people respect her teaching and that is a leader. I try to model that in some way, I like the way she handles the children.” Some influential peers were described as being quiet and in the background. “She may not be the most vocal person initially, but if you can pick up and notice what she is doing, she will dive right in and be very inviting and give you anything you need. I see her as a learner.”

“This teacher is one who goes home and asks what am I going to do tomorrow that will make the difference.” “It is her reflective piece; it is ongoing, not stagnated.” One special education teacher stated, “This particular teacher stays late and comes in early. Her door is always open in terms of if you need assistance with a concept, if you find your students aren’t grasping it, she is helpful in looking at it another way. She has provided me with insight on different ways to approach a concept. She encourages me.” A Seaview teacher

saw her influential peer as, “one who evolved, not one appointed to a role by an administrator, but a quiet learner.”

This notion of “quiet leader” as influencer was profound throughout the data. Knowing those influential peers exists and are acknowledged by others help to define leadership as a knowledge activity and one that can emerge over time. This idea of emergent leadership is discussed under the next theme.

Theme C: Leadership capacity was developed over time. Those identifying themselves as teacher leaders had early experiences and exposure to leadership opportunities. They developed experience over time and in many different situations. This helped form their leadership capacity as a professional. A first year teacher at Riverview reported, “I was the captain of my cheerleading team, captain of my dance team, the leader in my college dance company. I liked dancing, but not only that, I like being the leader and the helper, the nurturer, so added up, that is what I am today. Everything that I have done, I have tried to be the leader in, to a certain extent. I like to be heard and helpful.” These teachers have been actively engaged in leadership positions throughout their communities. A resource teacher talked about her commitment to an internationally sponsored program involving her daughter with special needs. “I stepped up as leader because I thought I had a lot of experience to share. Being a teacher helped me fill that role, dealing with large groups of people and planning, having structure, routine, and being able to multi-task. So, just my teaching background kind of helped model me for that leadership role.” A Valleyside teacher states, “I am not one that just sits back. I own a business I opened last year. I am successful in my personal life and I try to be successful in my professional life. When I graduated from college, there was a

hiring freeze so I worked in another occupation. When we came here, I worked in a daycare and my director said I should get a job in the public schools. In my first year here, I started having leadership roles.” A kindergarten teacher stated, “I was the director of all the clubs at my kid’s school. I did all I could to be on the committees and then I went back to work. Leadership is a thing I have seen evolve with me over the years.” A fifth grade teacher at Valleyside shared, “I am the mother of 2 children and that is about all the leadership you are going to get from me at the moment, in church, teaching Sunday school, summer bible school, organizing Bunko in the neighborhood, and committees at my kids’ schools. Professionally, I am just one of those where there is just never enough. I have been successful at writing grants and now I have started a cheerleading team at school with my daughter. I am 100% a cheerleader for the National Board process and I try to encourage and motivate others for that.” A coach at Seaview remembered, “I was a Girl Scout, captain of the cheerleading squad, and SCA. I always took on the role of leadership. I was one of those kids, like I am as an adult, involved in everything.”

Many participants were defined and designated as leaders by their peers. The art teacher at Riverview explained that she has taught a lot of classes for other art teachers in the district and is often asked to be on citywide committees based on her teaching performance in the classes. A Social Studies teacher remembered how she was selected to lead in a district-wide program, “The head of Social Studies was at our school and I was talking to her about one of my instructional concerns. She said she would come observe me teaching so she could help. She liked what she observed and wanted me to be involved in Social Studies and meet with a group of teachers to learn and improve the

Social Studies instruction for others. From that, I taught a staff development class. That is how I got involved.” A math coach remembered her initial involvement, “I was selected Teacher of the Year. I was honored. I would have other teachers come in and ask me what they could do. I was a leader in the Extended Day Kindergarten Program and was invited to the table to work on the handbook. I have never considered myself a leader but others tell me I am.” Another teacher described her path this way, “During my first year of teaching, they were starting this thing with technology and needed someone with knowledge. The principal looked at me and asked if I would go to the training and come back and teach the others. So here, as a brand new teacher, I became a leader right off the bat. Later, when we heard Kagan was coming, my partner said something to the principal about me going. I went to the first round of training and so my leadership at that point came from teaching Kagan. So both times, it fell into my lap.”

When asked to describe their leadership style, the responses showed reflective and collaborative actions based on close relationships. Several teachers felt they approached leadership in a democratic way, using a team approach. A math teacher at Cityside described her style as that of team player, “I have some good ideas, I know what I am doing. I don’t have all the answers, though. I am definitely a team player. When we have to do sharing, I will say thank you to the person who did the technology part of this. If there is credit for someone else, absolutely.” As remarked by a Riverview teacher, “If I have an idea or a thought, I am very willing to share, but I do like the team approach more. We all come together; it is better when more people work together.” An inclusion teacher stated it this way, “I like to be a democratic leader, have the other voices heard. My style, a lot of collaboration, I wouldn’t come up with the goal of the meeting or the

whole learning community myself. I would ask what is the goal, what is it we are wanting to work towards, how can we get there. I would be helping with getting everything together, more of a team player.” As stated by a coach at Seaview, “First I build a relationship with someone. I just don’t come in and tell you what to do. Building trust is very important to me. The teachers that I don’t feel I have changed are because the trust is not there. So I keep on trying, I don’t give up.” A teacher from Valleyside considers other people’s feelings. He does not say it is only his way. If there is disagreement, he creates options to try. Another Valleyside teacher said, “I like to have everyone’s input and be in on the decisions.” “I think I am fair. My kids say I am fair and that speaks volumes. I try to treat people equally regardless of who they are and what they do.” A Cityside teacher summed it by saying, “I just try to do everything I can to achieve. It all comes back to my students because they benefit from it. Education is constantly changing but you have to grab it by the coattails and go along for the ride. I don’t think everyone likes it, but it is in the best interest of the kids.”

As opportunities for emerging teacher leadership are created due to teachers seeing a need and finding others to work alongside of to fill that need, data are showing that they are tapping into leadership skills that were developed over time and bringing those skills to the table. Learning to work through consensus with peers offers to be a different challenge. The next section will explore how teachers experience their leadership influence with their peers.

Research Question 4: What personal and professional experiences do teachers perceive as influencing the development of their teacher leadership knowledge?

Construct 4: Skillful Collaboration Influences Professional Growth

- Theme A: Teaching requires fluid and reflective action
- Theme B: Collaboration is learned through experience
- Theme C: Teacher leadership as shared growth

Interview questions that addressed this research question were designed to elicit opinions concerning the need for teachers to redesign their work to include professional learning communities as a context to emergent teacher leadership. Participants were asked to reflect on their own influential ways and how that directly affects future plans. Construct 4 was formed based on three themes that emerged from the relevant text addressing this question.

Construct 4: Skillful Collaboration Influences Professional Growth

A summary of themes that emerged as a result of the collected data on the professional experiences of teachers show participants are leading and learning from each other as they move through the process of skilled collaboration and professional learning. Although most have had some experience with the collaborative process, there have been varying degrees of success and teachers are beginning to find real value in it. Teachers are realizing their own influence and aspire to broaden their experiences and level of education. Despite their goals of higher education and levels of professional degrees, there is an intrinsic pull to stay close to the classroom where they feel the real difference can be made.

Theme A: Teaching requires fluid and reflective action. There was a consensus among all participants that we need to change the way teaching is approached and professional learning is designed. One fifth grade teacher remarked, "Education is always

evolving and no one person is 100% skilled, so to speak, in the art of teaching so being able to reach out and gather ideas and manipulate ideas amongst your colleagues is always a great way to refine how you approach your teaching in general.” A math coach, whose job it is to teach professional learning to her teachers, is concerned, “Many teachers sit through collaboration and buck that. They think why can’t somebody just do it for me and tell me what to do. Sometimes I think they carry that into the classroom, this is what I want you to do so do it. The irony, though, from teaching classes to teachers, is they want me to just tell them what to do, but they really do have high expectations for their students. We don’t want to think, but we want our students to think.”

For some teachers, this move to learning communities has been a smooth and expected transition. A Cityside teacher stated, “I was fortunate for three years to have a wonderful team where we were open and able to branch out and to go in different directions and to listen to each other.” “I feel like I’ve done that ever since I was in college because we had to do a lot of collaborative work,” explained a teacher just completing her Master’s Degree. A first year teacher from Riverview experienced learning communities as part of her college training as well. “I think that I am more willing than those that have been here longer because I am fresh and ready to change things, be more innovative, but I can see how others might have a different opinion.” “I feel like I have grown up in this process through my career so to me it is not such a drastic change. I think we need to be more open to change and be flexible and constantly looking at ourselves to see what else we can do.”

Most participants did experience some difficulty with the process and expressed their frustrations through the interviews. A specialist stated, “It can be frustrating because

we are always adopting new ways to teaching and doing things, which is great, but by the time we get used to doing things, it is time to change again. I do know, first hand, that if the system didn't make them change, they wouldn't actually do it on their own." A Seaview teacher recalled how her team felt going through the process, "This year, because we have been a school working on mandated curriculum initiatives with C & I, we were working together collaboratively to the nth degree I will say. At first, I didn't see the benefit to be honest because it felt like chaos. The transition may not have been smooth; we were like a 6 headed monster at first." A veteran teacher from Valleyside observed, "I remember those days when if you wanted to spend a week doing what you wanted in the classroom, you just did it and we were happy knowing the kids were having fun. Now you can't because there is a level of responsibility and a level of necessity that you cover all the state-wide objectives and I think every grade feels that way." One teacher summed it up by stating "The learning curve is huge, the expectations from the district for the teachers and students are very high, which is good, but it puts a lot of pressure on us teachers." As one Cityside resource specialist stated. "I feel like I am in the French Revolution."

Although the transition from isolated teaching and traditional professional development is proving to be a challenge, participants are beginning to find the power in teachers learning from each other. A math coach can see the difference in how her teachers approach their work, "When I think teachers really dig in and redesign, they are being really thoughtful about the lesson." A Seaview teacher explained, "On my grade level there are 8 of us. There is no need for all 8 of us to recreate the wheel for everything. We can come together and say this is what needs to be done and this is how

we are going to do it and we can split up the responsibilities. Because teachers are taking more of a leadership role within the learning community, in the end, there is less for all of us to do.” Teachers from both high and low performing schools found this to be beneficial for the unique needs of their students. They are beginning to see the safety and well-being of their students as a strong motivator to working with each other in learning communities. “I think it is more helpful, our program runs deeper by sharing ideas as opposed to being isolated. When you are a teacher, your classroom is your domain, it is your world, they are your babies and if you are a good teacher, that’s great. If you aren’t, then those kids can suffer, by not having [their teachers in] that community.” “I think where the system is going, working more towards not breaking things apart but keeping it whole, I am in favor of it. With our kids, who are so disjointed in everything in their lives, they really need to see the connection. I work with people who are starting to get the bigger picture out there, entice the students and motivate them and buy into the learning.”

Whatever personal or professional ways teachers find to create fluid and reflective options in their teaching practice, they share in the understanding that collaboration is now a necessity for responding to the diverse needs of their students. This process of engaging in purposeful collaboration is discussed under the next theme.

Theme B: Collaboration is learned through experience. Part of the process of working in professional learning communities is learning the skill of collaboration. Teachers are encouraged to participate in collaborative conversations about their teaching practices with each other, however, it is not a skill that all shared equally. Teachers have for years been sharing ideas with each other, either formally or informally. The concept

that sharing ideas and collaborative conversation were different was not initially understood. Through collaborative experiences in their building, teachers are beginning to find the value. Participants were honest in sharing their experiences. One coach talked about the change her school is going through, "A new teacher came in and said 'I am not going to give her all my stuff'. There are a couple of teachers here who used to be the go-to people and no longer are. First semester, we sat with C & I and went over wonderful articles about this. Now, second semester, teachers are very glad they don't have to do that anymore. They will do it for their students, but don't see the value in doing it for themselves. The principal though, has done a complete 180, she no longer wants to hire anyone who is going to give her a dog and pony show. It was the shift from the top that made the difference and it is a good thing." "Basically, it was always sharing, when we got together. We didn't actually look at our work and ask is this really going to show us the students understand what we taught. We didn't talk about enduring understandings and the essential questions and I think collaboration has helped us a lot, really getting into what we want the students to know." "We have started to build on that this year. We have started to sit in on each other's PLCs, especially in the same subject area. We wanted to know what their expectations would be from our kids moving up to their grade level in terms of grading, lessons, so we could have the carryover from one grade to the next." One math coach remembered her first experiences as a new teacher, "I will be honest, for me, I was sold on it as a teacher. I collaborated with another grade level teacher. We would meet at Starbucks and we would do this. It was true collaboration, not sharing. Because of that, I was sold, so now when I go learn about it in classes and read books; it has made me a true believer because I experienced it myself."

The most difficult part of moving into a collaborative model for teachers is understanding that what had been in place for them, in terms of sharing curriculum ideas with each other, did not address the purpose of collaboration which is student achievement. It moved the boundary from that of teaching to that of learning. Teachers who had previous experiences with the true collaborative model were ready to grow from those experiences and share that growth with peers. This growth manifested itself as significant influence on their peers and is discussed in the next theme.

Theme C: Teacher leadership as shared growth. Through shared experiences with collaboration and professional learning communities, teachers are finding they are having a positive influence on their peers. This has led to teachers learning to lead and follow each other as a means of professional growth and student success. A second grade teacher explained, “A lot of times, the eyes turn to me for whatever reason. I think it is my confidence and my comfort level with knowledge about the curriculum. If they agree with me, they tend to follow along with me. If they don’t agree, and people have definitely questioned me, I want to look back at it and self reflect a little bit. So I would say I am receptive and open to change as well as being able to move forward.” “I hope I serve as a role model in how to teach in creative and innovative ways. I am willing to get ideas from them, so maybe they are willing to get ideas from me. I am a team player,” shared one Valleyside teacher. The math coach from Seaview was positive when she said, “It is really rewarding to see the teacher change, because when she changes for the better, she is not affecting just her class, but many classes.” The specialist at Riverview added, “People are more willing to give it their all and take ownership in things, within the team. When you team, everybody feels validated, everyone has ownership, and you

are not dictating, you are not telling, you are not saying this is how we are going to do it, it just makes everyone happier.”

Responses from the interviews showed the participants found that through skilled collaborative work, they were able to recognize their worth and influence as professionals. The shared growth and knowledge coming out of professional learning has the ability to sustain enthusiasm and commitment in uneasy times. How this may impact instructional practice is discussed in the next section.

Research Question 5: What do elementary school teachers perceive to be the impact of their leadership skill on instructional practice?

Construct 5: Reflective Professional Conversations Improve Measured Success

- Theme A: Three prong measure of success
- Theme B: Struggling students as motivation for professional conversation

Interview questions that addressed this research question were designed to understand how teachers measure success, involve themselves in professional learning conversations, and recognize the impact they have on their peers. Construct 5 was formed based on two themes that emerged from the relevant text addressing this question.

Construct 5: Reflective Professional Conversations Improve Measured Success

A summary of themes that emerged as a result of the collected data break down into ways in which success is measured and the substance of professional conversations. Although state test scores rank high as a measure of success among teachers in all schools studied, teachers also placed a lot of emphasis on individual student growth and their ability to close achievement gaps. Participants also gained satisfaction from

positive student feedback. The contexts of conversations during professional learning meetings provided a feeling of safety in which teachers could inquire about each others' practices, express willingness to model and support others, and demonstrate the ability to reflect on personal and professional goals.

Theme A: Three prong measure of success. When participants were asked to define their measures of success, they reflected on what teaching really meant to them. Across all four schools, the responses fell into three distinct categories: passing state-wide assessments, closing student achievement gaps, and personal gratification from student acknowledgements. Responses also showed that teachers in grades K-2 tended to look more at the student achievement piece while teachers in grades 3-5 were more inclined to mention state assessments as their prime measure of success. Although some teachers resented the fact that high stakes testing was pushed, "the tests are part of the problem, some of our students will never pass them, just teach them how to read", teachers in all schools responded that pressure to pass the tests was stressed. A specialist from Riverview shared, "We are kind of like a test driven school. At the beginning of the year, we have a power point presentation on who passed, who failed, the percentage of kids who passed or failed. These are shown by grade level. All of our test scores are part of our welcome back." Another teacher from the same school remarked, "I remember at the beginning of the year, they had a power point about the scores and it seemed, not malicious, but a little bit of competition about who got the best scores." When one teacher was transferred to a low performing school, he recalled the response from the district Superintendent, "There is a lot of pressure on you guys over there and I said 'gee thanks'! He is only seeing one thing; the pressure is the test scores." This pressure is

difficult for teachers, especially those from low socio-economic schools. Teachers from Valleyside acknowledged that when scores are down, morale is down. “Morale is definitely down. I know the principal is under a lot of pressure and it just filters down from the top. He is so worked up about it and that gets us worked up.” Another Valleyside teacher shared his perspective, “There is a lot of pressure at the 3-5 level. There is a strong emphasis on testing. We did not make AYP the last two years. Last year we put a strong emphasis on math. This year there was wide spread grade level changes with teachers throughout the building. Half the teachers in the school were asked to switch grade levels and that seemed like a drastic change at the time. The staff did not take it very well.” A teacher at Seaview remarked, “I would have to say that the principal says the tests are not the end all be all, and I hear from the Superintendent that the scores are not what we are looking at, but I know the principal shuts her door and says it is the scores. So, I guess it is the culture, unfortunately.”

Some teachers did state that although test scores were important, they measured success by helping students close the achievement gap. A math teacher at Cityside stated, “If there is a student struggling with social skills and I can develop a rapport and by the end of the year he is more confident, that is a success, regardless of their grades. If I can get my fourth graders just to do long division that is success.” A language arts teacher from the same school stated, “Some teachers are just standout teachers, they measure their successes based on student learning and the feeling of, oh my gosh, they’re getting it.” A Seaview teacher feels that knowing students have learned the subject matter is what is important. “We need to know if our kids are getting it, and getting it not to pass a test,

but to really be able to apply what they have learned. To me, it means they are going to go on and have a successful year next year.”

The third prong by which teachers measure success is that of personal fulfillment. “The first year I was teaching fourth grade, this student wrote a letter to me, like the ones that warm a teacher’s heart. It said I was a wonderful teacher because I taught him long division even when the student didn’t think he would ever get it. It was on Facebook, my niece’s friend saw it and said I had been her favorite teacher, too. That’s success,” shared a teacher from Cityside. One teacher from Seaview stated, “When I get letters from my students, either at the end of the year or down the road, and they tell me what a positive influence I have been, that is how I measure success. Seeing the difference in the students from the way they come in at the beginning of the year and how they are at the end of the year. That is success.” Reaching personal goals that impact their instructional practice was rated high. The advancements in technology and the pressure to include these new advancements in the classroom were on the forefront for many of the veteran teachers. As one Valleyside teacher stated, “Teachers are excited when they have mastered something new, like all the technology, one that is goal for them. I felt really great at the end of the year because I had mastered it.”

Participants were very emotional during the interviews when sharing these personal and professional successes. They were glad they could express how they felt about making a difference with their students, no matter how great or small. The successes were celebrated with their peers, however it was the knowledge that some students were not successful that brought about the highest level of frustration. The

notion that learning communities can provide the incubator for creative solutions to grow that address this issue of low student performance is discussed in the next theme.

Theme B: Struggling students as motivation for professional conversation. In order to meet those successes, teachers are beginning to take their professional conversations with each other to a higher level by asking what is working and not working in their instructional practices. These conversations are more than just asking to share plans, resources, or ideas. They are becoming reflective and teachers are influencing each other as an outgrowth of professional talk. The use of technology such as email, blogging, and SharePoint sites have enabled teachers to reach out, however these conversations are being ignited during collaborative planning sessions. A Seaview teacher shared, “Within our grade level we come together and say this did not work or this worked well. Just being able to say how things went and being vulnerable is a big part of it; being able to say I tried that and it flopped or being able to brag by saying I did that and it worked really well.” While collaborating with the reading specialist, teachers at Valleyside worked with her to incorporate specific writing strategies in their instruction. “They asked me to do a lesson, but it became more than doing a lesson. I said here is what I am planning, here is what the students should be able to do, and here is a follow up they can use to go beyond what we teach.” Comments from these teachers included, “We have talked among some of the teachers about what we would like to do, how we could do it better, how as a grade level we can do it,” and “Our group is pretty comfortable with each other and we put ourselves out there. This is what I’ve tried, this is what did or didn’t work. It is reciprocated, professionally respecting each other. We are there to help each other. The ultimate goal is to make the child successful.”

Through this professional reciprocity, teachers are seeing themselves as having influence on their peers and as such, see themselves as demonstrating teacher leadership. A Seaview teacher reflected, "I saw a teacher who wasn't so keen on collaboration at the beginning of the year. I said just try it. She observed and saw it working; now she has a better opinion about it because of something I said. Others have said to me they have tried something simply because I said it worked. I have heard this more than once." A reading specialist at Cityside shared an experience she had with a peer, "She was having difficulty with a story and the kids weren't getting it. We worked on it together and went in and team taught the lesson. The teacher told me at the end that for the first time, she felt like she was really teaching, the students were getting it." A coach at Seaview shared, "A 4th grade teacher had 100% of her students pass the state tests and said it was because of me. The one thing I did was show her how to analyze her data and I questioned her quite a lot. I don't tell people what to do, I ask questions. They trust me. Leaders do more questioning to help stimulate others to think. You also have to have mutual respect."

Entering into professional dialogue concerning personal instructional practice requires deference and respect among peers. Although participants stated they at first were leery, they related the positive outcomes of sharing the ups and downs that face each of them daily. Data showed school-wide student success was at the base of their conversations and that competition among teachers was not included in the conversations.

Summary

This chapter presents the qualitative data from 14 interviews organized by constructs and themes that shed light on the personal stories of the participants as they

experience teacher leadership and professional collaboration under reform mandates set out by their school district. The participants represented both high and low performing schools and their experiences with decision making, leadership, and collaboration differed in all schools. Although this study did not set out to compare and contrast high and low ranking schools, for the most part, participants working in high ranking schools in which the principal was supporting collaboration and shared decision making reported higher satisfaction with their opportunities to build their leadership capacity. Participants from lower ranked schools were more likely to report frustration and disappointment with the mandated efforts to form professional learning communities. Experiences and feelings of frustration also varied among the participants due to length of service, position within the school, and unique school-specific challenges.

Through these themes, five constructs emerged: (1) awareness of a paradigm shift; (2) dichotomous leadership structures; (3) teacher leaders seek culture of working with others; (4) skillful collaboration influences professional learning; (5) reflective professional conversations improve measured success. These thematic constructs attempt to bring light and definition to the concepts of teacher leadership and professional learning community while answering the five research questions. This study also helped to identify the teachers' positions on the continuum of influence as they related to the four factors. This is important so as to understand how ready teachers, schools, and the district may be to embrace teacher leadership within the context of professional learning community. These four factors are analyzed more in depth in the next chapter.

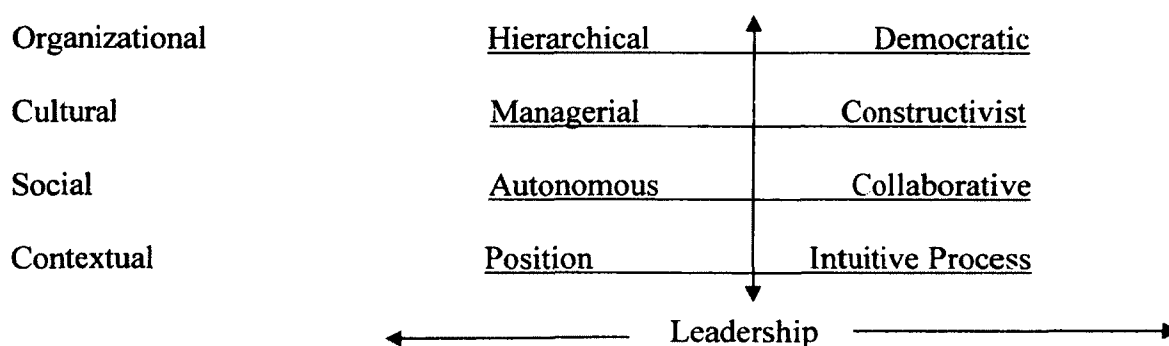
CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

Introduction

The literature review in this study suggests that organizational, social, cultural, and contextual factors influence the emergence of teacher leadership through the context of professional learning communities. The purpose of this study was to examine those factors and to support the theory that teacher leadership develops in a complex system functioning as a professional learning community and that together, teachers and administrators fall on a continuum of influence within each factor.

Figure 1 Continuum of Influence Concept Map



The findings have important meaning as schools move in the direction of 21st century organizations (Uhl-Bien, Marion & McKelvy, 2007). As discussed in Chapter 1, our schools are challenged to prepare students for an unforeseen workplace. Modern schools face unrelenting obstacles in part because they are not set up for global and technological competition. It has been documented throughout current literature that

change in bureaucratic organizations such as schools is slow, therefore it becomes difficult to keep up with the unprecedented rate of progress that technology and access to information is moving. Schools, when functioning as professional learning organizations, have the unique ability to tackle these obstacles through focused and collaborative work redesign. Teachers, when participating in collaborative work and joint problem solving at the classroom level, become best positioned to move through the bureaucratic barriers and provide students the 21st century skills set by the school district in this study: critical thinking, problem solving, collaboration, and becoming globally aware and independent learners. Teachers, building administrators, and central office personnel now have the opportunity to advance this emergent form of teacher leadership by acquiring the knowledge, building the relationships, and supporting the contextual change. By discussing the findings as they relate to each factor, teachers and administrators should be able to determine their place on this continuum. This qualitative study supports the idea that teacher leadership emerges and is sustained in a complex system that functions as a professional learning community, adding to the current body of research on teacher leadership and its impact on professional learning and leading.

This chapter discusses the themes found in Chapter 4 as they relate to the literature on organizational, social, cultural, and contextual factors and within the theoretical frameworks of complex change and adult learning as discussed in Chapter 2. The chapter moves into a discussion of the study's implications, conclusion, and limitations and will conclude with recommendations for future research based on findings from this study.

Factors on the Continuum of Influence

Organizational Factors

Construct: Role Redesign Leads to a More Democratic Organization

- Distorting dilemmas
- Leadership in flux
- Systemic opportunities exist for teachers to lead

The schools in this study were adapting to district reform mandates which required them to move towards the organizational model of professional learning communities. According to Senge (2000), schools need to emerge as organizations where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns to thinking are nurtured, and where people are continually learning how to learn together. Three themes emerged from the data addressing organizational factors: a) this change created distorting dilemmas in each school; b) leadership boundaries were in flux; c) the change allowed for systemic opportunities for teachers to lead.

Moving to the PLC model created distortion and dilemmas for some teachers, building administrators, and central office personnel (C & I) working in the school buildings. All schools in the study experienced some disruption and a sense of unreadiness in terms of how to proceed under the new initiatives as the concept of PLC was not wholly understood by the schools in the same way. Eaker, DuFour, & DuFour (2002) state, “the creation of a professional learning community is the result of a process rather than a prescribed program—there is no easy recipe to which one can refer for detailed, step-by-step instructions (pg.2).” Linda Hill (2010) explains that leaders can

encourage breakthrough ideas not by cultivating followers who can execute but building communities that can innovate. Mezirow (2000) identifies these distorting dilemmas as the initial phase of adult learning transformation. Some participants felt they had not been prepared for the type of professional conversations that were indicative of PLCs. They lacked the confidence and training to effectively perform and to work collaboratively with peers, administration, and C & I. Traditionally, planning groups have been one of sharing ideas, scheduling proper pacing, and making short and long term curriculum plans with grade level peers. PLCs are formed with student achievement as central purpose, a shift from a focus on teaching to a focus on learning (Eaker, DuFour, & DuFour, 2004). They are the context in which teachers share student data and ask themselves what to do when students aren't learning. This switch in organizational orientation for teachers from one of subject-centeredness to one of problem-centeredness is a characteristic of Knowles' (1984) assumptions of adult learning and forms a cornerstone of PLCs. Through organizational experiences such as purposeful collaborative planning, learning walks, peer observations, and reflective dialogue, both teachers and administrators can gain the confidence necessary to build teacher leadership capacity. By reducing or facilitating the distorting dilemmas caused by unpreparedness and lack of skill and training, schools can move forward in constructing a more democratic model of leadership.

As the teachers began to accept the challenge of change and emerge from the collaborative process as knowledgeable leaders and decision makers in terms of what takes place instructionally in their classrooms, they reported tugs on power strings took place, causing leadership boundaries to be in flux. As is the case with human systems,

such as schools, learning is complex and requires both structure and openness (Morrison, 2002). As the gatekeepers of this process, administrators were reported trying to find the balance between structure and openness in terms of their leadership actions with C & I adding another component to the power struggle happening in some schools. Pockets of grade levels in each of the schools were highly functioning teams that needed little direction from administration and in some cases, as with the lower performing school, resented their leadership styles. According to Morrison (2002), a key feature of complex human systems is that order emerges through teams forming themselves spontaneously to solve problems with participants, not administrators, deciding the boundaries. In other words, leadership doesn't reside in one person. A key for administrators moving their schools towards an organizational model of professional learning communities would be to assess what the highly functioning teams do when they meet and to provide models of those practices for those teams less likely to function at a high level of performance.

Procedural issues that accompanied formal leadership roles for teachers added to the distortion of organizational leadership. Remarks from participants such as, "The top 10 teachers do everything" and "I see a need to break this format and form new teams" have led teachers to look for opportunities on their own to develop leadership capacity within their buildings. Some teachers were reported connecting with one another through organizational opportunities such as learning walks, peer observations, collaborative planning sessions, book talks, student clubs, and peer led study groups. Through these self-organizing experiences, they were accumulating rich and expanded forms of professional learning and emergent leadership. Information from the collected data for this study show that teachers are beginning to work in collaboration with each other and

with administrators to more equally decide what goes on with their instructional practice. As such, when calculating the organizational needs of professional learning communities, administrators can open up informal leadership opportunities for teachers in an effort to increase leadership and learning capacity and support those that form spontaneously out of professional need.

Each school was reacting to this organizational change differently. The higher performing schools were more easily accepting that not only students but teachers are learners, “we are building a culture of collaboration”. With their principals asking for feedback, acting on it, and creating this type of culture, they were working towards balancing the idea of structure and openness with teachers. The lower performing schools were showing more resistance to the opportunities for democratic leadership, “we are not a learning school”. Some teachers in these schools felt resentment that change was being imposed on them without their consent and without preparation. Although the participants reported the teachers in their schools had a strong desire to work together, disorganized administrative leadership left them frustrated. Mezirow (2000) explains this ability to self-examine these feelings of fear, frustration, and resentment is just a step in the learning process leading to self confidence in a new role as teacher leader. Teachers in both school subgroups expressed the idea that teacher leadership is needed and can be a function of PLCs.

The findings disclosed that movement on the leadership continuum between hierarchical and democratic power has been put into play as a result of organizational changes and teachers working in collaborative teams. It can then be assumed that learning walks, peer observation, and collaborative work with student learning as a focus can

support the organizational factors needed for effective and sustainable professional learning and emergent teacher leadership.

Social Factors

Construct: Collaboration Builds Organizational Intelligence

- PLC as purposeful collaboration
- Collaboration is learned through experience
- Building competency
- Teacher leadership as shared growth

Barott & Raybould (1998) remind us that in “changing schools into collaborative organizations, we change the nature of relationships, the patterns of relating, and the rules of relationships because we are asking people to share information, participate in decision making, and work together to jointly solve problems related to student achievement (pg.35).” As such, Achinstein (2002) argues that in true collaborative practice, teachers can run into enormous conflicts over professional beliefs and practices and Lavié (2006) raised the notion that as schools move from autonomous to collaborative practice, it is imperative to remember the reason why efforts are made to reduce isolated practice: increased student learning. Participants in this study were reacting to the social change in teaching practices from one of autonomy to one of collaboration and professional learning. Four themes emerged from the collected data addressing social factors: a) PLCs operate through purposeful collaboration; b) collaboration skills are learned through experience; c) collaborative work builds leadership competency; d) teacher leadership comes from this shared growth.

As teachers were experiencing a growing period of losing their separateness and developing a team mindset, they acknowledged PLCs became the safe place not only to address student work but to learn from and to lead each other as professionals, “calling on people to grow, do research, and learn.” Drawing from the theories on adult learning, the role of ‘teacher’ is a social role with unwritten rules and this move from teacher to learner is a developmental milestone in transformational learning. As teachers formed professional learning teams to purposefully discuss student work, the barriers of autonomy were removed and teachers began to recognize the “gifts” each brought to the table. It is within these communities of learning that people are valued for who they are and have the opportunity to contribute to something larger than themselves (Hill, 2010).

Participants relayed that the collaborative process was not easily executed. Changing from a model of sharing and disseminating information through hierarchical procedures to one of shared decision making was misunderstood in some schools. Morrison (2002) reminds us that complex systems, such as professional learning communities that require a collaborative approach, connote more of a human relationship piece where the process of people relating to and interacting with each other happens over time, but we also understand that “a culture of continuous improvement does not require a persistent state of panic” (Eaker, DuFour, & DuFour, 2004). As stated in Chapter 4, the teams that had built the relationships through prior experiences and over time were more ready to move forward with purposeful collaborative methods. The higher performing schools had the advantage of working with external personnel and administrators that were able to positively model the collaborative process, thus

providing the supported experiences that gave teachers the self-confidence to carry on as an effective collaborative team.

As teachers began their deprivitization process in which they explored each other's instructional practices, an internal motivation for learning from and leading each other was created, suggesting that teachers were building their competency for teacher leadership through this collaborative process. The teachers gained knowledge from peer observations, learning walks, and peer led learning groups recognizing "there is room for growth and improvement as a part of learning". Although some of these opportunities for classroom visitations were mandated due to the reform efforts, there was evidence that teachers were taking it upon themselves to move this peer learning forward on their own. This move towards "explorations of options for new roles, relationships, and actions" is high on Mezirow's (2000) process of adult transformational learning and extends the meaning of teacher leadership as a learning activity.

At the very heart of teachers' craft is the implicit understanding that they work for the benefit of seeing their students succeed. As teachers bring innovative ideas observed during peer observations and collaborative work back into their classrooms, they then become the leaders in improving student achievement. Adult learning theory, as discussed in Chapter 2, understands that adults learn in these social contexts. They have the reflective ability to act on their learning and this ability to reflect and make decisions based on consensual professional knowledge forms the theoretical basis for emergent teacher leadership in the context of socially constructed professional learning communities. It can then be assumed that the social need for trusting relationships becomes the basis for teachers to emerge as leaders as they move their craft along the

continuum of influence from a culture of autonomy to one of collaboration and shared growth.

Cultural Factors

Construct: Moving From Traditional Culture to Learning Communities

- Teachers share a 3-prong measure of success
- Struggling students create foundation for professional conversations

The history of educational organizations, as discussed in Chapter 2, reminds us that the model for schooling has changed little over the course of the last century. Smylie & Denny (1990) stated that any attempts to change schools were grounded in a view that schools were operating on a factory model based on bureaucratic and hierarchical structuring. Advances in technology and global communications made us aware of the need to change educational culture from one of traditional linear teaching to one that supports the creation of professional knowledge and learning, thus turning schools into places of leadership for both adults and students (Andrews & Lewis, 2004). In addition, Giles & Hargreaves (2006) have suggested that learning organizations need to be resilient to standardized reform agents. The teachers in this study reflected on those reforms and how they were moving from a culture of traditional managerial structures to one of learning and leading from peers and, in the process, constructing their own knowledge in an effort to act on that knowledge to better serve their students. Two themes emerged from the data addressing cultural factors: a) Teachers share a 3-prong measure of success; b) Struggling students create the foundation for professional conversation.

Although some participants measured their success through intrinsic factors such as student gratitude, most participants knew their success was measured by external factors

such as state-wide mandated assessments and progress with closing achievement gaps, “I know the principal shuts her door and says it is the scores. So I guess it is the culture, unfortunately.” In order to achieve the type of successes by which they are measured by stakeholders, teachers will need to lead a cultural change to one of professional learning communities. According to Mezirow (2000), adults transform their existing frames of reference by becoming critically reflective of their current culture and through professional conversation, evolve into a culture of careful listening to new perspectives. By listening and learning from peers, teachers allow themselves and their students to become part of a community, to create a culture in which successes and struggles are shared. When success is measured by external factors, teachers and students are far better able to meet those successes when learning from each other and sharing different perspectives on old ways.

The purpose of professional learning communities is to look at student work and use those data to drive instructional decisions. Teachers have traditionally used a ‘teach then test’ approach to their practice, however within a PLC, teachers are now tasked to reflect on their instruction together and to plan for specific action on that reflection. Struggling students then become the foundation for professional conversations, “We are there for each other. The ultimate goal is to make the child successful.” It results in a cultural change from one of hierarchical dependency to one of social constructivism in which participants “embrace perspective and encourage dialogue among those perspectives rather than aiming at singular truths and linear predictions” (Patton, 2002). PLCs are there to help teachers answer the question, “My student did not learn this, now what?”

The teachers were experiencing emergent leadership as they began socially constructing their learning and understanding their influence on others through the PLC process. Thus, the results of this study indicate that the cultural switch to professional discourse which is based on reflection of student needs and takes place with peers in PLCs becomes the starting point by which teachers are able to move their craft from one of managerial hierarchy to a culture of constructivist leadership.

Contextual Factors

Construct: Influential Peers Set Model for Intuitive Leadership

- Teacher leadership as influence
- Shared understanding leads to change
- Teacher initiated professional learning through small peer-led groups
- Influential peers lead covertly
- Leadership capacity was developed over time
- Teaching requires fluid/reflective action

The lens, through which educational leadership is currently viewed as stated in the literature review, indicates that leadership is contextual and is the process of being perceived as leadership through the socially constructed and contextually defined meanings on the part of organizational peers. Morrison (2002) agrees by stating that complex organizations have their own internal dynamics which is not always contingent with one person acting as, or deemed by position as, leader. The teachers made quite clear the process of teacher leadership conflicted with current practices of hierarchical levels of power and decision making. The mandate to operate within the context of professional learning community brought about unconsidered ramifications

as teachers, administrators, and central office personnel began to experience leadership, not in the traditional position of one leader, but on a more implicit level of influence. Six themes emerged from the data addressing contextual factors: a) Teacher leadership as influence; b) Shared understanding leads to change; c) Teacher initiated professional learning through small peer-led groups; d) Influential peers lead covertly; e) Leadership capacity is developed over time; f) Teaching requires fluid/reflective action.

Findings from the data collected from all four schools indicate that for the most part, teachers are defining teacher leadership as the actions of those that influence others over time. It is not a position or role with designated boundaries. Teacher leadership occurs when teachers, socially constructing their new frames of references, begin to construe themselves as leaders among their peers through a commitment of extended and repeated professional conversations that evolve temporally. Based on Mezirow's (2000) theory, it is the height of adult learning to build relationships and confidence in these new frames and to reintegrate back into one's professional life as teacher leader based on these newly acquired perspectives.

It is this reintegration back into professional life as a leader and learner among peers that substantiates the context of teacher leadership. It is through the shared understanding of what needs to be done to increase student learning that allows teachers to change their instructional practice. Most teachers relied on their peers for the ideas and reflective actions that would create the change needed for student success. As stated by one of the participants, "In terms of guidance, recommendations that would lead to changes, I would have to go with my peers, my fellow coworkers."

A review of the literature reminds us that “leadership is a complex interplay from which a collective impetus for action and change emerges when heterogeneous agents interact in networks in ways that produce new patterns of behavior or new modes of operating” (pg.298, Uhl-Bien, Marion, & McKelvey, 2007). Some of the teachers demonstrated the commitment, as defined by DuFour (1998), to find ways to produce these new patterns of behavior deemed ‘teacher leadership’ through the process of small, peer-led projects. As a Valleyside teacher explained, “They started to see the need.”

Confidence needed for emerging teacher leadership seemed to be built on observing and reflecting on the confidence of influential peers. Teachers described how they valued the intuitiveness of those with whom they regarded as silent leaders within their schools. Working within the context of professional learning communities provided the opportunity for teachers to observe, reflect, and dialogue with these influential peers while engaging in joint learning and problem solving. Morrison (2002) concludes that schools, operating as complex systems, are prone to understanding that leadership does not reside in one person; that it is a process of people relating, interacting, and building leadership capacity together over time.

The schools in this study were being tasked to deliver diverse opportunities for students to obtain 21st century skills. The learning curve in this for most teachers is considerably high as new technologies far outpace the speed in which educational change is made. This requires fluidity and reflective action on the part of schools. As Fullan (2001) remarks, an element of learning while schools are at the edge of chaos is for all participants to understand the change process and that this learning becomes the central principle to creating professional learning communities. Even though the school district

in this study initiated PLCs as mandated reform initiatives, teachers, administrators, and central office personnel are moving at various speeds through the process as they adapt to new internal and external contexts and construct a more intuitive approach to emerging teacher leadership.

Implications

Emerging Thematic Construct: Learning Schools

Much like our medical profession has developed models of “teaching hospitals” in which health professionals learn from and lead each other, teacher leadership has the ability to transform traditional models of schools into learning schools that support both teachers and students leading and learning from each other. Past school reforms have not been successful meeting the challenges of improving student learning. Those methods did not take into account that teachers are the first and last bastions to critical reform and, as Fullan (1993) states, they become the catalysts for this change process. Taking social constructivism into account, knowledge is gained when constructed through social entities, such as professional learning communities. Teachers are more apt to gain from their interactions with influential peers than traditional models of teacher development.

A review of the literature helps us to understand that several factors are in play in order for this transformation into learning schools can take place. It is also understood that creating these learning communities, or learning schools, is a process, not a prescribed format of reform. It is not inherent but responds to fluid and reflective action of its participants. It flattens hierarchical leadership to one of intuitiveness, collaboration, and is socially constructed in the context of professional learning. It is the process, then, not the product, that becomes the only barrier to teacher leadership. Schools will need the

time and facilitation to go through this process in order to construct their knowledge and understanding of the power invested in this form of influential leadership.

The findings of this study indicate that this paradigm shift from schools of teaching to 'learning schools' is not innate. It will need deep considerations for the ramifications of working within such a complex system as a professional learning community. Findings suggest the following considerations:

1. Role redesign leads to a shift on the hierarchical leadership continuum.

Teacher leadership in the organizational sense brings about a more democratic approach to decision making. Teachers listening to and learning from each other emerge as the distinct leaders of the classroom. As such, they will need the opportunities and experiences from which to grow, learn, and build their influence capacity. Findings from this study support assumptions from the literature stating traditional leadership roles do not seem to directly impact instruction and the participants revealed that the influence of their peers had a greater direct impact on their practice. School districts may want to follow the reform measures set forth for professional learning community expectations as did this school district, but will need to guide and facilitate the process.

2. It is through focused collaboration that organizational intelligence is built.

Findings indicate that understanding and stating the "why" for collaboration is critical to its success. Administrators, central office personnel, teachers, and stakeholders will need to embrace the notion that leaders with-in all ranks of the organization will collaboratively and collectively decide how to support the needs of students. All within the organization will need support and

guidance with collaborative work. They will need to understand the concept of “team”, redefine themselves as a team member, and comprehend the ramifications of staying isolated. Collaborative conversations will need to be facilitated to stay focused. If not, there can be a tendency for teams to become isolated, producing consensus (Achinstein, 2002) and group think (Giles & Hargreaves, 2006).

3. Schools will need to move from a traditional model of teaching to a community of learners to advance student achievement.

Katzenmeyer & Moller (2001) reported “the giant resource of teacher leadership still remains relatively untapped as school leaders struggle to make schools more responsive to students (pg. viii).” Struggling students create the cause for professional learning communities and the need for reflective professional discourse. Stakeholders have a right to know what will be done when students aren’t learning. The lower performing schools in this study showed a greater need for this type of conversation as the immense challenges facing teachers in those schools put them behind the curve from the beginning. The notion of student success being the responsibility of schools practicing in the traditional model is not helpful in today’s world of global knowledge and information access. It is on the school community as a whole to provide the ingredients for student success. A true learning community can express those needs, bring issues to light, and joint problem solve.

4. Influential peers set the model for intuitive leadership.

Findings overwhelmingly support the concept that influential peers were the model for teachers as learners. Being involved in their conversations, having exposure to their mindset, observing their way of reaching students proved paramount to emergent teacher leadership. Many terms for leadership appear in current literature and acknowledge that influence plays a part in the role of leader (Muijs & Harris, 2007; Uhl-Bien, Marion, & McKelvey 2007; Osborn, Hunt, & Juach 2002; Plowman et al.2007). Teacher leadership, however, stands apart as it does not attempt to influence from above, but from within. It does not preclude other models of shared leadership but stands on its own as a conduit for teachers to socially construct their shared growth, ultimately impacting their instructional practice. It needs no policy, guidelines, or hierarchical mandates as emergent leadership is created through a constructivist approach. Finding opportunities for teachers to work and learn together will create the type of intuitive leadership needed to promote and support learning schools.

Taken together, we begin to comprehend the bifurcation point leadership in schools finds itself. Nationally, there has been unleashed, ironically through top-down maneuvering, a case for creating and establishing professional learning communities which moves professional decision making for classroom instruction and student learning to teachers. Historically, changing teachers has been the dominant policy strategy to improve instruction, 'change the teacher, change the school' (Cuban, 2013). In this attempt to once again reform schools, teachers are front and center, except this time, it is with the knowledge that schools are complex systems in which self-organization and

change agency are teacher led. O'Day (2002) reports that research on professional learning communities note the motivational aspects of membership in those communities and of the normative structures that focus on student learning and professional identities. Yet, she states that teacher knowledge and skill level to effectively participate in professional learning of this sort is not what it needs to be, and this limits the professional stature and accountability needed throughout our education system. making it incongruent with tenets of professional learning. Teachers are not prepared to determine the standards by which they are professionally judged, and hierarchical leadership has proven to be impotent in terms of creating and sustaining reform efforts which increase student learning.

So once again, schools are at a conundrum. This study has documented the perceptions of the participants as they socially constructed meaning through their emergent leadership experiences and some observations from the researcher can be advanced. First, frustrations with district accountability demands, mandated learning community structures, and power struggles with persons in formal leadership roles run counter to the ideology behind what we understand to be professional adult learning opportunities. Teachers, as adult learners, need time to reflectively participate in professional conversations with peers about their instructional practices and their students. They need a safe, risk free zone to practice joint problem solving and collaborative practices. Teachers, as emergent leaders, need opportunities to self-organize and influence others. Recognizing that this needs time and continuous practice is congruent with what we know and understand about learning and leading as adults.

Second, there did not seem to be a sense of urgency to move towards this type of leadership, yet our global achievement gap is outpacing our ability to reform. Change takes time, yet teachers are immune to change due to the unsuccessful and ill-planned reforms of the past. Current educational leaders need to move quickly and as Sargut & McGrath (2011) strategize, need to gather diverse thinkers who can deal creatively in their approach to decision making given the complexity of our educational system in order to increase our chances of success. Developing a strong sense of urgency requires learning communities to designate what is important and eliminate what isn't. Too often in public education, new reforms, mandates, and instructional guidelines are added, yet nothing is taken off the plates of those that are responsible for the achievement of our students. This process of adding on and not taking off runs incongruent with the notion that we need to approach this work redesign with a strong sense of urgency.

Third, stakeholders within learning communities need to inquire as to what real schooling means. Reforms have historically focused on making schools produce literate citizens for the public good, graduates for the industrial workforce, and have used the institution of school to try to correct the ills created by society. At the same time, schools look much the same as they did a century ago. It seems what is needed is not reform, but innovation to prepare us for global technological and informational societies. Our inherent understanding of schooling no longer applies. We, as participants in our society, seem to think we know what school should be; it has prepared us for a future we could understand. Advances in technology, however, are requiring that we prepare students for a world in which we may not know or understand. Schools are obsolete in their current form and innovation, creativity, and motivation are key for sustaining true change. The

teachers in this study were struggling with the idea of redesigning their role as teacher. Reflecting on not what or how, but why they teach will perhaps further this process of emergent leadership within professional learning communities along the continuum at a pace that will allow us to sustain true innovation.

Limitations

Due to the inductive process given to qualitative research, limitations of this study need to be considered. Those connected to this study include research design and interviews. Given that the district in which the study was completed was undergoing initiatives to move towards a professional learning community model, schools found eligible for participation may not have had enough time to gain a full understanding of the notion of professional learning or teacher leadership. As a result, the data may have been interpreted using responses of participants expressing heightened feelings of excitement towards the move or anxiety about undertaking another initiative. The participants from the lower performing schools may have exhibited thoughts and ideas that could have been accredited to variables outside the scope of this study as they struggled with complex demographic issues associated with their student population. This study was conducted in a large urban school district with participants from 4 elementary schools falling on dichotomous ends of a school achievement continuum based on state assessments. Although this study did not set out to compare and contrast high and low performing schools, using maximum variation sampling only as a means to obtain data from a wide spectrum of participants, the different schools did relate similar concerns and responses from participants. Data that tended to show significant differences between the low and high performing schools may have presented isolated or extreme outlooks on

professional learning communities and emergent teacher leadership. This should not be construed as a means of transferability to low and high performing schools or to secondary level schools.

Participants for interviews were volunteers from the selected schools. The researcher addressed faculty at meetings with the principal in attendance. Some participants may have volunteered due to professional expectation from their administration, reducing the likelihood that participation was strictly voluntary. Participants from the lower performing schools outnumbered the amount of participants from the higher performing schools 8 to 6 and this may contribute to some variance in the reported data. Knowledge of the researcher's role as administrator in the district may have added to the variance as well. Finally, participants' responses provided rich in-depth data that may not hold up over time as teachers become more experienced with professional learning communities and emergent teacher leadership.

Directions for Future Research

The findings and results reported in this study point to directions that may be suitable for future research in an attempt to further understand the qualities and impact of teacher leadership as it emerges through participation in professional learning communities. The participants in this study were from researcher selected elementary schools in an urban school district. In order to obtain a greater source of data and hence gain deeper insight into the process of teacher leadership, a broader sample of participants from both elementary and secondary schools would be helpful. Increasing the geographical areas to include suburban and rural school districts to see how they are achieving the model of PLCs may also enhance the depth and scope of the literature.

This study made clear that principals were integral to providing opportunities and experiences for teachers as they built their leadership capacity. Designing a study to include input from principals may add another perspective to the literature, as well. Data collected from teams of teachers working within effective professional learning communities may add some insight and help less productive teams develop effective strategies for success.

Findings from this study showed that the reason teachers participated in focused collaboration through the PLC model was to promote student success. Involving students and getting their perspective on increased teacher learning would add to the understanding of the power of professional teacher learning and leadership. Studies that focused on the impact of student achievement due to collaborative practice would enhance the literature, as well.

Through data collected from interviews of teachers in an urban school district, this study has shown that teacher leadership can emerge from participation in a complex system of professional and adult learning. The literature revealed four areas in which influential leadership can initiate change: organizational, social, cultural, and contextual. A concept map was designed to show a continuum of leadership influence and the data from this study articulated where on the continuum the participants may fall. By allowing professional learning communities to flourish and giving teachers the time to go through the process by which their roles are redefined, schools and communities can begin to emerge into schools of learning where teachers learn from and lead each other to successfully respond to the 21st century needs of their students.

Conclusion

School reforms of the past have not measured up to expectations for student success in a technological and globally aware environment. To meet the high demands to produce students accomplished with critical thinking, problem solving, and collaborative communication skills, schools are facing an innovative shift of thought and acknowledging emerging teacher leadership as a function of professional learning communities. Through in-depth interviews exploring ways in which teacher leadership manifests itself, the ability of teachers to understand their own leadership capacity, and how their emergent leadership influences others, data from this study reshape the notion that schools do not need to reform, but need to transform from traditional schools of teaching into contemporary schools of learning, providing the type of professional knowledge needed to foster 21st century skills for students.

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APPENDIX A BLUEPRINT FOR INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Research Questions	Organizational	Social	Cultural	Contextual
#1. In what ways does teacher leadership manifest itself in the context of professional learning community?	What have been your experiences with collaboration? *probe-internal or external activities *probe-volunteer or mandatory	What have been your experiences in discussing your teaching practices with your peers? *probe-comfort level with feedback	What is the major source of influence on your instructional practice? *probe-central office; Principal; peer feedback; peer observation	In what ways have you engaged in leadership activities? *probe-personal/professional *probe-how did you get started in the activity?
#2. To what degree do social, cultural, organizational, and contextual factors influence teacher leadership?	Given the complex nature of teaching, what is your opinion of teachers expanding their role so they might function as a professional learning community? *probe-level of importance of teacher leadership	In your opinion, what have your peers gained from your leadership capabilities? *probe-what specifically have you done to influence your peers instr. practice	In your opinion, should all teachers be leaders? *probe-why/why not	How extensive is the practice of teacher leadership in your school? *probe-what function does teacher leadership/professional learning community
#3. How can teachers understand their leadership capacity?	How do you feel about the decision making process at your school?	How would you describe your feelings/thoughts when peers ask to observe your instructional practices? What do your peers feel/think when asked to have their instructional practice observed by others? How comfortable are teachers in your school receiving feedback from peer observations?	To what degree are you satisfied with the engagement of leadership process in your school? *probe-few or many participating	What is your reaction to a Principal's need to jumpstart the collaborative process? *probe-would it happen spontaneously in your school. why/why not
#4. What personal and professional experiences do teacher leaders perceive as influencing their development of leadership skills?	In what ways is professional learning initiated in your school? *probe-Principal or teacher driven	How do you find out about the instructional practices of your peers? *probe-by casual conversation with peer; Principal input; peer observation; word of mouth by others	How would you define teacher leadership and Professional learning communities?	Describe your leadership skills/style.
#5. What do teacher leaders at the elementary level perceive to be the impact of their leadership skills on instructional practice?	How might a professional learning community develop in your school?	What might I hear or see when you initiate a professional conversation with a peer? What might I hear or see when a peer initiates a professional conversation with you?	What might you see them doing differently due to your influence?	Think of a peer you see demonstrating teacher leadership. Describe that person. How have they influenced your instructional practice?
Background	If you were my mentor, what might you say to me to help me understand my own leadership capacity?	What training have you had in the collaborative process?	Describe your leadership function currently. Where do you see yourself in the future? What needs to take place for it to happen?	Describe your path to becoming a teacher leader.

APPENDIX B

Interview Protocol and Consent Form**Study Description**

As part of the requirements for my doctoral program, I am conducting a qualitative study of teacher leadership that includes individual interviews. These interviews focus on how teacher leadership emerges and its relationship to professional learning communities in the elementary school setting.

Your instructional practices and experiences will provide important perceptions of teacher leadership. Two teachers representing grades K-2 and two teachers representing grades 3-5 are needed and your participation is strictly voluntary. Your signature on the consent form indicates your willingness to participate. As a token of your valuable time, I will provide a gift card from a local vendor at the end of your interview.

You will not be identified in any written report, as confidentiality is of utmost concern. This will allow you to be as candid as possible when answering questions. If you have any questions, feel free to contact me. Thank you for your time and support.

Andrea Voshell
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Interview Consent Form

I consent to be interviewed by Andrea L. Voshell at a convenient time that meets my schedule. The interview will address the concept of teacher leadership and it fulfills a requirement of Andrea L. Voshell's doctoral program at Old Dominion University.

I understand that the interview will be audio taped and hand written notes will be taken. I will have the opportunity to read the verbatim transcript of the interview and verify it is accurate.

I agree that the transcript may be used by Andrea L. Voshell in written reports for the dissertation and that I will not be identified in any way. I understand that I may withdraw as a participant of this study.

Signature _____ Date _____

APPENDIX C

Interview Protocol Principal Consent Form

Study Description

As part of the requirements for my doctoral program, I am conducting a qualitative study of teacher leadership that includes individual interviews. These interviews focus on how teacher leadership emerges and its relationship to professional learning communities in the elementary school setting.

The instructional practices and experiences of teachers in your building will provide important perceptions of teacher leadership. Two teachers representing grades K-2 and two teachers representing grades 3-5 are needed and their participation is strictly voluntary. If you are willing, I would like to contact you via e-mail to set up a convenient time in order for me to address your staff and explain the nature of my study. As a token of your valuable time, I would be more than happy to provide you with a copy of my report and findings from my data analysis so as to keep you abreast of this research. Teacher leadership and professional learning communities are current target strategies our school division is incorporating in our Compass 2015 strategic plan.

Your school will not be identified in any written report, as confidentiality is of utmost concern. This will allow your teachers to be as candid as possible when answering interview questions. If you have any questions, feel free to contact me.

Thank you for your time and support.

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VITA

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EDUCATION

Expected date of completion, May 2013
 Ph.D. in Education, Educational Leadership
 Old Dominion University, Norfolk, VA

Master of Science in Education
 Early Childhood
 Old Dominion University, Norfolk, VA, December 1990

Bachelor of Science in Elementary Education
 Old Dominion University, Norfolk, VA, May 1975

EXPERIENCE

2008-Present	Assistant Principal Three Oaks Elementary School Virginia Beach, VA
1985-2008	Kindergarten/Second Grade Teacher Fairfield Elementary School Virginia Beach, VA
1976-1981	First Grade Teacher, Hermitage Elementary School Virginia Beach, VA

HONORS/AWARDS

2005	Teacher of the Year, Fairfield Elementary School
2005	DisneyHand Teacher of the Year Nomination
2001	Tagged by the Superintendent Award
1996	Reading Teacher of the Year, Fairfield Elementary School
1996	Teacher of the Year, Fairfield Elementary School