

TEACHER LEADERSHIP IN AN URBAN SETTING

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by

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## DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to Nellie Mae, a woman who too soon abandoned hope and too soon ceased the search for her own purpose and fulfillment. She was a grandmother who, while she struggled with personal demons of abuse and depression, gave love and direction the best way she knew how. She was a creative soul that, ironically for those who knew her, never found her own voice. She was gifted with insight and compassion, but often cruelly withheld these gifts from those she professed, and I think truly believed, she loved.

Although the doctoral degree that this dissertation completes is not the medical degree she desperately wanted me to obtain, it nonetheless signifies the culmination of a circuitous educational journey that she simultaneously supported and ridiculed. However, if not for her instilling a vision of something possible beyond the now recognized artificial limits of our narrow-minded town, I never would have left the seemingly protective and isolating hills of my childhood to witness a much larger, grander, and wonderful world. If not for her pervasive but dysfunctional love, I never would have had the courage to take the risk to be the first in our extended family to graduate from high school, to attend college, to complete an advanced degree, and to now to be awarded a doctoral degree.

Thank you, Meanie, for the gifts of vision, of perseverance, and of courage.

## ABSTRACT

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As the presence of teacher leaders becomes increasingly ubiquitous, initiatives to identify, develop, and support those leaders are also increasing. However, despite this growth in practice, a consensus has not been reached on a broadly accepted definition of teacher leadership, and questions remain as to how teacher leaders evaluate their own effectiveness. Simultaneously, there has been a growth in initiatives created to identify, train, and support teachers who are willing to participate in a variety of leadership roles at the campus level.

Therefore, in Study 1 of this journal-ready dissertation, I sought to verify, by way of a systematic literature review, if there has been progress regarding researchers establishing an accepted definition of teacher leadership and of teacher leader practices. My findings confirmed that no universally adopted definition has yet emerged, despite the pervasive influence of York-Barr and Duke's (2004) proposed definition. Additionally, research results led to the conclusion that teacher leaders are *experienced*, *exemplar* teachers who, by means of a variety of opportunities and experiences, have been *equipped* to lead.

In Study 2, through an analysis of archival program data, I examined the experiences of teacher leaders who participated in a district-wide teacher leader initiative. Results indicated that teacher leaders found program participation to be beneficial and that they valued the leadership opportunities provided to them by the program. Additionally, program cohort members expressed a growing awareness that participation

in the initiative fostered a process of change. At the conclusion of their year-long experience, teacher leaders witnessed personal and professional growth that had resulted in their becoming *agents of change* as they correspondingly became *agents changed*.

KEY WORDS: Teacher leader, Teacher leadership, Distributed leadership, School reform, Teacher professional development

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

As districts and campuses have sought ways to embrace and implement federal and state mandates, principals frequently have turned to teacher leaders to lead the charge for instructional change and reform (Margolis & Huggins, 2012). However, after almost a half century of teacher leader practice and research, a consensus on who is considered a teacher leader and what a teacher leader does, has yet to be reached. According to Angelle and Schmid (2007), “Defining teacher leadership has been difficult because of myriad concept variations, from leading by example to assuming a specific leadership position” (p. 773).

Although a broadly-accepted definition of teacher leadership remains elusive, there is a growing consensus on what characteristics teacher leaders share, and an understanding on what roles teacher leaders perform (Portin, Russell, Samuelson & Knapp, 2013). In general, as partners in distributed leadership, teacher leaders are tasked with facilitating instructional, cultural, or collegial change on their campus. The depth of this change depends on factors of administrative support, peer acceptance, and the teacher leader’s own skill development (Struyve, Meredith, & Gielen, 2014).

Additionally, who constitutes a teacher leader is dependent on the context of the leadership. Formally recognized campus teacher positions, such as department chair, constitute teacher leadership, as do less formal roles such as seasoned classroom veteran and acknowledged instructional expert. Regardless, it is understood that teacher leaders fulfill a number of campus roles and functions (Portin et al., 2013).

Historically, teacher leaders have likely always existed on the school campus, although York-Barr and Duke (2004) credit the education reform movements of the last half of the 20th century with the rise of the teacher leader movement. An unstable economic climate in the 1980s spurred schools to explore ways of attracting and retaining quality educators. Concerns over teaching as a viable career option, coupled with growing negative views of public education, prompted a cadre of school reform efforts. These initiatives included experiments in distributed leadership and teacher leadership (York-Barr & Duke, 2004).

### **Statement of the Problem**

After nearly four decades of research, it remains uncertain that a consensus on a definition of teacher leadership has emerged (Wenner & Campbell, 2017; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Relatedly, although an evolution in the roles of teacher leadership has occurred, established expectations for fulfilling teacher leadership positions remains in flux, as does identification of the qualities campus leadership values in a teacher leader. Further, for teacher leaders given an assigned role, there remains concern surrounding what supports and training are to be provided, and uncertainties about teacher leader perceptions of the quality of their experiences within campus leadership.

### **Purpose of the Studies**

After nearly four decades of research, it remains uncertain that a consensus on a definition of teacher leadership has emerged (Wenner & Campbell, 2017; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Relatedly, although an evolution in the roles of teacher leadership has occurred, established expectations for fulfilling teacher leadership positions remains in flux, as does identification of the qualities campus leadership values in a teacher leader.

Further, for teacher leaders given an assigned role, there remains concern surrounding what supports and training are to be provided, and uncertainties about teacher leader perceptions of the quality of their experiences within campus leadership.

### **Educational Significance**

Both York-Barr and Duke (2004) and Wenner and Campbell (2017) called for “more empirical research with robust data collection measures” (Wenner & Campbell, 2017, p. 164). My systematic literature review responded to this call. Wenner and Campbell further related the importance of research as the practice of teacher leadership increases and as schools continue to struggle with issues of school reform, along with teacher evaluations and rising teacher attrition. The completion of a more recent systematic review of the scholarship confirmed that these associated needs surrounding teacher leadership are being addressed in the scholarship. Additionally, research results verified that, although a universally accepted definition of teacher leadership did not exist, there was a growing consensus among researchers regarding an accepted definition, and an emerging agreement on who is considered a teacher leader and on what a teacher leader does.

Also adding to the growing literature on teacher leaders, Study 2 deepened the understanding of the experiences of teacher leaders, their successes and their struggles, as well as expounded on the perceived influences of one district’s teacher leader initiative. Although the Career Pathways Program had a stated outcome of student academic progress, evidence in this study did not affirm Angelle and Schmid’s (2007) contention that a link exists between teacher leader actions, administrative actions, and student learning. However, of specific importance to the Career Pathways Program, results from

this study did confirm the effectiveness of the program in providing teacher leadership development and support. Relatedly, positive evaluative findings and conclusions provided evidence to guarantee the continued viability of the program and to support efforts in program expansion and potential program replication beyond the host district.

### **Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework for understanding teacher leadership was that of distributed leadership. Focused on the hows and the whys of school leadership, distributed leadership contends that the work of school leadership ought to be shared, and that the tasks of leadership should be executed through an “interaction of leaders, followers, and the situation” (Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2004, p. 27). Relatedly, Gronn (2002) described distributed leadership as generating an exponential dynamic where the product of a leadership team is greater than the sum of the efforts of individual team members.

Based on a review of distributed leadership literature, Reed and Swaminathan (2014) delineated the benefits to the distributed leadership concept. In addition to modest effects on student academic achievement, campuses that implemented a distributive leadership model saw positive school change and improvement, and experienced “sustainable school leadership” (Reed & Swaminathan, 2014, p. 1100). Of specific importance to the role and purposes of teacher leadership, Mayrowetz (2008) also determined that implementing a distributive leadership model built a school’s capacity in identifying and developing school leaders. Mayrowetz concluded,

The final prevalent usage of distributed leadership promotes the notion that by having multiple people engaged in leadership, these individuals will all learn



more about themselves and the issues facing the school. Eventually, the collective capacity of the organization will increase to the point that the school can address its own shortcomings. (p. 431)

### **Definition of Terms**

To bring focus to the discussion of *teacher leadership* and by association *teacher leaders*, teacher leadership will be defined as:

The process by which teachers, individually or collectively, influence their colleagues, principals, and other members of the school communities to improve teaching and learning practices with the aim of increased student learning and achievement. Such team leadership work involves three intentional development foci: individual development, collaboration or team development, and organizational development. (York-Barr & Duke, 2004, p. 287-288)

Within the context of school leadership, a teacher is understood to be a licensed classroom professional within a K-12 school setting. The teacher leader may or may not be an instructor of record, but is an individual with regular, instructionally based, influence on students' achievement.

However, beyond this foundational definition of teacher leadership, teacher leader discourse often includes references to a variety of synonyms for teacher leadership. These include distributive leadership and hybrid teacher leadership. Although researchers may seek to draw sharp distinctions between these synonymous terms, generally the differences are based on semantics over substance.

## **Delimitations**

The systematic literature review on teacher leadership was limited to peer reviewed, qualitative study articles from 2013 to 2018. Additionally, following York-Barr and Duke's (2004) example, only studies in which teacher leadership and its related keywords of distributive leadership, shared decision making, and parallel leadership were included in the literature review. Excluded works were books on teacher leadership, chapters within books on teacher leadership, blogs, vlogs, and social media posts.

Only participants in the Career Pathways Program for the cohort years of 2016-2017 and 2017-2018 were included in Study 2. Further, data were limited to End of Year (EOY) questionnaire responses from teacher leaders in those cohort years. No extraneous data previously generated or published by the Career Pathways Program were reviewed.

## **Limitations**

The systematic literature review in Study 1 has a narrowed scope, resulting in limited applicability of its finding. Because only a small portion of the existing literature on teacher leaders and teacher leadership was consulted, broad and sweeping conclusions regarding answers to the study's research questions are not appropriate. Additionally, as a meta-synthesis, according to Onwuegbuzie and Frels (2016), this review is further limited by the inherent characteristics of meta-synthesis. Namely, it is solely a review of qualitative research, thus eliminating any related quantitative studies. Also, a meta-synthesis is interpretive, requiring coding and analysis that is systematic, but highly subjective. Therefore research findings are vulnerable to heightened bias in their determination and their application.

Responses from Career Pathways Program cohort participants were limited to end of the year (EOY) questionnaires for two school years, 2016-2017 and 2017-2018.

Although the program was implemented prior to 2016, and it continues to be operational, earlier corresponding data were not available from program leadership and more recent data were not yet collected when this study began. Consequently, research results reflect the thoughts and impressions of only a portion of historic Career Pathways Program participants.

Additionally, the processes involved in the constant comparison analysis of the study data requires condensation. Explaining data condensation, Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014) state the data “can be transformed in many ways: through selection, through summary or paraphrase, through being subsumed in a larger pattern, and so on” (p. 12). Essentially, the constant comparison process is replete with researcher choice and is consequently open to researcher bias. “The researcher’s decisions – which data chunks to code and which to pull out, which category labels best summarize a number of chunks, which evolving story to tell – *are all analytic choices* (emphasis in the original)” (Miles et al., 2014, p. 12).

Consequently, these delimitations and limitations, along with other threats to internal credibility and external credibility, as discussed by Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2007), had potential to undercut the dependability, the reliability, and the *truth value* of these two studies. Of specific concern to me in Study 2, were the internal threats associated with my prior experiences with the Career Pathways Program, primarily *voluptuous legitimation*, *researcher bias*, and *confirmation bias*. Additionally, sensitivity to secondary threats of *observational bias* and *reactivity* was based on the manner in

which the data were originally collected. This potential for bias encouraged me to be mindful that likely not all program participants completed the questionnaires, and that participants may have self-edited comments to please or undermine program leadership. Aware of these threats, I bracketed my preconceptions regarding the program, realizing this suspension was fundamentally important to my phenomenological research (Johnson & Christensen, 2014).

The external threats to credibility of *interpretive validity*, *generalizability*, and *research bias* were also inherent to this study. These threats were likewise rooted in my personal experiences with the Career Pathways Program. However, I attempted to mitigate these threats through the following: (a) *triangulation* by data from multiple years; (b) *weighting the evidence*, giving proportionate attention to more robust responses; and (c) *frequency effect size*, calculating the times a response, term, or concept occurred within the data.

### **Assumptions**

Fundamental assumptions regarding Study 1 included the exhaustive nature of the ERIC database and the related Boolean phrase search results. Assumptions related to Study 2 were focused on the reliability of the archival data supplied for the Career Pathways Program Leadership. Because I did not have direct access to questionnaire responses and did not personally view the means by which the data were collected, the validity and completeness of the teacher leaders' responses were assumed to be the actual responses of the teacher leader cohort members.

## Organization of the Studies

In the first journal-ready article of this dissertation, I extended Wenner and Campbell's (2017) research through 2018. Although the empirical research did not demonstrate the emergence of a single definition of teacher leadership, the research did confirm the growing influence and impact of the work of York-Barr and Duke (2004) and their proposed definition, as well as the growing influence of the Model Teacher Leader Standards developed by the Teacher Leadership Exploratory Commission in 2018. Additionally, this systematic literature review led me to conclude that teacher leaders are *experienced* and *exemplar* teachers who are *equipped* to lead. Although the development of a teacher leader can be anecdotal or intentional, a teacher's evolution to teacher leader is fostered by experiences that span the teacher's career. As teachers gain experience, they also gain influence. This maturation process equips teachers to become teacher leaders. The consequence of this leadership development is a campus cultural shift, a change facilitated by teacher leaders' credibility as an effective educator, their collaborative demeanor, and their skills in coordinating professional development.

In the second article, through a constant comparison analysis of program archival data of the Career Pathways Program of ABC School District, I determined that teacher leaders characterized their experiences in the program as *beneficial*. They also cited appreciation for the *opportunities* afforded them through program participation, principally opportunities to learn from existing campus leadership, opportunities to mature themselves as a leader, and opportunities to become an agent for positive campus change. Additionally, Career Pathways participants appreciated the degree of *value* that campus administration placed on the teacher leaders' work. Being valued resulted in

feelings of empowerment and of being acknowledged for making a positive difference on the campus.

In the final chapter of this dissertation I reviewed the implications of the results of the two journal-ready studies. Additionally, I discussed how these findings might be integrated to assist in understanding teacher leadership and initiatives developed to identify and nurture teacher leaders. The chapter closes with recommendations for future research on the phenomenon of teacher leadership.

### **Summary**

As the practice of teacher leadership grows and as the number of teacher leader initiatives proliferate, questions remain as to a consensus on a definition of teacher leadership. Additionally, although an understanding of the roles of a teacher leader has emerged, researchers still grapple with identifying the qualities of a teacher leader most valued by campus administration. Finally, researchers continue to struggle to understand the challenges and the rewards experienced by teacher leaders and how teacher leaders evaluate their own effectiveness. The purpose of this journal-ready dissertation was to address these ongoing concerns.

## CHAPTER II

### **A Systematic Review of Research on Teacher Leadership from 2013-2018**

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This dissertation follows the style and format of the *Journal of International Education and Leadership*.

### Abstract

To assist in their response to myriad state and federal mandates, principals have frequently turned to teacher leaders to help lead campus-based reform efforts (Cooper et al. 2016; Portin et al. 2013; Weiner & Woulfin, 2018). However, as the presence of teacher leaders has proliferated, so have questions regarding who is considered a teacher leader and what teacher leaders are expected to do. Following the example of York-Barr and Duke (2004) and Wenner and Campbell (2017), this systematic literature review sought to determine, through a metasynthesis of the relevant research, (a) if a consensus on a definition of teacher leadership has emerged, (b) if an evolution in the role of a teacher leader has occurred, and (c) if expectations have developed regarding which teachers qualify as teacher leaders. Examined scholarship was limited to qualitative studies from peer-reviewed journals and articles published between 2013 and 2018.

**Keywords:** *teacher leader, teacher leadership, distributed leadership, school reform*



## **A Systematic Review of Research on Teacher Leadership from 2013-2018**

Historically, either formally recognized or informally sanctioned, individual teachers have emerged from the ranks of the faculty to assist school principals in fulfilling the multitude of demands made on a school (Cooper et al., 2016; Portin, Russell, Samuelson, & Knapp, 2013; Weiner & Woulfin, 2018). These teacher leaders, generally out of a clear commitment to educational effectiveness, have assumed a variety of responsibilities (Newton, Riveros, & da Casta, 2013). More recently, as districts and campuses have sought ways to embrace and implement federal and state mandates, principals frequently have turned to teacher leaders to lead the charge for instructional change and reform (Margolis & Huggins, 2012).

### **Background to the Study**

However, who exactly is considered a *teacher leader*? According to Angelle and Schmid (2007), “Defining teacher leadership has been difficult because of myriad concept variations, from leading by example to assuming a specific leadership position” (p. 773). In essence, who constitutes a teacher leader is dependent on the context of that leadership. Formally recognized campus teacher positions such as department chair or subject lead constitute teacher leadership. Conversely, the teacher who offers a colleague advice on classroom management or shares a lesson plan is also a teacher leader. Teacher leaders may head a campus reform effort, or they may be referenced as a peer coach, a team leader, a subject specialist, or a team coordinator. Regardless of the designation used, it is understood that teacher leaders fulfill any number of important campus roles and functions (Portin et al., 2013).

Although many authors and researchers have discussed the importance of teacher leaders, have offered descriptions of specific teacher leader roles, and have reviewed the characteristics of an effective teacher leader, few have proposed a substantive, working definition of a teacher leader or teacher leadership. As case in point, in 2016, the National Network of State Teachers of the Year sought to address this lack of a definition in its publication, *Great to Influential: Teacher Leaders' Role in Supporting Instruction*. The resulting statement ambiguously read, "A teacher leader is a highly effective educator who is trained in and practices teacher leadership" (Jacques, C., Weber, G., Bosso, D., Olson, D., & Bassett, K., 2016, p. 5) . Preemptively, the publication's authors defined the teacher leadership process as instances where "highly effective educators take on roles at the classroom, school, district, state, or national levels in order to advance the profession, improve educator effectiveness, and/or increase access to great teaching and learning for all students" (p.5). However, despite an accompanying list of teacher leader tasks, the authors' definition of a teacher leader was especially broad and could be applied to almost any teacher, administrator, or even community member who was a champion for education.

Therefore, the purpose of this systematic literature review was to determine, after nearly four decades of research, if a consensus on a definition of teacher leadership has emerged. Additionally, given this lapse of time, it is hoped any evolutionary changes in the role of a teacher leader will be revealed. Finally, the intent of this literature review is to disclose what expectations campus and district leadership may have developed regarding which teachers qualify as teacher leaders.

**Teacher Leader Traits and Tasks.** A concentration on teacher leader traits and tasks was evident throughout the literature. Having once alluded to the confusion regarding the lack of a clear definition of a teacher leader, researchers instead have focused their discussions on who a teacher leader is and what a teacher leader does (Angelle & Schmid, 2007; Feeney, 2009; Wenner & Campbell, 2017). Recognizing this trend to allow the job to define the individual, Wenner and Campbell (2017) undertook “a rigorous examination of the empirical research that has occurred in the last decade surrounding teacher leadership” (p. 135). Wenner and Campbell’s (2017) systematic literature review on teacher leadership has been frequently referenced, although their efforts did not result in a working definition of a teacher leader. However, Wenner and Campbell did settle on delineating five themes that characterized teacher leadership. Their teacher leader tasks were: (a) to work beyond their own classroom, (b) to lead professional learning, (c) to be involved in setting campus policy, (d) to improve student achievement, and (e) to work for school-wide change.

Similarly, Harris and Muijs (2003) divided teacher leadership into three areas of activity: (a) coaching and mentoring other teachers, (b) providing professional development, and (c) modeling effective teaching and pedagogy. The authors further discussed the importance of teacher leadership, how it can benefit the campus, and how administration can support teacher leadership. They summarized by stating, “Teacher leadership points towards a ‘new professionalism’ based upon mutual trust, recognition, empowerment, and support” (Harris & Muijs, 2017, para. 12).

Angelle and Schmid (2007) also discussed the characteristics that describe a teacher leader, delineating five traits. As *decision makers*, teacher leaders were seen as

an extension of formal campus leadership, a de facto administrator. As *role models*, teacher leaders were characterized as exemplary teachers. A teacher leader in an *informal leadership role* was labeled as a positional designee, and served intermittently, acting as a bridge between teacher groups, between teachers and administrators, and between teachers and parents as needed. As a *supra-practitioner*, teacher leaders were viewed as educators involved beyond the level of the regular classroom teacher, choosing to perform extra duties, work additional hours, or perform supplemental tasks. Finally, when characterized as *visionary*, teacher leaders were seen to have a more global perspective and worked toward realizing campus goals (Angelle & Schmid, 2007).

Earlier, Gabriel (2005) avoided offering a definition of teacher leadership and directly moved into a discussion of the various teacher positions and the different leadership approaches required for each role. The author categorized the roles of a teacher leader into four areas: affecting school culture, building teams, training peers, and increasing student achievement. Gabriel attached a high priority to teacher leaders as agents of cultural change. He prefaced his discourse by commenting,

In order to be successful in these areas, a teacher leader must be a skillful communicator who can neutralize resistance, which will invariably and unfortunately arise from fellow teachers and even from administrators. At the same time, teacher leaders must find ways to create a positive climate and sense of community. A negative environment—one that lacks direction, unity, cohesiveness, motivation, shared ownership, and professionalism—can permeate teams and infect entire schools, which has a trickle-down effect on student achievement, standardized test scores, and morale. (Gabriel, 2005, p. xi)

**Teacher Leader Struggles.** Contradicting Gabriel (2005), Angelle and Schmid (2007) arrived at several alternative conclusions regarding teacher leaders. First, Angelle and Schmid concluded the lack of a formal definition or job description for a teacher leader was beneficial, as it allowed emerging leaders to assume a variety of roles to better meet the specific needs of a campus. Second, teacher leadership should be singularly and wholly instructional, focused only on the teaching and the learning elements of the campus and not concerned with correlated issues of student discipline or school culture. Third, the authors determined, due to the differences that exist in campus instructional structures and the varying instructional modalities, educators from the three K-12 education levels (i.e., elementary, middle, high) saw teacher leadership differently. Ending their report, Angelle and Schmid cautioned campus leaders to be sensitive to whom on the campus is a teacher leader and to construct conditions in which teacher leaders might safely practice and develop leadership skills.

Without this administrative support, Struyve, Meredith, and Gielen (2014) determined teacher leaders struggled to maintain and balance professional and social relationships with their teacher peers. Although teacher leaders longed for recognition as a leader from those they lead, teacher leaders also desired a social-professional balance in these work relationships. The authors resolved that three overarching concepts characterized teacher leader development and teacher leader peer interactions.

First, according to Struyve et al. (2014), teacher leadership practices were emerging and complex. Mandates surrounding teacher leader duties and responsibilities varied based on the needs, vision, and priorities of the campus on which the teacher leaders served. Second, the teacher leaders felt tension at being neither a fulltime teacher

nor a fulltime administrator. Although the teacher leaders welcomed the opportunities afforded to them to work with a larger cadre of peers, the teacher leaders also wrestled with feelings of being isolated from their peers. Third, on a personal level, the teacher leaders saw both positives and negatives associated with their roles. They embraced being involved with broader school policy and affecting instructional practice, but the teacher leaders grappled with issues of balancing their classroom responsibilities with their additional duties. The teacher leaders frequently felt they were distracted from giving adequate time and energy to their direct work with students. Stuyve et al. (2014) surmised that teacher leaders justified the conflicts inherent in their leadership role by choosing to see teacher leader responsibilities as being different from, rather than superior to, the duties of their teaching peers.

To assist in bridging the gulfs that might exist between teacher leaders and their peers, Portin, et al., (2013) outlined four areas of instructional expertise that were essential for teacher leaders: content area knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, relational skills, and the ability to link teacher leader efforts with campus instructional priorities. Additionally, the authors discussed five supports campus administrative leadership needed to provide teacher leaders in their work. These expectations were to clarify the work responsibilities of the teacher leaders, to help the staff to understand the teacher leader initiative, to provide time and other resources for teacher leaders to accomplish the work, to promote a campus-wide culture of team work, and to coach the teacher leaders in efforts proven to support best teaching practices. To further assist campus leadership in their work with teacher leaders, Portin et al. called for district-wide support of campus efforts and cautioned there was a need to understand that teacher leadership initiatives have

an inherent learning curve. Additionally, the authors reinforced the need to provide teacher leaders with technical, material, and emotional resources.

### **Conceptualizations of Teacher Leadership**

The discussion on a definition of a teacher leader or of teacher leadership can be summarized by the National Education Association's work through its Teacher Leadership Institute. On this organization's website, a search for a definition of a teacher leader resulted in the following excerpt.

Today there is no one widely accepted definition for teacher leadership that encompasses the myriad roles that teacher leaders play in their schools and districts. Teacher leadership looks different for every teacher who pursues it, dependent on his or her context. However, there are some common traits among successful teacher leaders across the spectrum. (National Education Association Teacher Leadership Institute 2017, para. 1)

However, this persistent ambiguity and confusion over teacher leaders has not stopped efforts to develop an employable definition of a teacher leader. Rather, current teacher leader research has been a catalyst for furthering investigation into generating that elusive, concise, working definition of a teacher leader and teacher leadership. Perhaps the problem lies with so many researchers and authors becoming distracted by seeking a holistic definition of a teacher leader without initially delineating what they mean by being a leader or discussing what is meant by leadership. Additionally, as mentioned earlier, even an understanding of who is a *teacher*, can be blurred. The word *teacher* becomes generic, an intertwining equivalent reference to an educator, administrator, reformer, tutor, professor, or K-12 teacher.

Therefore, I propose that before research on teacher leaders or on teacher leadership continues, a working definition of a leader and leadership needs to be determined. To this effort, I began my reflection on leadership by reviewing the work of Peter G. Northouse (2013). In his volume *Leadership: Theory and Practice*, Northouse submitted for his readers' consideration the following definition of leadership.

“*Leadership* is a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal” (Northouse, 2013, p. 5).

Simple in its construct, this definition highlighted several key elements applicable to understanding the teacher leader and teacher leadership. First, Northouse (2013) indicated that leadership was a *process*. Leadership is not something that is instantaneous, but a series of events that occur over a given span of time. Perhaps for the teacher leader, this time span is an academic or school year. Second is the awareness that to lead is *to influence*. The effectual nature of leadership is dependent on the effect the leader has on the others involved in the process. For the teacher leader this effect is built on the quality of the relationships the leader has with peer teachers. The third quality of leadership that should be emphasized, as gleaned from Northouse (2013), is that effective leadership results in a *change*. Leadership must have direction and the assumption is that it is a positive direction. In the context of teacher leadership, change is manifested in a variety of improvements including quality of instruction, teacher-student relationships, team collaboration, classroom management, and student achievement (Cooper et al., 2016).

Consequently, to bring focus to the discussion, *teacher leadership*, and by association *teacher leaders*, will be defined as:



The process by which teachers, individually or collectively, influence their colleagues, principals, and other members of the school communities to improve teaching and learning practices with the aim of increased student learning and achievement. Such team leadership work involves three intentional development foci: individual development, collaboration or team development, and organizational development. (York-Barr & Duke, 2004, pp. 287-288)

Within the context of school leadership, my understanding is a teacher is a licensed classroom professional within a K-12 school setting. The teacher leader may or may not be an instructor of record but is an individual with regular, instructionally based, influence on students' achievement.

Having established a foundational definition of a teacher leader and teacher leadership, this discourse includes references to a variety of synonyms for teacher leadership. Because, as also previously discussed, authors do not agree on a single definition, research on the topic is not synchronized and consequently specific references in the literature may also include the terms distributive leadership, learning-focused leadership, and hybrid teacher leadership, among others. Although researchers may occasionally seek to draw sharp distinctions between these synonymous terms, generally the differences are based on semantics over substance.

**Teacher Leaders as Hybrid Leaders.** Recognizing that many teacher leaders combine teacher leadership with continued classroom teaching, Margolis and Huggins (2012) coined the label *hybrid teacher leader*. A hybrid teacher leader's duties may include, in addition to providing direct student instruction, any combination of (a) professional development creation and delivery, (b) assessment construction and data

analysis, (c) colleague observations and coaching, and (d) the sharing of instructional plans and classroom resources. Further, Margolis and Huggins determined that these roles were defined, de facto, as districts and campuses generally provided no clear summary of hybrid teacher leader responsibilities. Rather, campus and district leaders allowed job duties to evolve organically, based on individual campus needs and individual hybrid teacher leader strengths. However, it was concluded that the consequence of this passivity was an ineffectual use of hybrid teacher leaders' talent and time as well as a disintegration of hybrid teacher leaders' relationships with colleagues and administrative leadership. Therefore, the researchers recommended that those campuses and districts undertaking a hybrid teacher leader model of teacher leadership should establish clearly stated hybrid teacher leader responsibilities and succinctly articulate learning benchmarks as a means of hybrid teacher leader evaluation and a measure of overall hybrid teacher leader program success.

In contrast to the hybrid teacher leader, many schools and districts capitalized on the traditional, often pre-existing role of department chair, to fulfill teacher leader responsibilities. For many, such as Kelley and Salisbury (2013), department chairs seemed uniquely situated to resolve many of the issues surrounding teacher leader roles and accountability. The authors' observations of large, urban high schools revealed some commonalities regarding department chairs. Generally, the department chairs: (a) developed a vision shared within the department, (b) relied on data to guide instructional decisions and to evaluate instructional effectiveness, (c) supported department members' professional learning and student learning, and (d) continuously aligned curriculum, instruction, and assessment. Kelley and Salisbury further emphasized the importance of

district and campus leadership in supporting department chairs in fulfilling these expectations.

Similarly, convinced of the inherent abilities and the unique placement of high school department chairs to facilitate instructional change, Bredeson (2013) examined department chair efficaciousness. As department chairs constructed a shared instructional vision for the campus, the author recognized that the chairs framed their vision around an analysis of campus data such as student assessment results. Through the process of developing a department's vision, the chairs shared content and pedagogical knowledge with department teachers. By demonstrating a commitment to the campus through assuming department chair responsibilities, the chairs gained greater peer recognition and respect as an instructional leader. Additionally, the professional development activities initiated by the chairs clarified their roles as instructional change agents and gave the chairs the knowledge and skills needed to lead their departments with confidence toward that change. On campuses with department chairs, there was individualized, working, distributed instructional leadership. Further, campuses using a department chair model of teacher leadership were equipped to maintain progress toward effective instructional change by means of this newly recognized distributed leadership team of teacher leaders.

Clearly, a sampling of the literature revealed that an understanding of the roles and responsibilities of teacher leaders and a delineation of the tasks and traits of teacher leaders, remained in flux. Additionally, it is important to note that the hybrid teacher leader model can include teacher leader roles other than department chair. A spectrum of teacher leader roles exists, and a greater effort needs to be applied to clarifying those

roles, at least within the context of the teacher leader's own campus (Margolis & Huggins, 2012; Portin et al., 2013; Weiner, 2011). Additionally, teacher leaders need more focused and intentional support from their campus administrators (Feeney, 2009; Kelley & Salisbury, 2013). Finally, teacher leaders need the recognition of their teacher peers. This peer acceptance will enable an instructional change that is impactful and lasting (Bredeson, 2013; Struyve et al., 2014).

### **Purpose of the Study**

Despite years of research on the concept and context of teacher leadership, little consensus has been reached about what it means to be a teacher leader or how teacher leadership is to be practiced (Wenner & Campbell, 2017; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Although the idea of teacher leadership has become entrenched in the ongoing dialogue about education reform and instructional leadership, a variety of researchers and authors posit nuanced definitions of what is teacher leadership and of what exactly effective teacher leaders do. As early as the 1980s, researchers (e.g., Devaney, 1987; Lieberman, Saxl, & Miles 1988; Rogus, 1988) began to explore the phenomenon of teacher leadership. Yet, two decades into a new century, although the presence and importance of teacher leaders on the school campus is ubiquitous, what teacher leaders are and what teacher leadership is remains undetermined.

Among the first comprehensive literature reviews on teacher leadership was that of York-Barr and Duke published in 2004. Since that time, their study has gained seminal status, repeatedly referenced in a large portion of the research that has followed. York-Barr and Duke examined the evolution of teacher leadership out of the educational reform efforts of the 1980s and into the new century's era of federal mandates and

regulations. Their conclusion was that the majority of the research they examined had several limitations including being “largely qualitative, small scale case study designs that employ convenience samples and self-report methodologies, mostly interviews and some surveys” (York-Barr & Duke, 2004, p. 257). Additionally, York-Barr and Duke observed that only a few of the studies were theoretical, leading them to generate their own conceptual framework and to voice a plea for more theory-driven research.

In 2017, Wenner and Campbell took up the mantle of York-Barr and Duke (2004) and completed a systematic literature review on teacher leadership, extending the years of study from 2004 through 2013. Although Wenner and Campbell used different research questions than York-Barr and Duke, Wenner and Campbell arrived at similar conclusions regarding the study of teacher leaders and of teacher leadership. Additionally, they called for more research on the influence of teacher leaders and the variety of roles teacher leaders play in establishing and promoting school culture. However, unlike York-Barr and Duke, Wenner and Campbell determined that increasingly more researchers based their studies on theory, although the diversity of theories cited was extensive.

Carrying the torch of York-Barr and Duke (2004) even further, the purpose of this systematic literature review was to explore the research literature on teacher leadership through 2018. Given almost four decades of research, the intent of this study was to help determine if a growing consensus on what defines a teacher leader and what constitutes teacher leadership has been built. Additionally, given the influence of federal legislation and regulation on the education community, this research sought to determine how the roles and responsibilities of teacher leaders might have changed and how the effects of teacher leadership may have been impacted.

## Research Questions

To guide this systematic literature review, the following research questions were analyzed.

1. How is teacher leadership defined?
2. Who are serving as teacher leaders?
3. What duties do teacher leaders perform?

## Method and Data Collection

Onwuegbuzie and Frels (2016) defined a systematic literature review as, “a critical assessment and evaluation of all research studies that address a particular research question on a research topic” (p. 25). They further clarified that systematic reviews use a specific set of criteria to narrow the focus of the review and that the purpose of the researcher is to integrate the findings of the review. Having explicitly defined the research procedures, and having delineated the inclusion and exclusion criteria for potential studies, literature review research results are then evaluated for validity and for appropriateness for addition to the literature review. According to Onwuegbuzie and Frels, a systematic literature review has four characteristics: (a) specified inclusion and exclusion criteria, (b) a clearly outlined research strategy, (c) a well-articulated and systematic coding and analysis process, and (d) a synthesis of the research findings.

**Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria.** This systematic literature review on teacher leadership was limited to peer reviewed articles published from 2013 to 2018. Further, following the example of York-Barr and Duke (2004), only qualitative studies in which teacher leadership and its related topics of distributive leadership, shared decision making, and parallel leadership, when they are identified as a key term, were included in

the literature review. Additional inclusion criteria were the review of studies conducted in urban, secondary school settings within the United States, as well as those studies searchable through the ERIC database, as accessed through the Sam Houston State University's online library. To supplement the results of the ERIC search, relevant search results were mined via the *pearl-growing* technique. This practice involved a review of the references of pertinent research results to ascertain supplemental literature previously determined by an article's authors to be relevant to the research topic (Barnett-Page & Thomas, 2009). Volumes or chapters within books on teacher leadership and related topics were not included. Despite the proliferation of blogs, vlogs, and social media, these sources also were not included in the systematic literature review. These exclusions were employed during the pearl-growing process as well.

### **Data Analysis**

Although this literature review aligns with the shortened timeframe characteristic of a rapid review (Onwuegbuzie & Frels, 2016), the resulting research data were analyzed using the framework of a qualitative *metasynthesis*. First espoused by grounded theory pioneers Glaser and Strauss in 1967, and consequently named by Stern and Harris in 1976, metasynthesis is a method by which the systematic literature review researcher integrates the findings from a selection of qualitative research studies. In addition to being limited to qualitative studies, according to Onwuegbuzie and Frels, a metasynthesis (a) is an interpretive analysis rather than an aggregate analysis, (b) is linked to theory development as opposed to theory testing, and (c) is intent on phenomenological understanding rather than establishing a cause-and-effect dynamic.

This definition echoes Sandelowski and Barroso (2007) who defined qualitative meta-synthesis as “an interpretive integration of qualitative findings in primary research reports that are in the form of interpretive syntheses of data: either conceptual/thematic descriptions or interpretive explanations” (p. 199). Noting that researchers using qualitative meta-synthesis have a choice in the method and approach used to produce their findings, Sandelowski and Barroso (2007) further explained,

The approaches you [the researcher] use will depend on the purpose of your project, the product you want to produce, and what the findings in the reports included in your study allow in the way of interpretive treatment. But the end product of qualitative metasynthesis is always an integration of research findings, as opposed to a comparison or critique of them. (p. 199)

Following a review of each study ensuing from the systematic search, each research article was coded based on the previously outlined research questions. These a priori codes included the following: (a) roles of a teacher leader, (b) definitions of a teacher leader, (c) characteristics and traits of a teacher leader, and (d) extraneous relevant information that spoke to the study’s research questions. These tangential data included (a) descriptions of teacher leader professional development, (b) influences on teacher leaders, and (c) effects of teacher leadership. Resulting data were entered into an Excel database where they were examined for common themes, observations, patterns, and features. Using the principles of metasynthesis as outlined by Saldaña (2016), integration of the research coding resulted in categories, which through collapsing revealed themes and concepts. The resulting themes were used to establish assertions regarding the characteristics of effective teacher leaders and the practices of effective



teacher leadership (Spradley, 1979). Additionally, each reviewed study was entered into a second database and tabulated according to author(s), date, research questions(s), and key findings.

More specifically, relevant articles were identified through a multi-layered research process. Because there is no standard definition of a *teacher leader* or of *teacher leadership*, a series of relevant terms such as *distributed leadership* and *shared leadership* were also searched. All searches were conducted within the Education Resource Information Center (ERIC) database.

Initial Boolean Phrase results for each term generally resulted in identifying an unwieldy number of articles. Consequently, initial results were pared by filtering for peer-reviewed articles only. This process consistently resulted in a substantial decrease in the number of articles identified for each phrase. For example, an initial search for *teacher leadership* produced 1,988 items. After filtering for peer reviewed articles only, the number of articles was reduced by over 40% to 1,151 articles.

Search results were further reduced by additionally filtering to be inclusive of the years 2013-2018, the pre-established span for this systematic literature review. For *teacher leadership*, this process yielded a total of 565 articles, splitting the search results by an additional 50%. This process was repeated for each of the related Boolean Phrase searches, demonstrating similar results each time. Ultimately, 863 *teacher leader*-related articles that met these criteria were identified. The results of this process are contained in Table 1.

Table 1

*Research Studies on Teacher Leadership, 2013-2018*

| Boolean Phrase          | Initial Results<br>( <i>n</i> ) | Peer Reviewed<br>( <i>n</i> ) | 2013-2018<br>( <i>n</i> ) |
|-------------------------|---------------------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------------|
| teacher leader          | 287                             | 125                           | 60                        |
| teacher leadership      | 1,988                           | 1,151                         | 565                       |
| distributed leadership  | 527                             | 361                           | 185                       |
| distributive leadership | 46                              | 23                            | 10                        |
| shared decision making  | 688                             | 222                           | 42                        |
| parallel leadership     | 4                               | 4                             | 1                         |
| Total                   | 3,540                           | 1,886                         | 863                       |

The cumulative research results from this repeated process were exported from ERIC to an Excel document. This export included the article title, author, publication information, and the abstract. Through the sort feature in Excel, duplicate articles were identified and the duplicates deleted from the worksheet. The total of the remaining articles was 765.

Recognizing a need to continue a culling of the remaining articles, I composed a preliminary list of codes to classify articles for potential separation from the comprehensive list. These codes included *HE* for research that was completed in a higher education setting and *OC* for research conducted outside the country (i.e., the United States). As I repeatedly reviewed the article abstracts the number of these codes increased.

A portion of these codes were used to identify articles that appeared to discuss the topic of *teacher leadership* but approached the subject from a perspective outside the parameters of this literature review's inclusion and exclusion criteria. Examples included the elimination of quantitative studies and research in a rural or in an exclusively elementary (K-5) settings. Other codes used represented articles I identified as approaching teacher leadership from a limited perspective. These codes included *SBJ* for research with a specified subject area and *PRC* for studies focused on a single teacher leader practice such as mentor coaching or data disaggregation. Although articles could have frequently been coded with more than one code, such as rural and subject specific, I chose the code I thought was most representative of the research completed. Table 2 contains the results of this coding process

Table 2

*Codes for and Frequencies of Studies Eliminated from Search Results*

| Code | Code Meaning            | Code Definition   | Total<br>( <i>n</i> ) |
|------|-------------------------|---|-----------------------|
| HE   | <i>Higher Education</i> | Research within a higher education setting                  | 88                    |
| OC   | <i>Out of Country</i>   | Research conducted outside the United States                | 198                   |
| PRC  | <i>Practice</i>         | Research focused on a single practice of teacher leadership | 65                    |
| LDR  | <i>Leader</i>           | Research from perspective of campus leadership              | 76                    |

(continued)

| Code | Code Meaning        | Code Definition   | Total<br>( <i>n</i> ) |
|------|---------------------|---|-----------------------|
| QNT  | <i>Quantitative</i> | Research using quantitative methods                     | 12                    |
| SBJ  | <i>Subject</i>      | Research that focused on a single academic subject      | 48                    |
| RRL  | <i>Rural</i>        | Research conducted in a non-urban setting               | 4                     |
| ELM  | <i>Elementary</i>   | Research conducted in an elementary school setting      | 30                    |
| SPP  | <i>Special</i>      | Research focused on work with a specified subpopulation | 7                     |
| NR   | <i>Not Relevant</i> | Research not germane to teacher leadership              | 197                   |
| DPL  | <i>Duplicate</i>    | Research previously reviewed                            | 98                    |

Additionally, a total of 197 articles were determined to not be relevant to the topic of *teacher leadership*, because the authors did not discuss teacher leaders in the context of the working definition proposed within this study. Fundamentally, as outlined by York-Barr and Duke (2004), teacher leaders stimulate change among colleagues, campus leadership, and campus constituencies to facilitate collaborative and organizational development to further promote student achievement. Rather, these excluded studies discussed the leadership role fulfilled by all educators, or they approached teachers as classroom-level leaders only. One article was eliminated because it was the literature

review article by Wenner and Campbell (2017) upon which, in part, this study is modeled.

This coding process was conducted in four rounds. During each round, I also informally assessed each article's potential for addressing the stated research questions before assigning a defining code. This process ultimately resulted in 39 articles remaining for potential review and analysis.

All but one of the remaining 39 articles were located through the Sam Houston State University online library, and the text of each article was saved as a Portable Display Format (PDF) file on my personal computer and housed in a designated folder. The single article that was excluded from the folder could not be located by the university library through any search method. I assumed the article was self-published by the author and consequently was not available through the interlibrary loan system.

A subsequent reading of the remaining 38 articles resulted in eliminating an additional 23 studies, 20 because they were purely descriptive rather than empirical, and three because they were determined to be literature reviews. This left 15 articles with which to explore this study's research questions. A summary review of these 15 articles is in a table in Appendix A.

## **Results**

**The Definition of Teacher Leadership.** An analysis of the results of the systematic literature review established there was no clear consensus regarding a universally accepted definition of teacher leadership. However, the data did reveal some themes in the development of an accepted definition. Significant among these trends was (a) the continuing impact of the 2004 research completed by York-Barr and Duke, (b) the

authors' inconsistency in establishing a definition prior to conducting research on teacher leadership, (c) the growing influence of the Teacher Leader Model Standards, and (d) the confirmation of a key qualifier regarding the establishment of an accepted definition of a teacher leader.

The lasting impact of the research of York-Barr and Duke (2004) on understanding teacher leadership was clearly evident. In all but two of the articles (i.e., Bagley & Margolis, 2018; Portin et al., 2013), direct reference was made to the now seminal study, with most of the researchers echoing York-Barr and Duke's (2004) conclusion that "the concept of teacher leadership has not been clearly or consistently defined" (p. 263). Additionally, York-Barr and Duke's writing was cited as the accepted definition of teacher leadership in three of the articles (Fairman & Mackenzie, 2014; Swan Dagen, Morewood, & Smith, 2017; Weiner & Woulfin, 2018). Others, such as Cosenza (2015) appropriated a definition from another research source or agency.

Although numerous researchers did not proffer a specific definition, they did repeat York-Barr and Duke's (2004) claim that no widely accepted definition of a teacher leader exists (Allen, 2016; Hunzicker, 2017; Sato, Hyler, & Monte-Sano, 2014; Supovitz, 2018). Rather than expound on defining the phenomenon of teacher leadership, many researchers chose to move directly to exploring their research questions. These findings confirm similar conclusions from York-Barr and Duke (2004) and Wenner and Campbell (2017). However, each article did provide, at a minimum, a descriptive conceptualization of a teacher leader.

A second element that demonstrated a growing impact on defining teacher leadership was the work of the Teacher Leadership Exploratory Consortium. First

established in 2008, the consortium was formed to “discuss the potential of teacher leadership and the impact it can have in school improvement and student achievement” (Cosenza, 2015, p. 81). The consequence of the group’s study was the formation of the Teacher Leader Model Standards. As previously noted by Wenner and Cambell (2017), authors increasingly referenced the Teacher Leader Model Standards, with five authors (Bagley & Margolis, 2018; Carver, 2016; Cosenza, 2015; Fairman & Mackenzie, 2014; Swan Dagen et al., 2017) including references to the standards in their research. According to Swan Dagen et al., (2017), the Teacher Leader Model Standards have been accepted by a variety of educational policy makers and advocacy groups. These authors elaborated,

In schools where the cultural norm is to have teachers engage in formal and informal leadership, this document [the Teacher Leader Model Standards] may serve as a guide or reflect conditions of existing teachers’ practices. On the other hand, in schools where the culture of teachers as leaders is not as prevalent, these standards may be used as a strategic overview for developing teacher leaders. (Swan Dagen et al., 2017, p. 326)

However, despite the lack of a consensus on a definition of teacher leadership, one theme surrounding the establishment of a definition was evident across the studies. This common thread included the concept of teacher leaders as *influencers* along with teacher leadership being a *process*. Also rooted in my working definition and discussed earlier in this study, these linked characteristics have set a foundation for establishing a common vocabulary regarding an accepted definition of teacher leadership. Consistently, researchers viewed teacher leaders as *facilitating a process of influence*.

Eight of the reviewed articles explicitly referenced the teacher leader as having or exerting *influence* as a key element in the definition of being a teacher leader. An additional five articles made a more indirect reference to the idea of *influence*, for example “extending their presence” (Cosenza, 2015, p. 79) and “act with purpose . . . within a context or situation” (Sato et al., 2014, p. 5). The two remaining articles (Portin et al., 2013; Supovitz, 2018) did not express a fully articulated definition of a teacher leader or of teacher leadership. However, the perception that these authors could embrace a descriptor of teacher leaders as *influencers* was not difficult to infer, as both authors discussed teacher leaders as agents of change. A listing of the definitions from each article is found in the Appendix B.

**Who Are Serving as Teacher Leaders?.** Initially perplexed at not discovering emergent themes from the consolidated list of codes gleaned from across the 15 reviewed articles, I came to recognize that an internalized rewording of the research question led to uncovering more dominant themes. By reframing my query to focus on *what makes a teacher a teacher leader*, I was able to review the codes while asking what characteristics described a teacher leader. The results led to the formation of three categories: (a) teacher leaders are *experienced* educators; (b) teacher leaders are *exemplars* for other teachers, and (c) teacher leaders are individuals *equipped* to lead.

Most frequently mentioned in the research was that teacher leaders are selected from the ranks of *experienced* teachers. Whether the leader’s role was formal or informal, the initial qualification for leadership was experience as an effective classroom teacher and a reputation as an excellent educator. Associated with this experience was the frequent mention of teacher leaders as having qualities such as a “deep knowledge of



content and pedagogy” (Hunzicker, 2017, p. 2) and an “understand[ing of] the rigors and demands of teaching” (Carver, 2016, p. 160). Formal titles assigned to teacher leaders included instructional coach, instructional specialist, curriculum specialist, literacy coach, and reading specialist, as well as more traditional hybrid teacher leaders titles of department chair, professional learning community (PLC) leader, and team leader. Hunzicker (2017) noted, “The progression from teacher to teacher leader builds from a solid foundation of pedagogical knowledge and skills” (p. 3).

Closely associated with teacher leaders’ experience was the perspective that teacher leaders are an *example* to their peers. As model teachers, these leaders were also seen as change agents, educators to be followed and emulated, not only regarding classroom practice, but in reference to being an influencer, a community facilitator, and a relationship builder. As a campus instructional exemplar, teacher leaders were also recognized for their “desire to improve [campus] conditions and outcomes” (Fairman & Mackenzie, 2014, p. 8), and respected for being willing to take advantage of “a valuable opportunity to dip their professional toes outside the classroom” (Bagley & Margolis, 2018, p. 39). Supovitz (2018) concluded, in part,

This [influence] suggests an awareness of these teacher leaders of an internal dynamic within schools amongst teachers by which practices spread. In these teachers’ judgment, an effective way to share practices is to demonstrate their value first with their own students and, with this legitimate basis, to share them with those open to listening. (pp. 67-68)

However, each teacher’s disposition also qualified and spotlighted the teacher as *equipped* for a broader campus leadership role. Discussing influences on teachers

becoming teacher leaders, Hunzicker (2017) noted, “Factors that supported—or hindered—their [teacher leaders’] progression toward leadership included beliefs, attitudes, and values, willingness to take professional risks, intentional pursuit of goals, participation in professional development, and job-embedded collaboration related to a variety of instructional initiatives” ( p. 18). Additionally, Carver (2016) noted during teacher leader interviews, “when asked to share their understanding of teacher leadership, participants were significantly more likely to describe a set of dispositional traits and behaviors than a formalized set of roles and responsibilities” (p. 169). It was not only a teacher’s experience and impact on a campus that highlighted being prepared for leadership but also the teacher’s character and reputation. Each researcher indicated a number of qualities possessed by teacher leaders that equipped the teachers for roles in leadership, and a representative list of which is in Table 3. Either innately developed or cultivated through a teacher leadership preparation program, these qualities evidenced teachers as having an attitude and temperament suitable for leadership. Characteristics such as *caring, flexible, self-confident, trustworthy, and reflective* were essential for teacher leader success and vital to facilitating a positive impact on peers and the broader campus community.

**What Duties Do Teacher Leaders Have.** Although the authors frequently included lists of teacher leader duties or responsibilities in their writing, these listings were sometimes narrowly focused and were closely linked to the scope of the authors’ research questions. By reframing my query to focus on *how teacher leaders lead*, and following the same coding process outlined earlier, three themes related to what teacher leaders do began to emerge. These themes were: (a) teacher leaders facilitate

*collaboration*; (b) teacher leaders foster teacher *craft* development; and (c) teacher leaders help to formulate campus *culture*.

Teacher leaders were clearly seen as facilitators of collaboration on their campuses. Frequently, also referenced as coaching or cooperating, *collaboration* was explicitly mentioned as what teacher leaders do in seven of the articles (i.e., Cosenza, 2015; Eckert, Ulmer, Khachatryan, & Ledesma, 2016; Fairman & Mckenzie, 2014; Hunzicker, 2017; Nicholson, Capitelli, Richert, Bauer, & Bonetti, 2016; Nordengren, 2016; Supovitz, 2018). All the articles made related references to collaboration, indicating teacher leaders either mentored, modeled, or consulted with other campus teachers.

Closely related to collaboration was the concept of teacher leaders being responsible for relationship building and relationship development. Teacher leaders were the catalyst to foster and to strengthen the bond of collegiality (Bagley & Margolis, 2018). Other terms used to indicate collaboration were *learn together*, *develop*, *mentor*, *coach*, and *partner*. As expressed by Fairman and Mckenzie (2014), for teacher leaders, “The strategies of sharing, coaching, collaborating, and advocating all necessitated working through professional relationship – either forging new relationships or starting from existing relationships” (p. 8).

Not surprisingly, teacher leaders were also identified as supporting fellow teachers in the development of the *craft* of teaching. The form and context of the improvement of teaching craft was through professional development. In 10 of the reviewed articles the authors indicated creating, leading, or facilitating staff professional development as one element of responsibility of a teacher leader. The remaining five

articles alluded to this role by discussing and demonstrating teacher leaders shared best teaching practices or encouraged and supported a change in teacher practice. Often through their roles as an instructional specialist or professional development leader, teacher leaders were consistently used to impact instructional effectiveness. Portin et al. (2013) reported,

First, they [teacher leaders] rarely worked alone but rather were members of a schoolwide instructional team. As such, they helped to develop and jointly pursue a schoolwide strategy for improving teaching and learning. Second, they [teacher leaders] engaged teachers and instructional practice by doing the bulk of the professional development work in the school, mostly with individuals and smaller groups, as well as occasionally with the whole school. (p. 232)

Tasked with sharing their own expertise, teacher leaders were described as *sharing knowledge, sharing best practices, encouraging a change in practices, creating staff development, and promoting classroom improvement.*

Additionally, to assist teachers in improving their teaching craft, teacher leaders were frequently employed to disaggregate instructional data or to assist other teachers in the disaggregation. As Portin et al. (2013) also shared,

Data could act as a communicative tool in teacher leaders' work with teachers. As in teachers' work with students, the data could redirect teachers' attention away from a self-conscious worry about their inadequacies as a teacher and toward a problem-solving process they engaged in with the teacher leader. (p. 235)

However, the influence of teacher leaders extended beyond the instructional setting, with teacher leaders frequently being instrumental in the formation of campus *culture*. Evident in teacher leaders' work on shared decision-making teams and referenced as engaging in schoolwide policy making or advancing schoolwide efforts, teacher leaders took an active role in school improvement and systemic change. Carver (2016) found that teacher leaders developed "a growing sense of power and agency from realizing their potential outside the classroom" (p. 168). Relatedly, Nordengren (2016) confirmed the importance of teacher leaders in "building [a] shared vision and culture, collaborating with students' families, . . . generating meaningful research on educational issues and policies, . . . enacting system change, and taking on advocacy roles at all levels" (p. 96). Teacher leaders were also often responsible for implementing district initiatives and being involved in developing campus goals and initiating communication with parents and the broader school community.

## **Discussion**

**Implications for a Teacher Leader Definition.** The existing research has clearly established that no single accepted definition of teacher leadership has emerged since York-Barr and Duke's (2004) seminal study. Although York-Barr and Duke's definition has a high degree of acceptance, scholars remain uncommitted to a single definition, with many researchers still seeking to formulate their own description of teacher leadership based on the results of individual research studies. Additionally, as attested by the number of search results generated for this literature review, this lack of a universally accepted definition has not hampered the continuation of teacher leader research, nor has

its absence diminished the rhetoric surrounding the topic of teacher leadership, both in scholarship and in practice.

Therefore, perhaps a missing definition should no longer be a primary focus or concern of teacher leader research. Instead, research should concentrate on better understanding the process and influence of teacher leadership, a commitment previously called for by Wenner and Campbell (2017). Rather than focusing on the *what* of teacher leadership, scholarship could better serve understanding teacher leadership by directing its efforts to the *hows* and the *whys* of effective teacher leader identification and development. By highlighting efforts to support and train teacher leaders, researchers would assist campuses and districts in identifying what factors foster the development of teacher leaders and what practices best support teacher leaders in their work.

Additionally, the establishment of the Teacher Leader Model Standards reduces the need for an inclusive teacher leader definition. A review of the seven domains of these standards generates a comprehensive understanding of the goals of teacher leadership, while highlighting the tasks associated with effective leadership. In a 2015 study, Cosenza found a significant correlation between teacher leaders' conceptualization of their teacher leader experiences and the content of the Teacher Leader Model Standards. The author explained, "The consortium that developed the teacher leader model standards did so with the intention to provide guidance about teacher leadership and to delineate . . . a set of guidelines for the preparation of future teacher leaders" (Cosenza, 2015, p. 83).

**Implications for Future Research.** However, establishment of a singular definition aside, there is a need for continued research on teacher leadership. Bagley and Margolis (2018) confirmed this lack of sufficient research, writing,

Without attention to the nuances of what is involved in allowing teacher leaders to both teach and lead . . . teacher leadership will remain stuck in a nebulous zone of ‘we know this is important, but we’re not sure how to monetize it, value it, or structure it.’ (p. 41)

Although the authors were referencing hybrid teacher leaders, their comments were applicable to the broader topic of teacher leadership, as well. Prospects for additional literature reviews and areas viable for original research are highlighted in the results of this study.

The preliminary search results for this literature review provide multiple opportunities for more focused analyses of the existing research. Of special significance and including over one-fourth of the discovered studies was the number of articles that looked at teacher leader research outside the United States. It might be wondered what lessons American educators could learn from a systematic review of this research collection. Also of consequence was the number of articles based on research in the higher education setting and those that explored teacher leadership through the lens of the school principal or campus leadership. Although this scholarship did not appear designed to answer the research questions of this systematic literature review, research in higher education and through the experience of principals holds promise for cultivating a deeper understanding of how to develop and support teacher leaders.

Relatedly, the results of this study also suggest the need for further research on how potential teacher leaders can be identified and developed. Correspondingly, research is needed on how campus and district leadership can most effectively capitalize on the practice of teacher leadership, and how administrators can support teacher leaders in facilitating school reform and instructional change. Carver (2016) advocated, “As the practice of teacher leadership grows in our nation’s schools, so also must our understanding of how to prepare teachers for these critical leadership roles and responsibilities” (p. 158). The results from such studies may further confirm the findings of this study, or they may identify other characteristics or qualities of effective teacher leaders.

Another area of research on teacher leadership to be explored is the proliferation of books and book chapters that address the topic of teacher leaders. Several such volumes were referenced within the studies mentioned in this article and would likely provide extended insight into the identification, development, and support of teacher leaders. Scholarship on the various programs being implemented by districts and universities to develop teacher leaders provides a source for understanding the proliferation of the practices of teacher leadership, as well.

## **Conclusion**

The empirical research appears to confirm my working definition of teacher leadership. To repeat, this definition was lifted from the work of York-Barr and Duke (2004) and states, in part, that teacher leadership is “the process by which teachers, individually or collectively, influence their colleagues, principals, and other members of the school communities to improve” (York-Barr & Duke, 2004, pp 287-288). Over the



years since 2005, as both this definition and the establishment of the teacher leader standards as outlined in the Teacher Leader Model Standards have broadened their impact, research has consistently affirmed teacher leadership as a *process* and has reiterated the role of a teacher leader as an *influencer*.

Additionally, as supported by these findings, this process extends to the development of the individual teacher leader. If teacher leaders are *experienced*, *exemplar* teachers who are *equipped* to lead, then a teacher's transition to leadership has had to be developed over time. Although this process can be anecdotal or intentional, it is a professional change that was nurtured through a variety of experiences and opportunities that spanned the career of the teacher. It is the process of becoming an experienced teacher and the innate influence of being revered as an example to be emulated that equips a teacher to become a teacher leader. That equipping is further fostered through the availability of leadership opportunities, opportunities of which the emerging teacher leader chooses to take advantage. To paraphrase the adage, teacher leaders are not born but are made.

The purpose and the result of this leadership development is positive campus change that is facilitated by the teacher leader's work with other educators. Often this work takes the form of collaboration, a working side-by-side with colleagues to improve teacher practice and ultimately to improve student achievement. At other times, the transformation of colleagues by teacher leaders is in the form of professional development. Teacher leaders, themselves often still in the classroom, provide the training, support, and coaching that less experienced and frequently struggling teacher need to become more effective. Remaining in the classroom adds credibility to the

teacher leader's efforts and words. Ultimately, these instructional and professional changes result in larger cultural shifts on the campus. Often serving in non-instructional leadership areas such as school shared decision-making committees, teacher leaders influence the broader and pervasive cultural elements of the campus.

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### CHAPTER III

## **Career Pathways: An Exploration of an Urban School District's Program to Train and Support Teacher Leaders**

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This dissertation follows the style and format of the *Journal of International Education  
and Leadership*

### **Abstract**

With the rise of the prominence and the importance of teacher leaders, there has been a corresponding growth in initiatives created to identify, train, and support teachers who are willing to participate in campus-level leadership. One such initiative is the Career Pathways Program. This program was designed by one urban district to encourage highly effective teachers who were interested in leadership opportunities, but who also wished to remain in the classroom rather than pursue a traditional career path to an administrative position. In this study, I analyzed prior program participants' evaluative statements taken from end of the year questionnaires completed in the 2016-2017 and the 2017-2018 school years. The purpose of this study was to not only add to the growing literature on teacher leadership, but to help determine the impact of the Career Pathways Program on participating teacher leaders and to explore the continued viability of the Career Pathways Program.

**Keywords:** *Teacher leader, Teacher leadership, School reform, Distributed leadership*

## **Career Pathways: An Exploration of an Urban School District's Program to Train and Support Teacher Leaders**

Despite almost a one-half century of teacher leader practice and research, a consensus on who is considered to be a teacher leader and what a teacher leader does has yet to be reached. According to Angelle and Schmid (2007), "Defining teacher leadership has been difficult because of myriad concept variations, from leading by example to assuming a specific leadership position" (p. 773). However, although a broadly accepted definition of teacher leadership remains elusive, there is a growing consensus on what characteristics teacher leaders share, as well as an understanding on what roles teacher leaders perform (Portin, Russell, Samuelson & Knapp, 2013). In general, regardless of the specific teacher leader responsibilities assigned, teacher leaders are partners in distributed leadership and are tasked with facilitating instructional, cultural, and collegial change on their campuses. The depth of the change manifested depends on factors of administrative support, peer acceptance, and the teacher leader's own skill development (Struyve, Meredith, & Gielen, 2014). The teacher leader's level of involvement and level of success is predicated on campus administrators understanding what it means to be a teacher leader and what it means to embrace distributed leadership.

Having accepted the challenge of teacher leadership, teacher leaders enter their new leadership role with certain expectations. One set of expectations corresponds to the teacher leader as *an agent of change*. A second set of expectations corresponds to the teacher leader as *an agent changed*. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to determine how participants in a teacher leader development program described their

experiences as a teacher leader, both as a catalyst for change and as an individual changed by the experience.

### **Definitions**

To understand teacher leadership, it is important to first define the practice of leadership. According to Northouse (2013), leadership is “a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal” (p. 5). In other words, a leader influences or initiates change; a leader facilitates a process or a series of events; a leader works with or motivates others; and a leader articulates a goal or sets a target for change. Consequently, to bring focus to a discussion on *teacher leadership*, and by association *teacher leaders*, the following definition is provided. Teacher leadership is:

The process by which teachers, individually or collectively, influence their colleagues, principals, and other members of the school communities to improve teaching and learning practices with the aim of increased student learning and achievement. Such team leadership work involves three intentional development foci: individual development, collaboration or team development, and organizational development. (York-Barr & Duke, 2004, pp. 287-288)

Additionally, within the context of school leadership, a teacher leader is understood to be a licensed classroom professional in a K-12 school setting who may or may not be an instructor of record. However, the teacher leader is an individual with regular, instructionally based, influence on students who also fulfills an identifiable campus leadership role. This role may be formally sanctioned, or it may be informally accepted (York-Barr & Duke, 2004; Wenner & Campbell, 2017).

Furthermore, because it is mentioned throughout the literature about teacher leadership, an understanding of distributed leadership is important. Unfortunately, much like teacher leadership, a commonly accepted definition of distributed leadership is absent. Hartley (2010) commented that attempts to agree on the meaning of distributed leadership have not been successful, although the implementation of distributed leadership is practical and easily accomplished. Yet, the imperative of distributed leadership is that it decentralizes campus leadership, establishing a school culture of collective leadership and a practice of interaction between various campus constituencies (Liljenberg, 2014).

But, without labeling it as a definition, Harris and Spillane (2008) stated, “A distributed perspective on leadership acknowledges the work of all individuals who contribute to leadership practice, whether or not they are formally designated or defined as leaders” (p. 31). Additionally, the authors endorsed the practice of distributed education as a means to affect positively student achievement and to ensure accomplishment of school goals. Due to increased demands on campus leadership as a result of rising expectations surrounding accountability, Harris and Spillane (2008) shared,

In the increasingly complex world of education the work of leadership will require diverse types of expertise and forms of leadership flexible enough to meet changing challenges and new demands. There is growing recognition that the old organizational structures of schooling simply do not fit the requirements of learning in the twenty-first century. (p. 31)

Teacher leaders, consequently, fulfill the definition and the practice of distributed leadership.

### **Background to the Study**

Although teacher leaders have likely always existed on school campuses, York-Barr and Duke (2004) credited the education reform movements of the last half of the 20th century with the rise of the teacher leader movement. The unstable economic climate of the 1980s spurred schools to explore ways of attracting and retaining quality educators. The growing concerns over the viability of teaching as a career option, coupled with negative reviews of public-school performance in the media, prompted a cadre of school reform initiatives. As York-Barr and Duke (2004) shared,

To address these concerns, initiatives sought to increase the status and rewards of teaching so as to attract and retain intellectually talented individuals, to promote teaching excellence through continuous improvement, to validate teacher knowledge about effective educational practices, and to increase teacher participation in decision making about classroom and organizational issues. (p. 256)

Later, with the advent of federal No Child Left Behind legislation, as districts and campuses sought ways to embrace and implement federal and state mandates, principals frequently turned to teacher leaders to lead the charge for instructional change and reform (Margolis & Huggins, 2012). According to Newton, Riveros, and da Costa (2013), “There is considerable literature that points to teacher leadership, and the related notion of distributed leadership, as key in enhancing leadership capacity in schools” (p. 108).

**Teacher Leaders as *Agents of Change*.** Responding to the call of principals to assist in the growing mandates surrounding public education, teachers have willingly offered their assistance. However, teachers' ventures into distributed leadership were predicated on certain teacher leader expectations. Teacher leaders assumed their efforts would make a difference and that they would be a fundamental part of the process of campus reform. Margolis and Deuel (2009) stated, "Recent work indicates that some teachers choose leadership roles in order to deepen their capacity to influence others and gain more confidence within the educational system" (p. 265). Additionally, Hohner and Riveros (2017) related that teachers frequently transition into leadership for opportunities to collaborate with peers and to be further involved in campus initiatives. Their hope is to affect positively school culture and to engage in peer mentorship. A teacher leader himself, Pearce (2015) shared, "Teacher leaders are the driving forces behind creating a positive culture, modeling standards, and promoting student success and achievement in their school communities" (p. 46).

Other researchers have also commented on teacher leaders' expectations regarding teacher agency and teacher leader involvement in distributed leadership initiatives. Derrington and Angelle (2013) focused on teacher leaders' opportunities to work with colleagues and to be influential at a variety of levels. Observing that teacher leaders are characterized by a propensity to nurture relationships, the researchers contended that teacher leaders, as agents of change: (a) break down interpersonal barriers, (b) foster colleague mentoring opportunities, (c) support colleagues in responding to new policies, and (d) provide follow through on implementing decisions concerning school improvement.

However, forays into teacher leadership are not always successful. Coining the term *hybrid teacher leader*, Margolis and Huggins (2012) saw teacher leaders as partners in campus-level leadership by providing (a) professional development creation and delivery, (b) assessment construction and data analysis, (c) colleague observations and coaching, and (d) the sharing of instructional plans and classroom resources. But, the authors determined that where clear expectations regarding the hybrid teacher leader's role did not exist, the teacher leader experienced peer and administrative conflict undermining the effectiveness of the teacher leader. The ultimate result was unmet teacher leader expectations. The authors noted, "But due to the ill-defined nature of the roles amid increasing school complexity, the teacher leaders' roles became ineffectual, disconnected from the classroom, and often subsumed into the managerial emergency of the day" (Margolis & Huggins, 2012, p. 971).

Further evaluating the effectiveness of distributed leadership, McKenzie and Locke (2014) found that teacher leader unmet expectations were frequently rooted in the poor administrative leadership the teacher leaders experienced on their campus. Without effective campus administrative leaders, teacher leaders (a) experienced interpersonal conflicts and self-doubt, (b) struggled with mismanagement of time to complete assigned tasks, and (c) were frustrated that they had minimal influence on their peers with limited impact on peers' instructional practice. Putting voice to these unmet expectations, one teacher leader shared,

I feel, you know, like we're hitting the wall, we're hitting the wall and . . . I feel like it doesn't matter what we do. We can stand on our heads in front of them.

We can jump in front of a moving train to save their lives, and they aren't going



to be grateful. And maybe that's our mistake; we're looking for gratitude in the wrong places . . . I want them to say "Oooh, thanks for that. Thanks for giving us time to share." But they aren't going to say that (McKenzie & Locke, 2014, p. 179).

However, experiments with teacher leadership are not always so bleak. A University of Missouri study on teacher leaders in physics determined that when an appropriate campus culture exists, teacher leadership can be a successful tool for campus reform (Sinha, Hanuscin, Rebello, Muslu, & Cheng, 2012). The authors found that when teacher leaders felt empowered and safe in taking risks, the leaders "can build their school's capacity to improve" (Sinha et al., 2012, p. 12).

Also important to leadership success was having a plan of action as a teacher leader. Through developing a plan for the change they wished to accomplish, the teacher leaders were confident their goals were aligned to their existing skills and level of experience. Additionally, the recognition that leadership occurs at various levels within the school and in a variety of contexts gave the teacher leaders confidence in their efforts. The researchers elaborated,

As advocates, they [teacher leaders] speak up for what is best for student learning, framing and reframing issues so that student learning is the central focus. As innovators, they act as change agents, implementing new practices. As stewards, they positively shape the profession by contributing to their professional growth and that of their colleagues. (Sinha et al., 2012, p. 14)

Similarly, Margolis and Deuel (2009) concluded, "Teacher leaders have significant capacity to impact instructional change" (p. 282). Based on an evaluation of

teacher leaders in a program for improving literacy teaching and learning in secondary schools, the study authors believed the context was ideal for teacher leaders to have a positive impact on peer staff development and, consequently, the curriculum implementation. Because the leaders were familiar with those they led, they were able to draw on that knowledge and uses “savvy and emotionally appropriate strategies to encourage colleagues to try new ideas” (Margolis & Deuel, 2009, p. 282).

Fundamentally, as presented by Cosenza (2015), teacher leadership is progressively seen as an avenue for improving schools, and correspondingly, for improving student achievement. Cosenza (2015) states teacher leaders can “use group skills and influence to improve the educational practice of their peers, model effective practices, exercise their influence in formal and informal contexts, and support collaborative team structures within their schools” (p. 82). Referencing the Teacher Leader Model Standards, Cosenza (2015) emphasizes that teacher leaders, when effective, (a) foster collaboration, (b) improve teacher practice, (c) promote ongoing professional learning, (d) facilitate improvement in student learning, (e) encourage use of assessment data, and (f) improve school-community outreach.

**Teacher Leaders as *Agents Changed*.** However, as Wenner and Campbell (2017) cautioned, many of the struggles with unmet expectations that teacher leaders experience are because of missing or poorly designed teacher leader training. “It is presumptuous to think that teachers intuitively know how to lead their colleagues or schools without any focused support in the form of professional development” (Wenner & Campbell, 2017, p. 136). Consequently, there have been many attempts to nurture teacher leader capacity and to generate teacher leader development pathways. These

programs exist both within the states and around the globe. Some of these efforts have been successful; others have not. Following, a few exemplar programs are presented to highlight programmatic strengths and weaknesses.

Recognizing the impact of teacher leaders on campus reform efforts, one Lebanese school created their own professional development days (Ghamrawi, 2013). These in-house workshops took place on specified days during the school year and included a number of learning experiences developed by the school's faculty and aligned to campus priorities outlined by the school's administration. Veteran teachers were called upon to design and to facilitate the professional development of their peers, fostering growth in their mentorship skills and in their professional learning. Through leading professional development activities linked to campus goals, the teacher leaders (a) enhanced their own professional development, (b) honed their leadership skills, and (c) self-reflected on their own educational practice. One teacher leader shared, "I think professional days have brought out of me the leader who has long been waiting to be released" (Ghamrawi, 2013, p. 180).

Similarly, the state of Victoria in Australia created a teacher leadership program entitled Leading Professional Learning (LPL) (Clemans, Berry & Lougran, 2012). The primary aim of LPL was to train teachers over a three-year span to assume teacher leadership positions on their campus and to develop the new leaders' capacity to provide professional development to their campus peers. The initiative ended with a capstone project that required the teacher leaders to write and publish a case study on their experiences as a leader, reflecting on the successes and struggles they experienced in facilitating the peer professional development. The researchers found that the

requirement for participants to write and to publish their reflections in a case study helped the teacher leaders to reflect more effectively on their experiences and to consolidate their learning, bringing clarity to what the teacher leaders learned through the process of leading. “It was in the act of writing that they [the teacher leaders] came to realize what they knew and to feel the confidence they needed to rightly express their knowledge of leadership” (Clemans et al., 2012, p. 294).

Concerned with how struggling schools in Scotland could leverage the power of teacher leaders to stimulate change, Hamilton, Forde, and McMahon (2018) recommended that teacher leaders be afforded a pathway by which teacher leaders could “build progressively the knowledge and skills they need” (p. 74). Additionally, the pathway should include flexibility and provide multiple opportunities to access trainings tailored to the perceived needs of the teacher leader and also essential to effective teacher leadership. However, the authors cautioned that although pathways would support teacher leadership development and growth, precautions needed to be taken to avoid the pathways becoming simply a sequence of hoops through which developing teacher leaders are required to jump (Hamilton et al., 2018).

Newton et al. (2013) interviewed participants from a Canadian teacher leader initiative developed to facilitate instructional technology integration on their campus. The researchers concluded that the teachers so grew and benefited from their experience that 20 of the 21 of the teacher leaders transitioned into formal leadership roles. “The study findings suggest that teacher leadership roles may have a significant effect in generating skills and interest in formal leadership” (Newton et al., 2013, p. 105). For teacher leaders, the empowerment, support in risk-taking, and confidence-building they

encountered in teacher leader programs encouraged them to consider career options they previously would not have entertained. During the study, participants pointed to the “opportunities to experience other educational contexts outside of their school environment” (Newton et al., 2013, p. 108).

Continuing this trend, three teacher leader programs in the states, one in Massachusetts, one in Arizona, and a third in South Carolina, also saw positive results from their professional development efforts for teacher leaders. In the Boston Teacher Leadership Certificate program, teacher leaders were guided in creating professional development courses for their peers (Berg, Bosch, & Souvanna, 2013). Although the teacher leaders served in a variety of campus roles including team leader, content coach, and data facilitator, each teacher leader completed a learning series built to develop the teacher leaders’ leadership skills and role efficacy. Additionally, the teacher leaders were asked to provide feedback or evaluative information on their participation in the program. This information was then used to generate discussion guides for campus leadership. “Four conditions were salient in their [the teacher leaders’] responses: a common vision for shared leadership, clarity around authority, trust, and time” (Berg et al., 2013, p. 27).

In Arizona, the Arizona Master Teachers of Mathematics program was designed to develop further and to support already recognized Tucson-area expert mathematics teachers through a professional development apprenticeship and study group. During a series of institutes in partnership with a regional K-12 support center, teacher leaders learned the practice of cognitive coaching, using techniques of effective questioning to encourage teacher self-monitoring, self-analyzing, and self-evaluating by participants’ mentees. Professional development also included training in systems thinking, assisting

teacher leaders to understand the complexity of educational hierarchies and the position of the single campus within the web of a school district. The third component of the program was participation in a study group centered on strengthening the teacher leaders' pedagogical and mathematics content knowledge. One participant commented,

I realized that in the past, I have been a “problem solver.” In doing so, I have encouraged my colleagues to come to me again and again for answers and for solutions to their problem . . . . I need to help my colleagues to think for themselves to find solutions, not to rely on me to do it for them. (Felton & Page, 2014, p. 94)

Through involvement in the Arizona Master Teachers of Mathematics program, teacher leaders grew as mentors and as presenters of professional development.

In a study by Eargle (2013), a South Carolina rural high school took on the challenge of developing teacher leaders through a collaboration with a local liberal arts college. Recognizing the opportunity for greater synergy between the two schools, administration on both campuses came together to generate a plan that would better support the pre-intern experiences of future educators, while also developing teacher leaders on the high school campus. Six social studies teachers participated in the program and a seventh teacher, who was also on the education faculty at the college, were contracted to teach the methods course in which the field experiences of the education students were conducted. During the semester, the college students and the teachers engaged in dialogues about instructional best practices, creative instructional strategies, and personal reflections on the nature of the cooperative endeavor. Whereas previously the social studies teachers felt burdened with their role as a mentor and the

college students historically often missed or dismissed the opportunities to observe in the classrooms, by the conclusion of the semester, both students and teachers felt they benefited from the experience. Ultimately the professor emerged as a recognized teacher leader throughout the district and the social studies teachers all reported a more regular focus on new instructional strategies. The authors concluded that for the social studies teachers, “the focus on using the field experience program as a means of professional development prompted a more cohesive pedagogical focus and resulted in improved teacher leadership” (Eargle, 2013, p. 31).

Dempsey (1992), in developing a conceptualization of teacher leadership, indicated there were four views of teachers as leaders. The author proposed,

Four images of the teacher can serve as the basis of a conceptual framework for a program to develop teachers as leaders. The images proposed are teacher as fully functioning person, teacher as reflective practitioner, teacher as scholar, and teacher as partner in learning. (Dempsey, 1992, p. 114)

I contend the characteristics of teacher leaders as partners in learning and as scholars directly correspond to teacher leaders *as agents of change* and teacher leaders *as agents changed*. The teacher leader as a partner in learning is providing professional development for others, serving as a mentor or coach, and supporting broader campus initiatives and programs. This concept is the teacher leader as *an agent of change*. Prior to assuming teacher leadership and during their tenure as a developing scholar, teacher leaders participate in a variety of learning and professional development opportunities, generally designed to prepare them for their teacher leader role and to support them as they experience that role. This outcome is the teacher leader as *an agent changed*.

## **Statement of the Purpose**

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of participants in a teacher leader development program called the *Career Pathways Program*. This program was instituted in a large, urban school district in the southern United States beginning in 2013. The Career Pathways Program was designed to allow highly effective teachers who were seeking campus leadership opportunities, and who also wished to remain in the classroom, the opportunity to pursue an alternate campus leader career path, a path apart from the traditional assistant principal route (ABC School District, 2016). More specifically, I analyzed the evaluative statements of prior program participants taken from the end of the year (EOY) questionnaires completed by program participants in the 2016-2017 and the 2017-2018 school years. In conducting this study, an examination of the teacher leaders' statements provided insights into the experiences of teacher leaders and added to the growing literature on teacher leadership and the impact of teacher leaders in public education.

## **Research Questions**

The Career Pathways Program was implemented to allow schools within the ABC School District to recognize, reward, and retain their best teachers. By contextualizing teacher mentoring, the Career Pathways Program seeks to support teacher leaders in developing leadership and peer coaching skills (ABC School District, 2016). To analyze the experiences of program participants in accomplishing these goals, in this study I addressed the following research questions:

1. How do teacher leaders describe their experiences in the Career Pathways Program?



2. How do teacher leaders describe the strengths and weaknesses of the Career Pathways Program?
3. What conditions, positively and negatively, influence teacher leaders in the Career Pathways Program?

### **Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework for this study was built on the notion of distributed leadership. Originating in the business sector, distributed leadership came to be more closely associated with education at the start of this century and was, in part, a response to the rise of school accountability and educational reform efforts (Harris & Spillane, 2008). Spillane, Halverson, and Diamond (2004) delineated a perspective on school leadership that they termed *distributed*. Focused on the how and the why of school leadership, the researchers concluded that the work of school leadership ought to be shared, and the tasks of leadership should be executed through an “interaction of leaders, followers, and the situation” (Spillane et al., 2004, p. 27). As teacher leaders participate in a variety of leadership tasks, formal and informal, this study embraced the framework of distributed leadership and the appreciation that distributed leadership provided “a frame that helps researchers build cases for practitioners to interpret and think about in their on-going leadership practice” (Spillane et al., 2004, p. 28).

### **Educational Significance**

Qualitative research results focused on teacher leaders who fulfilled a defined role within a structured program purportedly designed to facilitate teacher leaders’ professional development and partnership with campus-level administration. Program goals included the effective coaching of teachers’ peers and the academic growth of

students (ABC School District, 2016). A review of program qualitative, archival data, specifically the statements of prior program participants taken from EOY questionnaires completed by program participants in the 2016-2017 and the 2017-2018 school years provided evaluative feedback on the teacher leaders' experiences in the Career Pathways Program's professional development and the programs' efforts to support teacher leader involvement in campus distributive leadership. Research results broadened the understanding of the experiences of teacher leaders, their successes and their struggles, and elucidated on the perceived impact of teacher leaders on the achievement of campus' goals.

Of significance was the location of this initiative within a large, southern, urban district where the need to capitalize on the limited resources of personnel, time, and finances is acute. Consequently, this study provided insights into how to effectively facilitate the programmatic and administrative support that teacher leaders often report as missing. As recommended by Weiner (2011), to ensure teacher leader success, campus administration needs to accommodate for the time needed to complete additional teacher leaders duties, to allocate for supplemental teacher leaders professional development, and to discern the personnel best suited to serve as teacher leaders.

Additionally, although with a stated program outcome of student academic progress, evidence in this study did not provide a link between teacher leader actions, administrative actions, and student learning. According to York-Barr and Duke (2004), "there are many well-reasoned assertions and even some data-based inferences about the effects of teacher leadership on student learning, but little evidence exists to support these claims" (p. 285). Although historically teacher leaders believed they were distracted

from giving enough time and energy to their work with students, this study provided insights into how teacher leaders and administrators, working cooperatively, could positively impact student achievement (Angelle & Schmid, 2007). Discovered information, albeit through the eyes of the teacher leaders, confirmed the effectiveness of the program's teacher leadership development and support. Positive evaluative findings and conclusions have guaranteed the viability of the program and supported efforts in program expansion and replication within the district and beyond.

### **Method**

This phenomenological study provided insights into teacher leadership as a conceptualization of distributed leadership. This study was constructed around a phenomenological approach to understanding the experiences, impressions, and conditions surrounding teacher leaders within a district-level teacher leader initiative, known as the Career Pathways Program. Johnson and Christensen (2014) discussed phenomenology as a description of one or more individuals' awareness of and response to a particular action or series of events. The German philosopher Edmund Husserl founded phenomenology in the late 19th century to express individuals' experiences of their surroundings or what Husserl termed a *life-world*. Phenomenological researchers seek to describe these experiences or phenomenon (Johnson & Christensen, 21014). Therefore, in this study, I sought to describe the experiences of teacher leaders who participated in the Career Pathways Program and to understand the program conditions that influenced their perceptions of the leadership experience and of the program's effectiveness.

**Research Paradigm.** Personal reflection, research, and collegial dialogue led me to conclude that I view myself as a social constructionist. Through discussion and review, I considered the fundamental tenets of constructionism and recognized that I highly value an emphasis on the importance of social interaction and the process of interpersonal communication (Berger & Luckmann, 1967). Social constructionists focus on meaning making as a relational process, co-constructed by social members, closely echoed my own understanding of how individuals interact to create shared meaning and understanding (Berger & Luckmann, 1967).

**Participants and Instrumentation.** Study participants were Career Pathways Program teacher leader cohort members from the 2016-2017 and the 2017-2018 school years. These cohorts were comprised of teacher leaders with a range of experience in the Career Pathways program. Because the EOY questionnaire did not provide information regarding years of experience with the program, some teacher leaders might have been new to the program; others might have been involved in Career Pathways since its inception in 2013.

However, according to questionnaire responses, each cohort included teacher leaders who were identified and trained for a variety of Career Pathways roles such as instructional specialist, data coach, literacy coach, technology specialist, Teach Like a Champion coach, and induction coach. In Table 3 is a brief description of the various teacher leader roles filled by cohort members. Also in Table 3 is the number of teacher leaders for each role from each of the cohort years.

Table 3

*Teacher Leader Role Descriptions and Cohort Numbers*

| Teacher Leader Role                    | Description of Role  | School Year<br>2016-2017<br>(n) | School Year<br>2017-2018<br>(n) |
|--|--|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Classroom Culture Specialist           | Assess teacher skills in classroom management and culture while identifying or creating resources and strategies to build those skills.  | 8                               | 14                              |
| Data Tracker and Assessment Specialist | Train and coach colleagues to examine student performance data for trends and build teacher skills in collecting and analyzing data.     | 17                              | 27                              |
| Effective Practice Specialist          | Model effective teaching by providing teachers opportunities to observe live or taped lessons taught by the specialist.                  | 0                               | 26                              |
| Instructional Excellence Coach         | Identify resources and strategies and provide observation feedback to build teacher skills aligned to the instructional practice rubric. | 16                              | 26                              |
| Instructional Technology Specialist    | Model, observe, coach, and provide feedback to peers on incorporating technology into their instructional practice.                      | 9                               | 8                               |
| Literacy Specialist                    | Identify effective literacy resources and strategies while modeling, observing, and coaching peers on district literacy initiatives.     | 3                               | 14                              |

(continued)

| Teacher Leader Role                     | Description of Role  | School Year<br>2016-2017<br>( <i>n</i> ) | School Year<br>2017-2018<br>( <i>n</i> ) |
|---|--|--|--|
| STEM Instructional Specialist           | Identify effective STEM related resources for classroom instruction while modeling, observing, and coaching peers on implementation. | 6  | 4  |
| <i>Teach Like a Champion</i> Specialist | Plan and facilitate <i>Teach Like a Champion</i> learning opportunities that are aligned to campus goals.                            | 7  | 0  |

Additionally because participant information included in the EOY questionnaire was negligible, teacher leaders might have been from either a high school, a middle school, or an elementary school, and might have served on either a comprehensive or a magnet (specialty) campus within the district. Also, teacher leaders' length of tenure in the classroom might have varied, although all Career Pathways Program participants were identified as having successfully completed at least three years in the classroom. Success was defined as being evaluated as *effective* or *highly effective* through the district's teacher evaluation system.

**Data Collection.** Data were archival, taken from the EOY Career Pathways Program questionnaire responses of teacher leaders in the 2016-2017 and 2017-2018 cohorts. This questionnaire was anonymous and was designed to gather information and perceptions of teacher leaders' regarding the previous year's Career Pathways Program activities, trainings, and campus-based experiences. All data, as they were generated through the use of public school funds and public funded grants, were available for public review.

The district's program director consolidated responses from each EOY questionnaire and housed the teacher leaders' comments in an Excel document. Each teacher leader's responses were linked to the specified program survey question asked. In Table 4 is a listing of the EOY survey questions, along with the number of teacher leader responses for each question in each cohort year.

Table 4

*End of Year Survey Questions with Frequencies of Response*

| Survey Questions  | Responses in<br>School Year<br>2016-2017<br>( <i>n</i> ) | Responses in<br>School Year<br>2017-2018<br>( <i>n</i> ) |
|---|--|--|
| Was there anything you wish that training or your Problem Solving Community addressed in order to help you be more successful in your role?               | 21   | 51   |
| How was your principal able to create additional time during the school day? How often did the additional time occur and for what length of time?         | 33   | 58   |
| Was there anything that your principal or another administrator did in particular that helped you be successful in your Career Pathways leadership role?  | 35   | 76   |
| Was there anything you wish that your principal or another administrator had done to help you be more successful in your Career Pathways leadership role? | 35   | 76   |
| What specifically about your Career Pathways leadership role is more attractive to you?   | 41   | 85   |
| What would keep you from participating in the program again?  | 36*  | 79*  |
| Is there anything else about your experiences with the Career Pathways Program that you would like to share?  | 18*  | 55*  |

Note: Not all participant responses were counted because comments included *nothing* or were tangential to the posed questions

**Legitimation.** An examination of the *Qualitative Legitimation Model* outlined by Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2007) reveals the potential threats to internal credibility and external credibility that are inherent in this phenomenological study. Threats to internal credibility, as discussed by the authors, undercut the dependability and the *truth value* of a study. Of specific concern to me were voluptuous legitimation, researcher bias, and confirmation bias.

These threats were prominent because of my personal prior experiences with the Career Pathways Program. As a researcher, I had to be reflective throughout the process of data analysis to help ensure personal preconceptions and knowledge about the program were bracketed. This bracketing or suspension is fundamentally important to the phenomenological researcher (Johnson & Christensen, 2014). Additional threats, such as observational bias and reactivity, arose from the manner in which the data were originally collected (i.e., through EOY questionnaires). Sensitivity to the data collection process encouraged me to remain mindful that not all program participants may have completed the questionnaires, or that participants may have self-edited their comments in an attempt to either please or undermine program or campus leadership.

External threats to credibility were also inherent to this phenomenological study. Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2007) discussed three external credibility threats that were of prominent concern to me: (a) interpretive validity, (b) generalizability, and (c) research bias. Each of these threats was rooted in my personal experiences with the Career Pathways Program. However, I attempted to mitigate these threats through the use of a variety of methods including (a) triangulation by using multiple years' data; (b) weighting the evidence, giving proportionate attention to thicker and richer, or more



robust, participant responses; and (c) frequency effect size, calculating the number of times a response, term, or concept, along with their corollaries, occurred in the data.

**Data Analysis.** In this journal-ready study I used the processes of constant comparison analysis to aid me in understanding teacher leaders' perceptions of their leadership experience. Glaser (1965) first introduced the concept of constant comparison analysis, which two years later was incorporated into the grounded theory process that was developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967). Since that time, constant comparison analysis has become an accepted method for analysis of narrative and textual data, such as interview transcriptions and open-ended questionnaire responses. The primary purpose of this analysis is to generate a set of themes that effectively elucidate on the topic or subject of the research (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2007).

The characteristics of constant comparison analysis include a path for understanding possible multiple meanings of data and to identify the relationships among these meanings. The result, as envisioned by Glaser and Strauss (1967), is to build theory, not to test it (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2007). Although initially developed to include three stages, the constant comparison analysis of teacher leader questionnaire responses were comprised of two phases: (a) open coding and (b) axial coding. The smaller data set inherent in the responses from a single program (Career Pathways), although the program data encompasses two years, prevents the integration and refinement of theory, as originally contained in the tenets of the more holistic grounded theory.

The first stage of constant comparison analysis, known as open coding, involves assembling the puzzle pieces for the analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Consequently,

using the Excel-based bank of Career Pathways' EOY teacher leader open-ended questionnaire responses, I began a review of the data. Chunking the various participant responses by survey question asked, I ascribed a code or codes, that is descriptive words or short phrases for each answer. These summative descriptors indicated the primary content, context, or meanings of each questionnaire response.

The process for developing these codes was comprised of three elements: origination, verification, and nomination (Constas, 1992). In my analysis, I adopted a hermeneutical approach to the origination of the research codes. Constas (1992) described this method of orientation as the researcher being in the participant's place to "re-cognize and re-create his personal, intellectual position" (p. 259). Regarding verification, I utilized a rational approach, seeking to ensure that my chosen codes were logical extensions of the data. Nomination was aligned to my hermeneutical approach of origination, attempting to discover each teacher leaders' "psychological moment" (Constas, 1992, p. 259). As might be deduced, my coding practice temporal designations were posteriori or developed after the organization and review of the data (Constas, 1992).

The second stage of constant comparison analysis is axial coding or grouping the original codes into broader categories or themes (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2008). To accomplish this stage, I generated in a separate Excel document the list of codes that I had generated from each open-ended questionnaire response. As I repeatedly reviewed and reflected on this list, I looked for larger, overarching themes that may immerge. Further reflection on these themes, the themes' relationship to each other, and the study's

research questions resulted in potential answers to the research questions posed in this study.

### **Research Results**

A cursory review of the survey questions completed for each of the teacher leader cohort years revealed a lack of continuity in structure and content between the two surveys. To compensate for this discontinuity, I created a survey question cross walk, and identified 11 questions that were identical in both survey years. Of these 11 questions, one question was eliminated because the associated response data was incomplete. This question was designed as a Likert-scale item, but participant responses were absent from the survey files received from the Career Pathways Program manager. The loss of these data was profoundly unfortunate because the question had asked participants to rate the effectiveness of specific program activities.

The data associated with three additional questions were also eliminated from consideration in answering my research questions. These questions were determined to elicit what Saldaña (2016) termed *attribute codes*. They resulted in data that provided teacher leader role-related information about the survey participants, rather than insights into the participants' experiences in the Career Pathways Program.

Ultimately, the responses to seven survey questions, duplicated in both cohort years, were coded for their connection to my three research questions. This process resulted in 21 code sets, which provided data from which research results were extrapolated. Figures 1 through 7 contain these code sets as they aligned to my research questions, along with the frequency of each code.

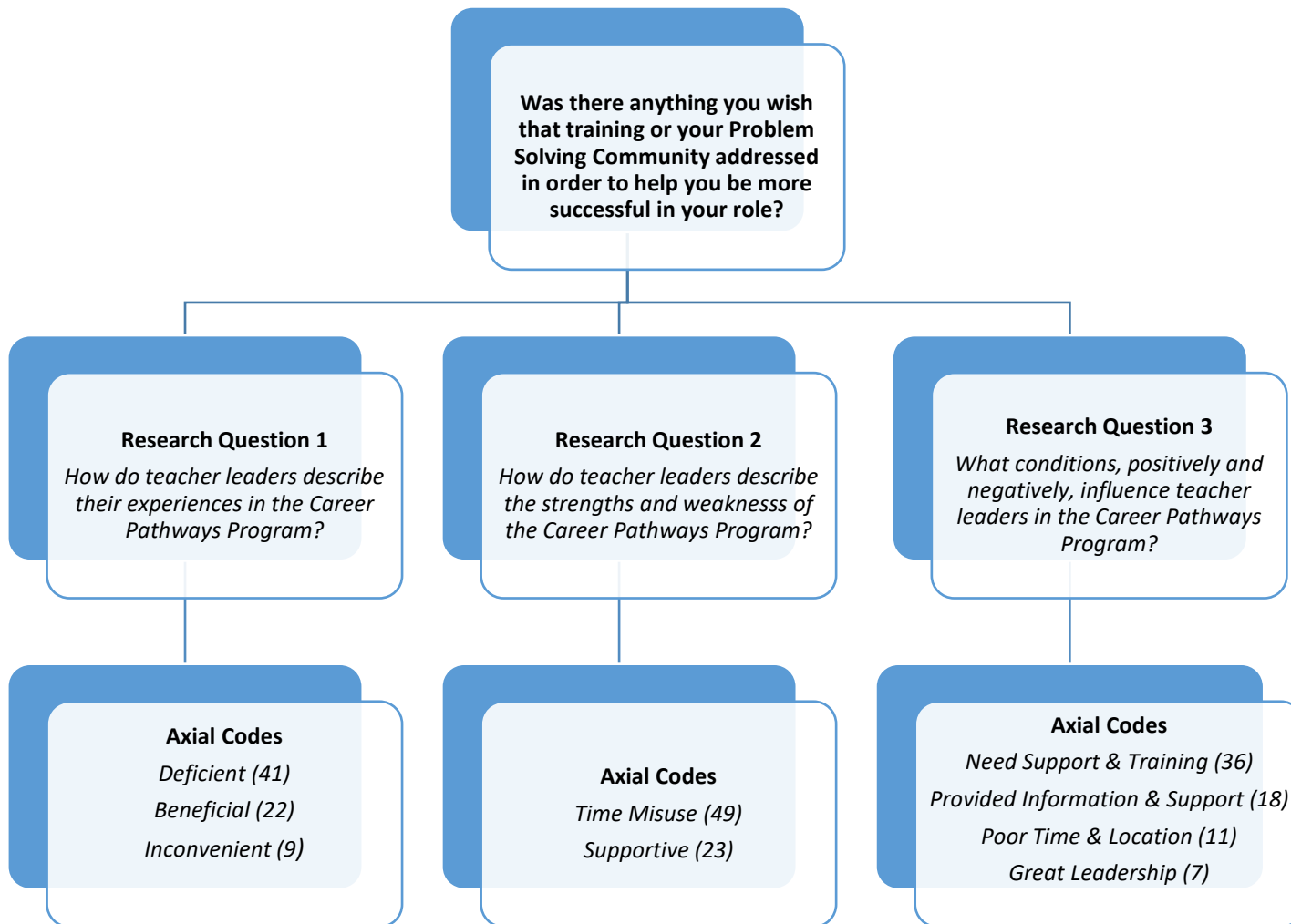


Figure 1. Axial Codes with Response Frequency for Survey Question 1.

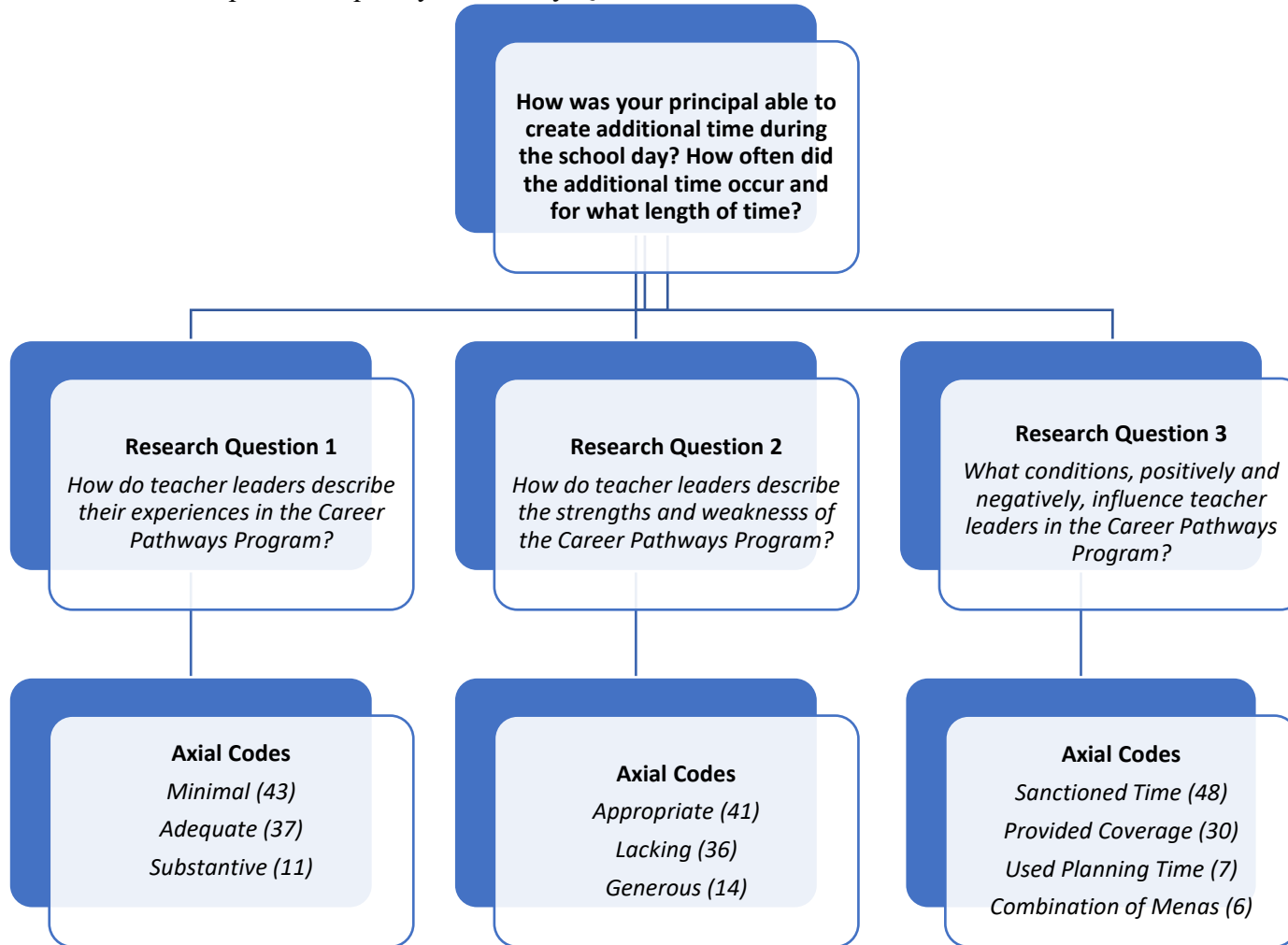


Figure 2. Axial Codes with Response Frequency for Survey Question 2.

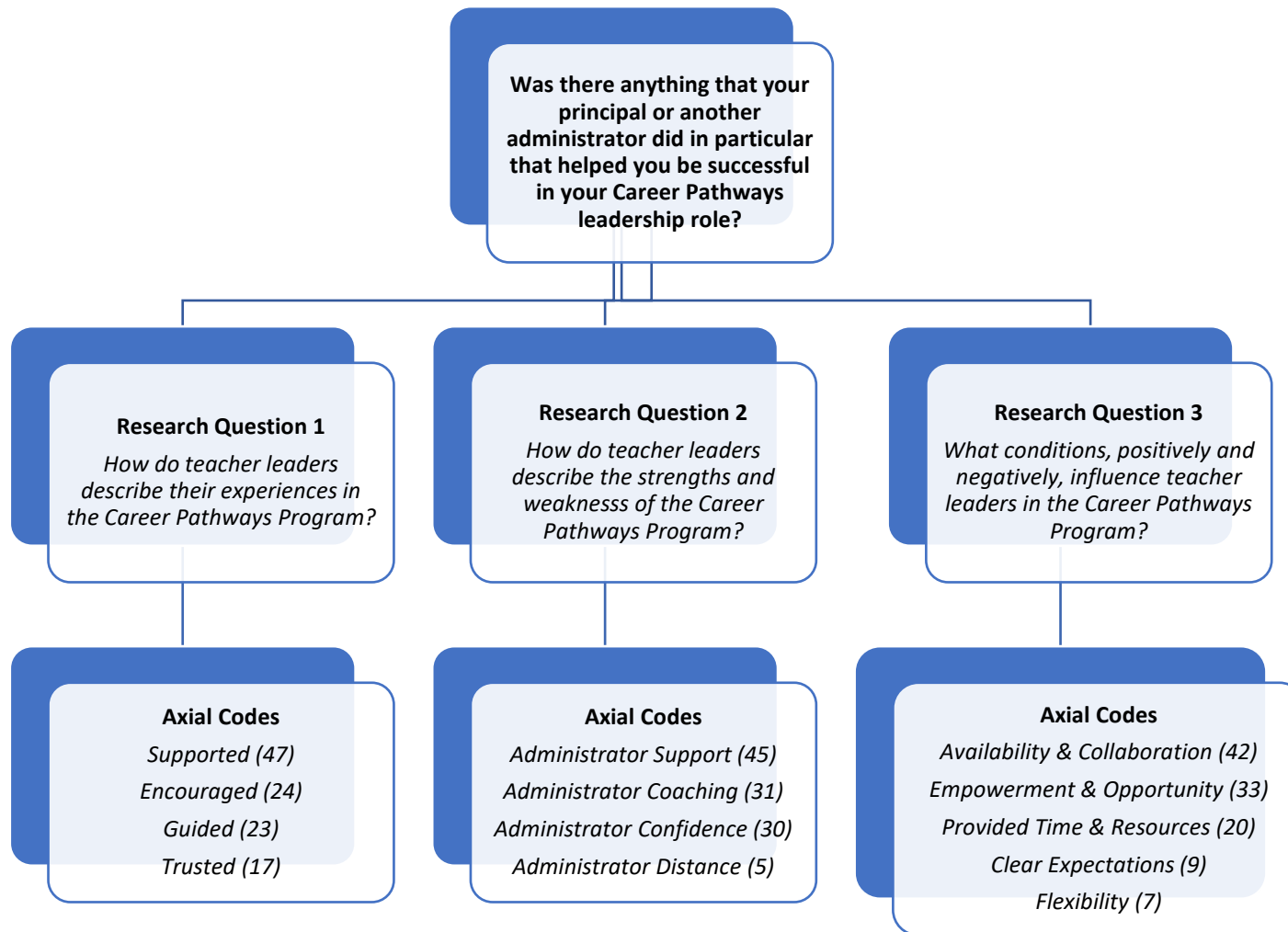


Figure 3. Axial Codes with Response Frequency for Survey Question 3.

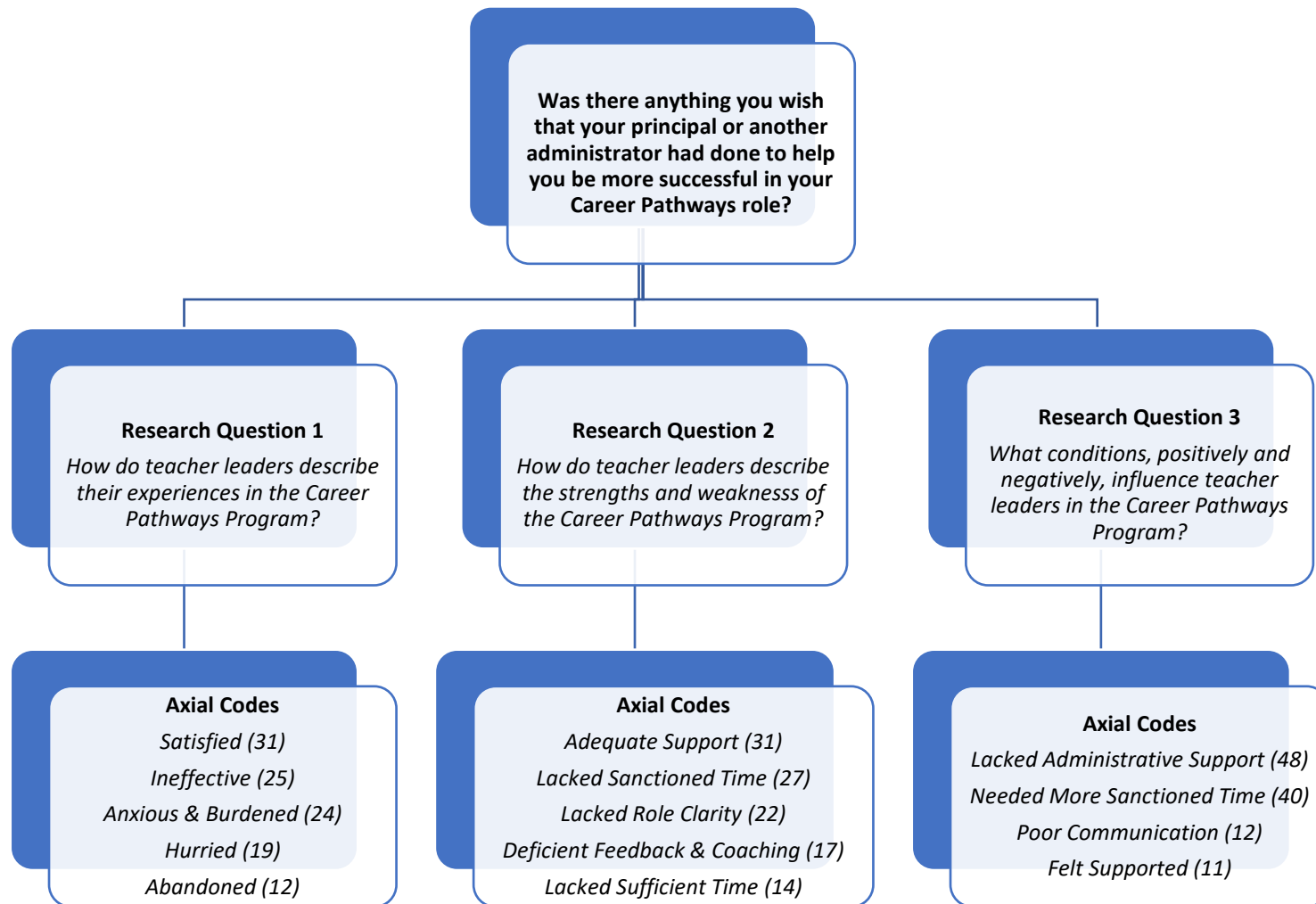


Figure 4. Axial Codes with Response Frequency for Survey Question 4.

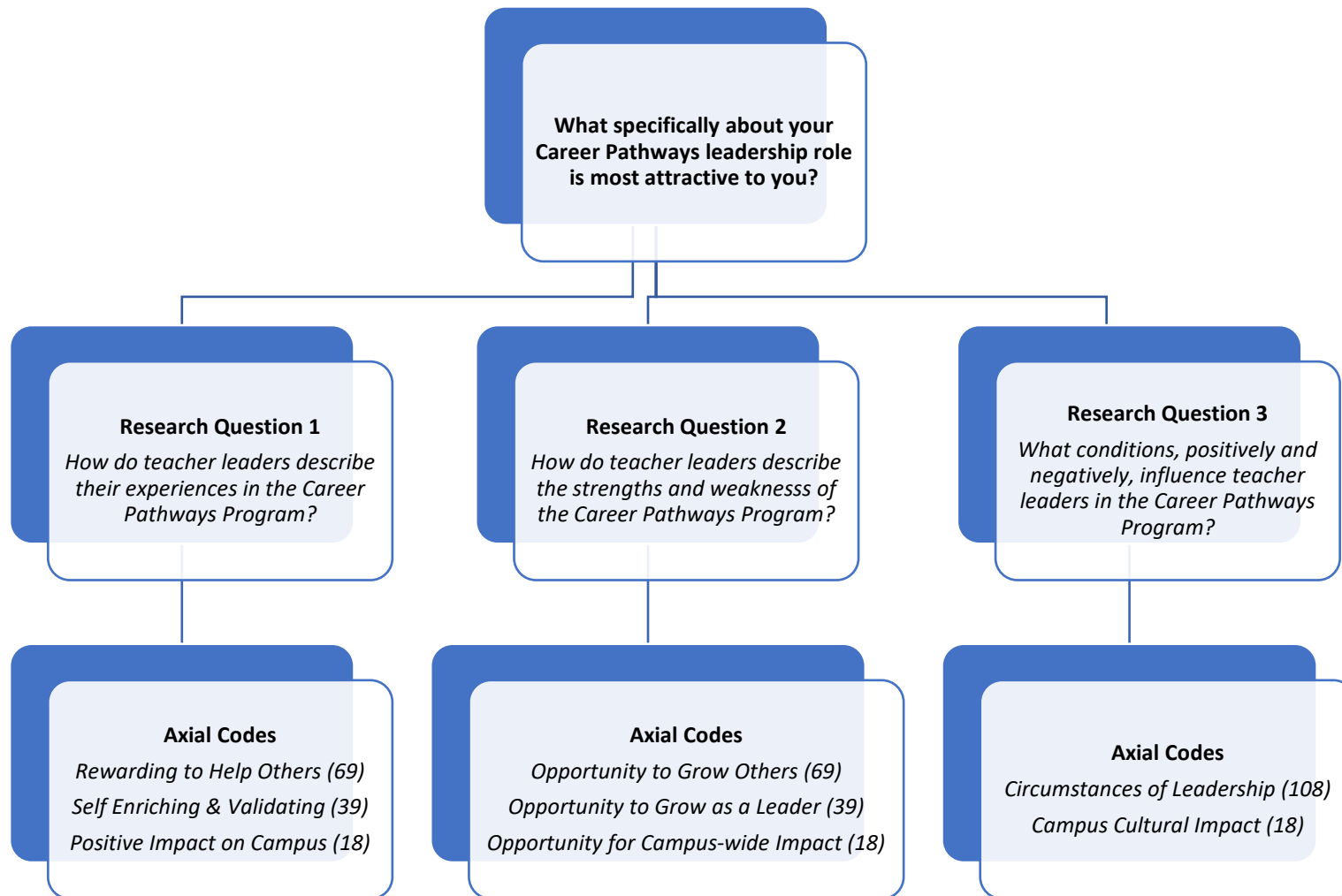


Figure 5. Axial Codes with Response Frequency for Survey Question 5.



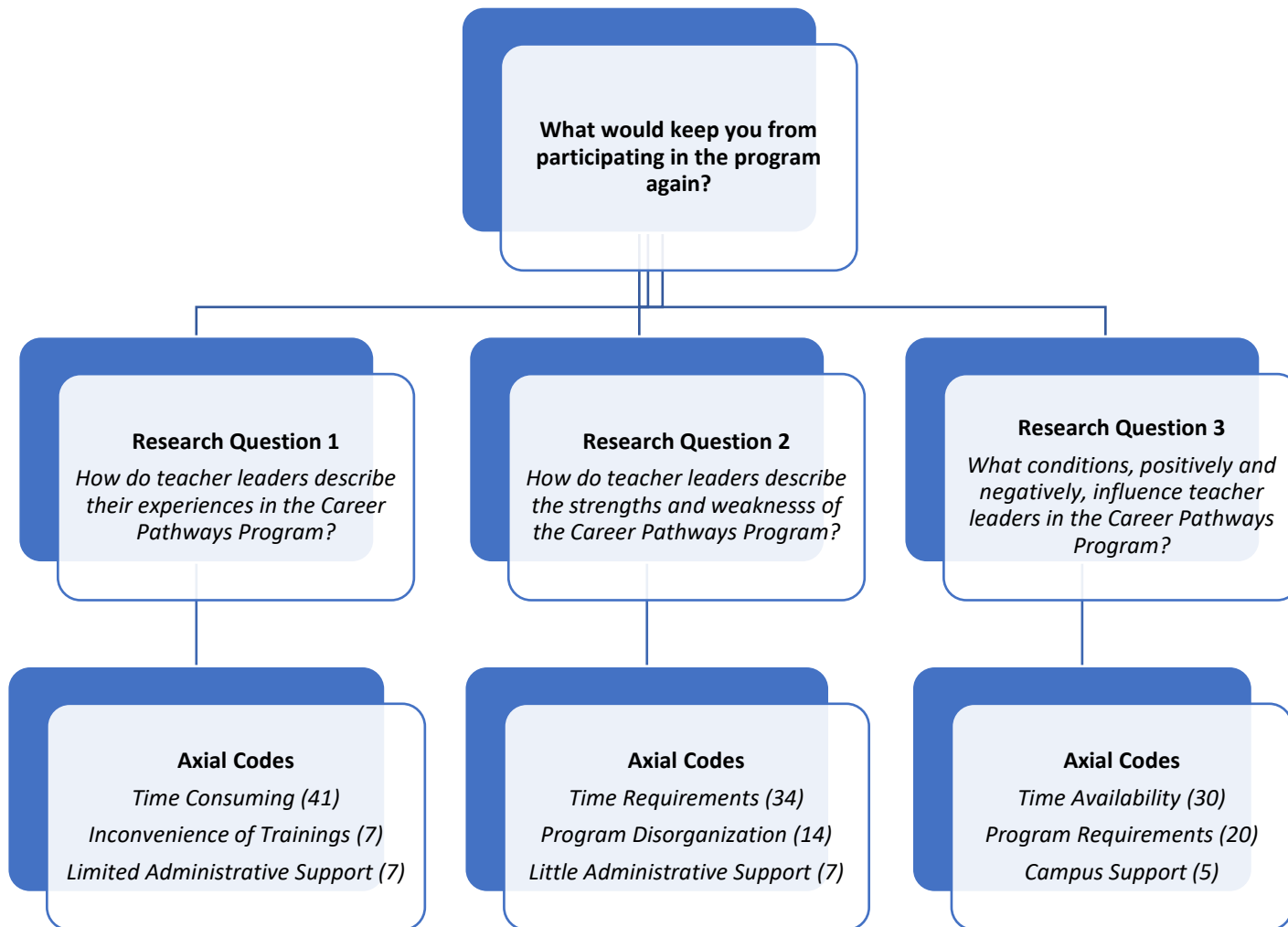


Figure 6. Axial Codes with Response Frequency for Survey Question 6.

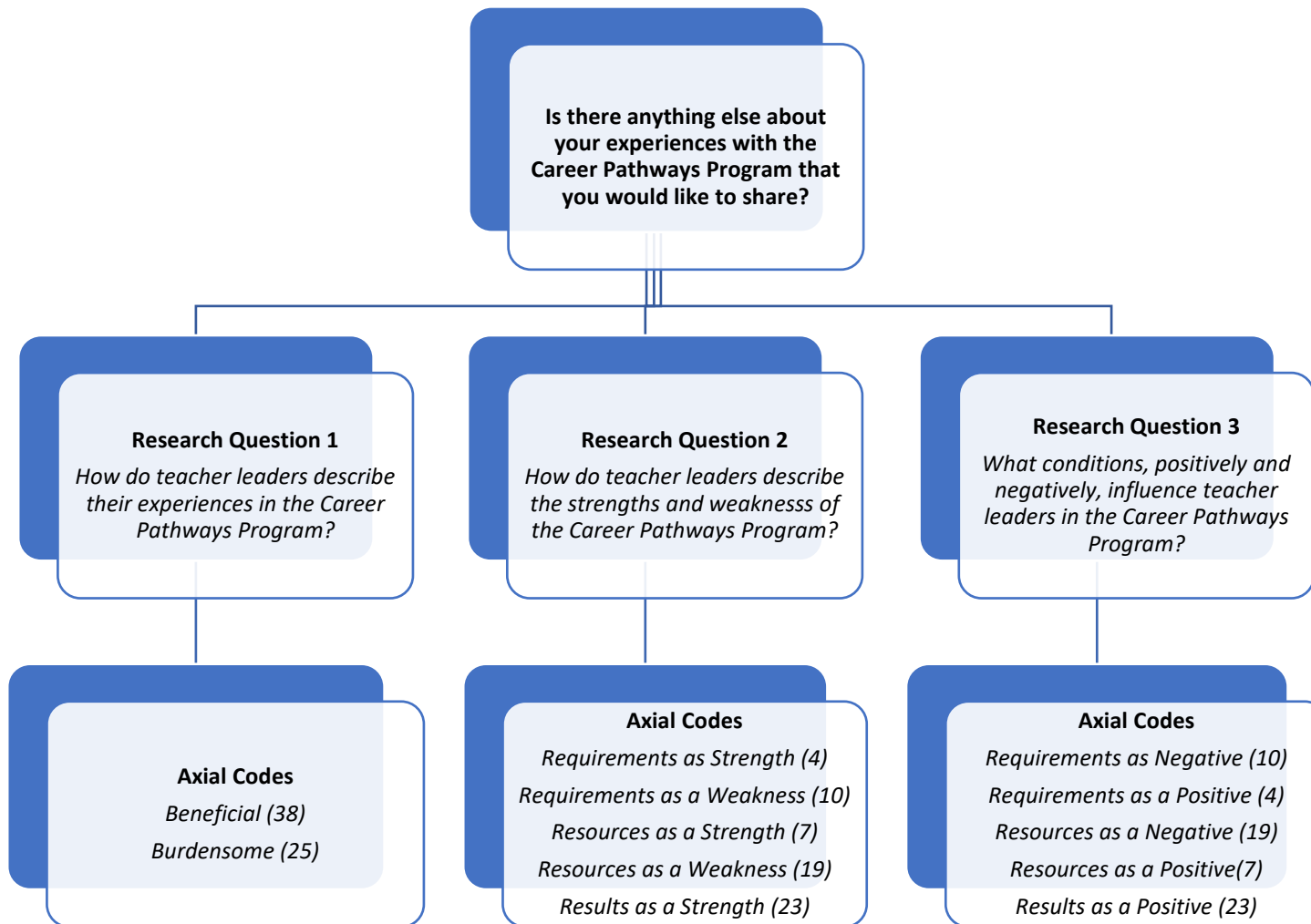


Figure 7. Axial Codes with Response Frequency for Survey Question 7.

**Background to Participant Surveys.** Minimal information about individual program participants was provided by the Career Pathways Program or contained in the survey questions reviewed. What was known, based on program participation requirements, was that all teacher leaders had successfully completed at least three years of teaching in the classroom. Success was defined as receiving a district teacher appraisal rating of *effective* or *highly effective*. In addition, each teacher leader had to be nominated by a campus administrator, generally the campus principal, and had to complete an online application.

As a stipulation to receive the program participation stipend, each teacher leader (a) submitted an updated resume that reflected the Career Pathways Program experience, (b) created an e-portfolio that highlighted personal triumphs and struggles in the program, and (c) completed an EOY survey regarding their experiences as a Career Pathways Program teacher over the previous school year. Out of a total of 187 Career Pathways participants, 66 completed the 2016-2017 survey and 121 completed the 2017-2018 survey. However, because survey completion was anonymous and because many participants were cohort members in the program both years, it was not possible to determine an exact number of unique survey respondents. Consequently, I looked at total participants from both years in the aggregate. The greatest number of unique responses to a single survey question was 126. The smallest number of unique responses to a single question was 73. Table 4 shows the number of responses for each EOY question for each year of this study.

The program participants represented teacher leaders assigned to eight separate teacher leader roles. The number of participants in each teacher leader role for each

survey year is outlined in Table 3. It is important to recognize that a majority of the teacher leaders served as Data Tracking and Assessment Specialists and as Instructional Excellence Coaches. Only seven served as a Teach Like a Champion Coach, which was only offered as a role in the 2016-2017 school year. The Effective Practice Specialist role was only offered in the 2017-2018 school year.

The survey results did not provide demographic information about participants' gender, total years as a teacher, or educational background. Also missing was any indicator of the setting in which the teacher leader served, that is an elementary, a middle school, or a high school campus. Although this information may have provided deeper insights into the teacher leaders' experiences within the Career Pathways Program, the absence of this data did not prevent me from answering my research questions.

**Research Question 1 – Described Experiences.** Teacher leaders' work in the Career Pathways Program was divided into three types of activities: (a) fulfilling district required program elements, (b) fostering campus level administrative interaction, and (c) facilitating role-associated leadership tasks. In each activity category, teacher leaders shared positive and negative experiences, but characterized their overall involvement as being *beneficial*. A recurring negative critique concerned the amount of *time* teacher leaders were required to invest in their program participation.

Overall, most teacher leaders entered the program anticipating having an experience that was personally *fulfilling* and one that would have a positive *impact* on those with whom they would be working. They further described their leadership efforts as *enriching* and *rewarding*, with one participant responding, "I am able to help new teachers to grow in their instructional practice, therefore impacting the learning of more

students.” Another teacher leader shared how rewarding the experience was, because it was, “Giving me the opportunity to grow as a leader and . . . the chance to network with other educators/leaders that share the same interests.” A third cohort member simply wrote, “I love helping teachers grow!”

Teacher leaders also appreciated the *support* they received from campus-level administrative leadership over the past year and felt guided by that leadership through the experience. Although the teacher leaders expressed appreciation for receiving administrative support, they also shared a desire for that support to be more effective and better designed to strengthen participants’ emerging leadership skills. Several teacher leaders shared an uneasiness at realizing campus leadership was not familiar with the teacher leader’s role description or with overall program requirements. One teacher leader wrote, “I wish that my principal would have had a clearer understanding of what my job was. I wish she would have known the roles and was able to provide coverage to me for completing the role.”

A second participant elaborated,

My principal believed that the career pathways program was an extension of administrative staff on campus . . . so in the event that they were not on campus it was expected that teacher leaders would take over. I wish my principal had a better understanding of the program. She tried to feed teacher leaders jobs that were not associated with the roles. When we refused those tasks, the relationship between principal and teacher leaders became tumultuous.

Relatedly, teacher leader experiences with completing the required Career Pathways Program elements frequently generated frustration, especially in relationship to

teachers' participation in the mandated Problem Solving Communities. More than two-thirds of the participants indicated a concern over the structure, location, or timing of these group meetings. One respondent commented, "The meetings were impossible to attend when you teach tutorials, or have other after school responsibilities." Another, when describing the Problem Solving Community's expectations, stated, "I wish I had more time and more modeling using the tracking tool and building the website." A third wrote, "I truly wish we didn't have the meetings. They were a waste of time. It would have been more useful to use a message board for those with concerns."

However, not every teacher leader felt the Problem Solving Communities were a challenge. Another cohort member responded,

I really enjoyed having [named leader] as our PSC [Problem Solving Community] presenter. She allowed for an open atmosphere and was very good at keeping us on task. She was also able to give strategic practices to immediately use in regard to any of our daily concerns in addition to the wonderful feedback and suggestions from our awesome group. I truly enjoyed every moment of PSC!

**Research Question 2 – Program Strengths and Weaknesses.** Teacher leaders in the Career Pathways Program identified the program's overall strength as providing *opportunities*: (a) an opportunity to be a positive force on the campus, (b) an opportunity to grow and to mature as a leader, and (c) an opportunity to learn and to benefit from interactions with campus leadership. When describing their work with campus peers, one teacher leader was effusive about the strengths of the program, exclaiming,

I just want to do this full time, if there is ever a role for that, please let me know.

I want to impact multiple campuses and help out! I have been infected with the bug that is ‘Culture’, ‘Planning’, and ‘Community.’ I want to do this full time!

Additionally, teacher leaders appreciated the opportunities they had to develop their own leadership skills. Reflecting on the year-long assignment, one cohort member highlighted personal leadership development by stating,

Thank you so much for the opportunity. This experience has provided clarity on my long-term goals and aspirations both on my campus and within the district. . . . Thank you for helping me to understand that being a leader is learning how to build capacity in others instead of trying to do it all yourself.

Another participant simply shared, “The program improve[d] my leadership skills and also me as a teacher, as well.”

Many cohort members credited their campus administrators for this leadership growth. The opportunities that were available to work side-by-side with school and district level leadership built teacher leaders’ confidence and skills in working with others. “The weekly check-in meetings provided focus to our [the principal and the teacher leader’s] purpose. We also did instructional rounds and how we debriefed was a good way for our SSO [school support officer], dean of instruction, and other leaders to model effective coaching techniques,” expressed one teacher leader. Another commented,

She [the principal] offered feedback. [She] trusted my ability to help other teachers and fulfill my role. If time was needed or something I needed to attend,

she would [allow] me to do so. She communicated with me weekly on plans for our campus and changes that needed to be made concerning data and instruction.

I third participant shared,

My principal allowed me the opportunity and trust to complete my roles and responsibilities as I saw fit. She would provide additional suggestions and support for things she wanted to see implemented campus wide. She trusted my judgement and was open to push back.

However, teacher leaders in the Career Pathways Program identified the program's overarching weakness as not ensuring the appropriate availability of *time*: (a) time for sufficient training of teacher leaders and those who support them, (b) time to complete the program's administrative and clerical requirements, and (c) time to effectively and consistently fulfill the responsibilities associated with the specific assigned teacher leadership role. Almost half of the respondents claimed that the time they were provided to complete teacher leader responsibilities and program requirements was lacking. Only 14 teacher leaders considered the time provided for the fulfillment of their roles to be generous.

Additionally, a significant number of cohort members indicated that the campus did not build in sanctioned or protected time for teacher leaders to facilitate their assigned role. One teacher leader lamented, "Principals need to be mindful about the need of conceding time out of the classroom in order to better develop the leadership role." Another echoed this sentiment stating, "Time is needed to complete the duties. Ancillary time, after school, and lunch time shouldn't be the only options."



To address this shortfall in sanctioned time, several campuses provided teacher leaders with classroom coverage by a substitute or another available staff member. However, teacher leaders perceived this practice as also being deficient. Expressing frustration with this practice, one participant wrote, “My principal had someone to cover my class or I used my ancillary time.” Also concerned about time management and the sacrifice of personal and instructional time, another teacher leader wrote,

Throughout the day the teachers would come to my location if it was something minor I could assist with. I would stay after school or go during my planning time to assist a teacher if it was needed in their classroom. Most of the time it would not take that long maybe an hour depending on the assistance the teacher needed.

Relatedly, when asked about potential future participation in the program, one participant claimed, “Not having sanctioned time to fulfill my role would keep me from participating in the program again,” A second reinforced this sentiment stating, “My principal not allowing me the adequate time that is needed in order to successfully perform my role specific duties” would be the practice that would prevent continuing with the Career Pathways Program.

Feeling exasperated by the entire experience, one participant vented, I have very little positives to say about the program. The requirement kept being redefined during the process. It felt like a burden and busy work. The TLA [Teacher Leader Academy] was useless and boring. The chairs were uncomfortable. The location was not convenient for people who live north. This program is not considerate of those who have teaching jobs and team lead

positions. In addition, those who have a family are further put at an inconvenience. The nerve of you to offer training for an e-portfolio two months before its due! You should have your standards set so they don't keep changing. The change of time tracking from M-F to Thurs.-Thurs. was just plain dumb. It just seems that everyone who works for this program has forgotten that we are teachers, which is a feat in itself

**Research Question 3 – Program Influences.** Teacher leaders in the Career Pathways Program were influenced by the level of *value* that campus administration placed on cohort members: (a) completing outlined program expectations, (b) spending time on fulfilling role responsibilities, and (c) working with campus administration on building personal leadership skills. Value was demonstrated through the amount of time, energy, and support that campus leadership invested in ensuring viable participation by the campus in the Career Pathways Program. As seen through the eyes of cohort members, teacher leaders' value was confirmed when they felt empowered and when they felt acknowledged for making a positive difference on their campus.

One teacher leader commended, "I just appreciated that my principal trusted me to do the work and did not micromanage my decisions or programs." A second cohort member shared, "[My principal] supported me, and encouraged me to continue to do what was most beneficial to my campus, colleagues and students. [He] involved me in conversations and decisions." A third participant reinforced a sense of being valued by the principal by writing, "She [my principal] trusted me and my talents and gave me the freedom and flexibility I needed to succeed."

Unfortunately, not every teacher leader experienced this level of being valued. Most frequently because sanctioned time was not honored, and because the campus principal was often not available, many cohort members felt disconnected from campus leadership and described feelings of isolation. One cohort member lamented, “I wished I would have had specified sanctioned time. We barely received sanctioned time, but when we did, it was always unexpected, and I had to sacrifice teaching time to satisfy Career Pathways requirements.” Feeling removed from broader campus leadership, another teacher leader shared a desire for,

Generally more regular check-ins [with administration] and clarity, especially at the beginning of the year. I didn't really get a caseload to work with until maybe October, so that made the beginning of the year feel confusing to me.

Also sensing a distance from campus administration, a participant quipped, “The program has potential, but [that potential] was not utilized on my campus.” Another teacher leader simply pleaded, “Allow the time to work with teachers!”

For many teacher leaders, the greatest hurdle was the disconnect that developed between campus expectations and district program requirements.

I wish there had [been] more clarity and alignment between her [the principal's] goals for me and the program. I also wish that I had been allowed opportunity to work with teachers at least a few times during school time to make my coaching more effective and meaningful.

Expounding the conflict between program and campus expectations, one participant complained, “Much of what my principal asked me to do didn't actually align with the CP [Career Pathways] requirements, so it often felt like two different roles, which made it

difficult to manage time to complete all of that.” A third teacher leader stated, “The amount of time spent on the website portfolio was counter intuitive to spending time doing the actual work with my teachers and students.”

However, more frequently than not, teacher leaders were aware of their own development as a campus leader and evaluated their experiences as a leader as being positive. One participant summarized,

I really enjoyed the opportunity of leading, but most importantly supporting teachers and helping them meet their goals. I also enjoyed planning and receiving information from my principal on the direction that she wanted my role to work and the duties I needed to perform.

A second cohort member shared,

It was a great experience that allowed me to have a taste of leadership roles and still being a classroom teacher. Also, [it] served as a great platform to be able to share and impart my expertise in more of a collaborative way. Also, it gave me the chance to motivate and inspire other teachers, as well as they did me, [by] trusting and believing in me.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

The Career Pathways Program affords several benefits to participating campuses, benefits that echo the intend and purpose behind the spread of teacher leader practice. More specifically, the Career Pathways Program provides for developing teacher leaders to share in the administrative tasks and instructional support that campus leaders crave. Additionally, Career Pathways established a means by which effective teachers and potential leaders in education can experience career advancement without abandoning the

classroom. In this way, the Career Pathways Program fulfills the expectations of the hybrid teacher leader while simultaneously nurturing and supporting teacher leader development.

The EOY survey results from teacher leaders indicated that, overall, program cohorts found participation in the program to be beneficial. The experience provided teacher leaders with a variety of opportunities to grow, professionally and personally. Additionally, most Career Pathways teacher leaders saw and felt valued in program participation, and they themselves valued the interaction they had with peers and the mentorship they experienced with campus administration.

However, participants were frequently frustrated by the various requirements of program participation. Teacher leaders felt that neither the structure of the program, nor the implementation of the program on the individual campus, fully afforded them the time they needed to effectively and efficiently fulfill the requisites of their teacher leader role. Consequently, teacher leaders did not sense that the time they invested or the support they provided was consistently valued by campus leadership.

Therefore, although the Career Pathways Program offers a viable means by which teacher leaders may be identified, trained, and supported, the need to ensure consistency in teacher leadership development across the program remains. Campus leadership needs training and support in implementing the program with fidelity. Additionally, district level program leadership would benefit from an in-depth review of expectations and practices, specifically surrounding the Problem Solving Communities.

By offering a variety of teacher leader roles, the program provides numerous opportunities for leadership participation. Those who accept the challenge of teacher

leadership within the Career Pathways Program benefit from the experiences they encounter. Additionally, they grow as a leader as they actively engage in program-related training, such as the Problem Solving Communities. Although the degree of fidelity with which program elements are implemented varies, both between campuses and at the district program level, teacher leaders have multiple opportunities to experience campus-level leadership. These experiences result in the teacher leaders becoming *agents of change* and *agents changed*.

However, to meet the needs of Career Pathways Program participants and to ensure the viability and growth of the district initiative, several changes in how the program is evaluated are recommended. First, as the primary vehicle for obtaining participant feedback, the EOY survey questionnaire needs to be revised and piloted to ensure the instrument clearly and consistently provides the robust information that district program leaders need. The survey elements need to be consistent across annual cohorts, and the questions need to be worded so that they elicit richer open-ended responses, avoiding questions that can generate a single word response, especially those items that can be answered with a simple affirmative or negative response (Johnson & Christensen, 2014).

Additionally, survey developers and district program administrators need to effectively plan for recording and for preserving non-narrative question responses, such as Likert scale-type items. Such questions would broaden the scope of the program feedback provided and compliment the narrative, open-ended responses. If questions were also grouped around essential program elements and constructed using a spectrum of question formats, solicited information would provide data gleaned from a variety of

perspectives. For example, several questions about Problem Solving Communities, rather than a single question, would provide a more holistic insight into this essential, and time-intensive program element. Once solidified, requiring completion of the EOY survey will better guarantee a focused picture of participants' experiences and will highlight areas of program strength and weakness. To assist in survey development and the recording of teacher leader responses, it is suggested the district level leadership expands its use of online questionnaire development platforms such as Google Forms and Survey Monkey.

Third, to compliment and supplement teacher leader cohort members' feedback, a parallel beginning of the year questionnaire is needed. If designed appropriately, beginning of the year results, when coupled with EOY responses, will help program leadership to track teacher leader growth and to discern program deficiencies. Similarly, a separate evaluative questionnaire for campus administration would further round out and complete the picture of program effectiveness.

Fourth, based on numerous teacher leader comments, additional program training and support is needed for local campus leadership. The perception of numerous teacher leaders was that the campus principal did not understand Career Pathways Program expectations for teacher leaders, nor did they recognize the types and level of support the campus was to provide to teacher leaders. Focused training for principals and campus administrators who were designated to oversee campus-level program implementation would ensure teacher leaders were able to fulfill program requirements without overburdening the teacher leader or campus resources.

Finally, additional research is needed on the effects of the Career Pathways Program on teacher retention and student achievement, two of the programs stated goals. The impact on student achievement is especially acute in large, urban districts, such as ABC School District, where teacher turnover, student mobility, and limited resources are pronounced. Along with an exploration of similar programs that have been or are developing around the globe, this additional research on teacher leadership practices, teacher leader supports, and teacher leader training is essential for ensuring the continued growth and development of the Career Pathways Program and the support and expansion of the practices of teacher leadership.

### **Summary**

After nearly 50 years of research on teacher leadership, the roles and expectations for teacher leaders remains elusive. To address this gap, some states, school districts, and individual campuses have generated initiatives to identify, train, and support teachers who are willing to assume greater responsibility for campus-level leadership. One such initiative, The Career Pathways Program, provided opportunities for teachers to serve as more formally recognized teacher leaders, through collaboration with campus principals, and through a structured training and support program to help ensure teacher leader success.

This study explored teacher leader perceptions of the Career Pathways Program, specifically looking for the strengths and weaknesses of the program, as well as the positive and negative influences on the program's implementation. It is hoped that the results of this study will add to the growing literature on teacher leadership and it will help strengthen the impact of the program on participating teacher leaders.



Understanding the importance of teacher leaders in achieving campus instructional and cultural goals might strengthen the potential and the viability of the Career Pathways program.

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## CHAPTER IV

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

After nearly four decades of research, it remains uncertain that a consensus on a definition of teacher leadership has emerged (Wenner & Campbell, 2017; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Relatedly, although an evolution in the roles of teacher leadership has occurred, established expectations for teacher leadership positions remains in flux as does the identification of the qualities school leaders value in a teacher leader. Further, for teacher leaders given an assigned role, there remains concern surrounding what supports and training are to be provided.

Consequently, the purpose of this journal-ready dissertation was to determine how recent scholarship on teacher leadership has further shaped an understanding of who teacher leaders are and what teacher leaders do. Additionally, through an analysis of questionnaire responses from participants in one district's teacher leader initiative, this dissertation provided insights into how teacher leaders viewed their participation in distributed leadership efforts and how teacher leaders assessed the quality of their experiences as a teacher leader. Because the idea of teacher leadership has become entrenched in the ongoing dialogue about education reform and instructional leadership, recent research surrounding teacher leadership was systematically reviewed (Study 1). Because teacher leadership is also a practice, I assessed the experiences and the concerns of teacher leaders in the field (Study 2).

#### **Implications of Study 1**

Repeatedly throughout the literature, researchers have commented of the absence of a universally accepted definition of a teacher leader or of teacher leadership (Angelle

& Schmid, 2007; Wenner & Campbell, 20017; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). However, this fact has not hindered the proliferation of teacher leader research. With an initial total of 60 results from a simple ERIC search on the term *teacher leader* that spans only five years, and 579 results from a similar search on the term *teacher leadership*, is it clear there is abundant academic interest in exploring the topic of *teacher leadership*.

However, despite the lack of a definition, a consensus among researchers on who is a *teacher leader* and on what constitutes *teacher leadership* appeared to be growing. Much of the credit for this coalescence was given to the seminal work of York-Barr and Duke (2004). In their widely referenced literature review on teacher leadership, York-Barr and Duke (2004) proposed their own definition, stating in part, teacher leadership is “the process by which teachers, individually or collectively, influence their colleagues” (p. 287). In my structured literature review on teacher leadership, I determined that 13 out of the 15 reviewed articles made direct or indirect reference to York-Barr and Duke’s definition, clearly demonstrating the influence of their work.

Additionally, the more recently developed Teacher Leader Model Standards by the Teacher Leadership Exploratory Consortium, provided a second foundation for the further study and understanding of teacher leadership. Developed in 2008, the Teacher Leader Model Standards were frequently mentioned in the articles I explored in my literature review, with several reviewed studies being focused on the standards. Study authors highlighted the importance of the emergence of the standards and the standards’ influence on the proliferation of teacher leadership and the practices of teacher leaders (Bagley & Margolis, 2018; Carver, 2016; Cosenza, 2015; Fairman & Mackenzie, 2014; Swan Dagen, Morewood, & Smith, 2017). As Swan Dagen et al. (2017) noted, “In



schools where the cultural norm is to have teachers engage in formal and informal leadership, this document [the Teacher Leader Model Standards] may serve as a guide or reflect conditions of existing teachers' practices" (p. 326).

Parallel to these two dynamic contributions to teacher leadership was a growing consensus within the scholarship on the effective identification and support of teacher leaders on the school campus. Primarily, researchers identified teacher leadership development as a *process* that ultimately resulted in establishing teacher leaders as campus *influencers* as summarized by Nicholson et al. (2016): "teacher leadership [is] a process of influencing others to improve their educational practice" (p. 30).

As a *process*, teacher leadership development was recognized as a journey. Through their maturation as educators, teacher progressively became equipped to serve in a leadership role. This growth was facilitated by the variety of experiences the teachers weathered in the classroom and ultimately led the teachers to be recognized by campus leadership and by peers as an exemplar teacher. One seasoned teacher shared that the advantage of the teacher leadership experience was "being able to improve my leadership skills and [to] collaborate with others in my role [made] me stronger."

As *influencers*, teacher leaders were recognized as facilitators of peer collaboration, an exchange through which teacher leaders shared the best of their teaching craft to develop that craft in others. Another teacher leader noted, "In my career I've witnessed that the most meaningful positive [campus] changes come from teacher leaders." Beyond the classroom, as participants in campus distributed leadership, teacher leaders positively affected school culture, and they hoped ultimately affected student achievement.

Consequently, based on the research questions of Study 1, it is apparent that researchers could confidently set aside a preoccupation with establishing a universally accepted definition of a teacher leader and of teacher leadership. Rather, research might better be advanced by focusing on effective ways to identify, nurture, and support both emerging and recognized teacher leaders. Given the consensus that teacher leaders are influencers, and that teacher leaders have been created through a process of leadership development, future research might focus on how systems and individuals can most effectively facilitate that change from teacher to teacher leader, as well as substantively support the efforts of teacher leaders to initiate and to sustain the change they seek.

### **Implications of Study 2**

To address the need that exists to support and encourage teacher leadership development and service, individual schools, school districts, universities, and even statewide departments of education have developed a variety of programs. One such initiative was the Career Pathways Program, created by a large, southern, urban school district. This program's purpose was to support cohorts of previously identified teachers as they were trained and served as teacher leaders in specified campus teacher leader roles. An analysis of archival data taken from the initiative's End of the Year (EOY) questionnaire results, administered to program participants in two consecutive years, revealed that teacher leaders found the program personally and professionally beneficial. Participants also welcomed the variety of opportunities that program participation provided and appreciated the recognition of the value that their service as teacher leaders brought to the campus.

Although participant EOY responses contained references to struggles and disappointments with the program, most participants identified the Career Pathways Program experience as *beneficial*. More specifically, the teacher leaders identified personal, collegial, and campus-wide benefits that were evidenced by positive changes they witnessed on the campus where they served. Overall, program participants recognized their own growth as a leader. As a result of that growth, the teacher leaders also witnessed substantive changes in the teachers with whom they worked. Reflecting on the past school year, one teacher leader shared, “I love coaching teachers. I love seeing both the direct impact on teacher mental wellbeing and practice, as well as the student growth that occurs as a result.”

One descriptor of the Career Pathways Program frequently repeated by the teacher leader participants was that of *opportunity*. The primary goal of the program was to provide teachers with career path options outside the traditional campus administrator route. Program participants thought Career Pathways was successful in this regard and that the program gave teachers the opportunity to experience a leadership role without fully leaving their classroom responsibilities. Teacher leaders embraced this hybrid opportunity and highly valued being able to remain a classroom teacher while also serving the campus in a leadership role. One participant shared that being in the Career Pathways Program “allowed me the opportunity to not only improve, but [to] increase my leadership experience.” Being involved in Career Pathways also afforded the teacher leaders opportunities to learn from experienced campus and district-level leaders. Learning from the example and tutelage of other more seasoned educational leaders

enabled the teacher leaders to affect broader campus change while effectively working with teacher peers.

Both the sense that the program was beneficial and that participation afforded various leadership opportunities were closely linked to teacher leaders' feelings of being *valued* in their leadership role. Frequently this sense of worth was directly linked to the quality of the relationship a teacher leader had with campus administration, and more specifically the campus principal. When teacher leaders felt their work was valued by the principal, the teacher leaders were bolstered in their dedication to their work and enjoyed a sense of empowerment and recognition. One program participant remarked,

My principal allowed me the opportunity and trust to complete my roles and responsibilities as I saw fit. She would provide additional suggestions and support for things she wanted to see implemented campus wide. She trusted my judgement and was open to push back.”

Another teacher leader simply shared, “My principal was very trusting of my role, knowledge, and skill set.”

Consequently, there was much to commend the Career Pathways Program. There was abundant evidence that the program was accomplishing its stated goals and that it was fulfilling its established objectives. Additionally, not only should the program continue, albeit with some refinements and edits, but the program could serve as a model for other districts to pattern and emulate. However, the continued viability of the program does depend on program leadership's response to participant critique and on the integrity of its own self-evaluation.

## Integration of Study 1 and Study 2

To assist in a program self-evaluation, it is suggested that district leadership of the Career Pathways Program undertake a review of the Teacher Leader Model Standards and explore the research related to the Teacher Leader Model Standards' impact on understanding effective teacher leader practices. Of specific importance from the Study 1 results are the findings of Cosenza (2015) and Swan Dagen et al. (2017). Constructing a crosswalk between existing Career Pathways Program structures and expectations and the elements of the Teacher Leader Model Standards would provide insights into potential Career Pathways improvements. As discussed by Cosenza (2015), "the teacher leader model standards were developed to encourage discussions about the competencies required for teacher leadership as a means for school transformation" (p. 82). Additionally, Cosenza (2015) noted, "The consortium that developed the teacher leader model standards did so with the intention to provide guidance about teacher leadership and to delineate . . . a set of guidelines for the preparation of future teacher leaders" (p. 83).

Additionally, integration of the Study 1 concepts of teacher leadership development as a *process* and of teacher leaders as *influencers* might assist Career Pathways Program leadership in the design and implementation of various program elements such as the Problem Solving Community. The Problem Solving Community was developed as a venue for role-specific teacher leader training. It functioned as a forum for teacher leaders to discuss issues and challenges related to their role-associated tasks. Therefore, the Problem Solving Community was well situated to inform and to support Career Pathways Program teacher leaders in embracing the process of their own

leadership development and in understanding their role as an influencer on their campus. For those program participants who saw attending a Problem Solving Community as needlessly time consuming and a nuisance, reframing the expectations of the Problem Solving Community as being opportunities might help the teacher leaders to value the time invested in participation and to feel their time as a teacher leader is also valued by the Career Pathways Program.

Because the research literature on teacher leadership is rich, incorporating studies on recent research findings would support the aims of the Career Pathways Program and strengthen the impact the program might have on participating teacher leaders. Of special significance would be articles that highlight teacher leader struggles, such as Bagley and Margolis (2018) and Supovitz (2018). In these studies, developing teacher leaders could find examples of their own struggles. Through other articles such as Carver (2016), cohort members could compare and contrast their experiences in Career Pathways with teacher leaders in similar initiatives.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

Relatedly, further research on the Career Pathways Program would lead to a greater understanding of teacher leader identification, development, and support. Adding interviews with participants and campus leadership, as well as facilitating focus groups would broaden the understanding of the Career Pathways Program and of teacher leadership more generally. Extending the study years, as the program continues, will also provide rich and robust data for additional research. As the program expands and as its longevity is confirmed, continued research and evaluation of the Career Pathways

Program might provide a wealth of information and insight into effective teacher leadership practices.

Additionally, as a variety of teacher leader programs continue to be implemented, research that explores the similarities and contrasts between programs would aid in confirming teacher leadership development best practices and effective programmatic structures and design. This research would be especially important when considering that many programs have been implemented outside the United States. The opportunity to explore and to contrast programmatic elements expands exponentially when non-U. S. initiatives are added to the roster of teacher leader programs.

Also of importance regarding potential future research is the need to focus on the needs and experiences of those who serve in specific teacher leader roles, such as data analyst, technology liaison, or instructional coach. An exploration of and research on each role could provide unique insights in the practices of these teacher leaders, as well as delineating the specialized training and support they would need. Expanding the research possibilities further, a comparison and contrast of the various roles of teacher leadership within a single program or across programs would also add to the growing body of knowledge surrounding effective teacher leader development and support. This endeavor will become increasingly important as teacher leader roles such as literacy specialist and classroom management specialist are more narrowly focused and limited in their scope of responsibilities.

## **Conclusion**

Historically, teacher leaders have stepped from the rank and file of the faculty to assist the school principal in leading the campus. (Cooper et al., 2016; Portin, Russell,

Samuelson, & Knapp, 2013; Weiner & Woulfin, 2018). Out of a commitment to effective instruction and to school cultural change, teacher leaders have moved beyond their classroom to assume broader school responsibilities and to fill important campus leadership roles (Newton, Riveros, & da Casta, 2013; Portin et al., 2013). Having accepted this leadership challenge, teacher leaders have an expectation that their efforts will result in substantive change. Fundamentally, they expect to be *agents of change* and by default they also expect to become *agents changed* (Hohner & Riveros, 2017; Margolis & Deuel, 2009).

In the systematic literature review found in Study 1, I confirmed these teacher leader expectations. Teacher leaders are *experienced* and *exemplar* teachers who become *equipped* to lead. As they mature as leaders, they gain influence. The consequence of this influence is a campus cultural shift. This shifting is facilitated by way of the teacher leader's credibility, demeanor, and skill.

In Study 2 I explored teacher leaders' experiences in a leadership role and explored how the teacher leaders described their participation in an initiative known as the Career Pathways Program. Through an analysis of archival program data, I determined that teacher leaders welcomed the *opportunities* of leadership, especially when they felt their work and efforts were *valued* by campus administration. Additionally, participants overall found their leadership experience in the program to be *beneficial*, and they recognized their efforts as having made a positive difference on their campus.

However, research into identifying and supporting effective teacher leadership is incomplete. As teacher leader programs proliferate and as teacher leader practices



develop and refine, the need for ongoing research continues to grow. Having sidestepped the imperative of trying to establish a universal definition of teacher leadership, scholars can concentrate on researching and identifying best practices in identifying, developing, and supporting effective teacher leaders.

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## APPENDIX A

### *Research Studies on Teacher Leadership, 2013-2018*

| Study                       | Research Questions  | Key Findings   |
|-----------------------------|---|--|
| Allen<br>(2016)             | <p>“What are the experiential resources teachers engage to construct a professional identity as facilitator of teacher peer groups?”</p> <p>“How do teachers relate experiences outside of teaching (experiential resources) in their facilitation practice?”</p> | <p>Most participants gave greater emphasis to the influence of individual personal experiences and professional experiences outside of teaching as affecting their development as an effective facilitator</p>   |
| Bagley & Margolis<br>(2018) | <p>“What is the current state of teacher leadership in Washington state?”</p> <p>“How has teacher leadership evolved over recent years?”</p>  | <p>Potential of hybrid teacher leaders included teacher leaders staying close to students, using their classroom as a laboratory, have campus input and agency, and opportunities for career exploration. Challenges include systemic logistics (e.g. time), perceptions of teacher leaders as “less than” as campus leaders, movements away from the hybrid teacher leaders model, and stress of balancing teaching and leadership.</p> |

(continued)

| Study                | Research Questions  | Key Findings  |
|----------------------|---|---|
| Carver (2016)        | <p>“What is the nature of participants’ reported transformation from teacher to leader?”</p> <p>“What role did participating in the (Great Lakes)Academy play the transformation?”</p>  | <p>Participants’ perspectives changed resulting in an openness to being a resource for others, an eagerness to define teacher leadership on their own terms, and a readiness to embrace a leadership identity. Academy-based explanations for these changes were increased knowledge and skills that resulted in greater confidence, the development of an inquiry orientation that prepared participants to lead, and identification with likeminded peers that was affirming and empowering.</p>    |
| Cooper et al. (2016) | <p>“What change tactics do the leadership teams and individual teacher leaders use when attempting to change the teaching practice of their colleagues, and how do they use them?”</p> <p>“How do the structural and cultural facets of the systems within which teacher leaders are situated, including the leadership teams in which they are embedded, promote and impede their efforts to create change?”</p> | <p>Each school processed the initiative to generate change differently but used embedded systems to support teacher leaders in the process, leveraged teacher leaders as enforcers of non-negotiables, and recognized importance of principal as champion for change. Results emphasized the importance of teacher leader networks, the campus leadership team, depth of knowledge about wanted changes and instructional leadership, and school systems to create a sense of urgency for change.</p> |

(continued)

| Study                      | Research Questions  | Key Findings   |
|----------------------------|---|--|
| Cosenza (2015)             | <p>“How do teachers define the term teacher leadership?”</p> <p>“How do these definitions compare to the seven domains Teacher Leader Model Standards?”</p>   | <p>Five definition themes: <i>collaboration</i> (Domains I, III, IV); <i>sharing best practices</i> (Domains I, II, VII); <i>taking action</i> (Domains II, III, IV, VII); <i>role modeling</i> (Domains III, IV, VII); and <i>formal roles</i> (no Domain linkage).</p>   |
| Eckert et al. (2017)       | <p>“How did participation in the US Department of Educations’ <i>Teaching Ambassador Fellowship</i> shape definitions, understandings, and enactments of teacher leadership?”</p> <p>“How did participation shape the subsequent career opportunities and choices of participants?”</p> | <p>Participants understood teacher leadership as dispositional (characteristics) rather than positional (job/role). Participants were seen to be either <i>adders</i> (teacher leaders who stayed on the campus to take on additional roles beyond the classroom) or <i>path-finders</i> (teacher leaders who left the campus to take on new roles in education).</p>  |
| Fairman & Mackenzie (2014) | <p>“How do teachers influence their colleagues to improve teaching and student learning?”</p> <p>“How do teachers understand the concept of teacher leadership, their work, and their development as leaders?”</p>  | <p>Teacher leaders were motivated to initiate change because of a desire to improve student learning. They used a variety of strategies to influence this change, including their own leadership skills and collegial relationships. However, teacher leaders doubted the impact of their role, unless they had a formal designation as a teacher leader. There is a growing need for different conceptions of leadership.</p> |

(continued)

| Study                   | Research Questions  | Key Findings   |
|-------------------------|---|--|
| Hunzicker (2017)        | <p>“How do teachers progress from teacher to teacher leader?”</p> <p>“What factors and conditions influence this progression?”</p>  | <p>Progress to teacher leadership is gradual, progressive and recursive. Internal factors of motivation and confidence, rather than external factors of position, campus leadership, and school culture, have a stronger influence on the progressive from teacher to teacher leader.</p>  |
| Nicholson et al. (2016) | <p>“What are the affordances particular to the teacher leadership network (TLN) that enable the leadership development of teachers?”</p>  | <p>TLN meetings offered a safe space for thinking and reflection, allowed for discussion of complexities and challenges of teaching, and provided guidance for teachers by modeling and offering support in addressing leadership challenges.</p>  |
| Nordengren (2016)       | <p>“How do summative evaluation documents for the Performance Assessment for California Teachers (PACT) describe working with colleagues?”</p> <p>“How do these documents represent the concept of teacher leadership presented in academic work on school leadership?”</p> | <p>Teacher leaders are <i>mediators</i> (resources for and sources of expertise on teaching and learning) and <i>brokers</i> (translators of principles of classroom improvement and instructional competence). Teacher leader to teacher relationships are synonymous to teacher to student relationships, requiring learning objectives, an explanation of thinking, and effective feedback that prompts analysis and results in improved teacher performance.</p> |

(continued)

| Study                            | Research Questions  | Key Findings   |
|----------------------------------|---|--|
| Portin et al. (2013)             | “How do select urban high schools, designated as making progress, exercise learning-focused leadership?” - implied  | Effective administrative leadership fosters sense of team, mentors teacher leaders, clarifies the work of teacher leaders, normalizes the idea of teacher leaders, allocate time for teacher leadership, and provides resources to support teacher leaders.  |
| Sato, Hyler, & Monte-Sano (2014) | <p>“What do National Board Certified Teachers do for leadership broadly defined?”</p> <p>“How did working toward National Board Certification change teachers’ leadership?”</p> | The National Board Certification process influenced teachers’ leadership: (a) by initiating opportunities for teachers to experience leadership; (b) by providing choices for leadership activities and responsibilities; and (c) by empowering liberty in approaching leadership activities and responsibilities in which they engaged. |

(continued)

| Study              | Research Questions   | Key Findings  |
|--------------------|--|---|
| Supovitz<br>(2018) | <p>“What roles did teacher leaders enact in their schools to improve instruction?”</p> <p>“What strategies did teacher leaders use to influence the instructional practice of their peers?”</p> <p>“What limitations did teacher leaders report in their efforts to enact teacher leadership?”</p> | <p>Teacher leaders were <i>trainers</i> for school-wide professional development, <i>team leaders</i> working with sub-groups of teachers, and <i>teacher developers</i> as they worked with individual teachers. Teacher leaders led by example, collaborated with peers, and encouraged peers. Teacher leaders felt limited by the cultural boundaries between teachers and administrators, by the resentment of peers, by teacher leaders’ lack of formal authority. To compensate for limitations, teacher leaders developed <i>soft strategies</i> to influence peers.</p> |

(continued)

| Study                    | Research Questions   | Key Findings   |
|--------------------------|--|--|
| Swan Dagen et al. (2017) | “How are the state’s National Board Certified Teachers (NBCT) engaging in the functions of leadership as defined by the Teacher Leader Model Standards?” | NBCT certified teacher leaders are experienced, advanced degree educated, school-based educators, with regular interaction with students. Teacher leaders are engaged in a variety of leadership responsibilities across multiple Teacher Leader Model Standards Domains, but to varying degrees. Teacher leaders, formal and informal, are self-aware leaders with skills developed through training and experience. The work of formal leaders was more closely aligned with Teacher Leader Model Standards Domains. |

(continued)



| Study                   | Research Questions   | Key Findings  |
|-------------------------|--|---|
| Weiner & Woulfin (2018) | <p>“How do participants make sense of Developing Exemplary Educators (DEE)’s conceptualizations of teacher leadership and the degree to which they developed the knowledge, skills, and dispositions it requires?”</p> <p>“How do participants perceive their ability to apply ideas and learning from DEE’s professional development?”</p> <p>“What organizational and social factors do participants report as enabling and constraining this transfer?”</p> | <p>Participants found case study methodology of DEE built teachers’ skills for reflection and communication. They experienced positive changes in their: (a) intrapersonal skills of empowerment and control; (b) communication skills of listening, thoughtful response; (c) coaching skills to develop a collaborative process; and (d) team functioning skills to generate purpose and focus of meetings. However, they also experienced challenges to the transference of teacher leadership skills because of district conditions, campus organizational conditions, and social norm conditions.</p> |

## APPENDIX B

*Representative Research Question Answers from Teacher Leadership Studies*

| Study                    | Representative Codes for “Who Are Serving as Teacher Leaders?”  | Representative Codes for “What Duties Do Teacher Leaders Perform?”   | Quotes on “How Is Teacher Leadership Defined?”  |
|--------------------------|---|--|---|
| Allen (2016)             | Facilitator<br>Reflexive practitioner<br>Work with groups   | Facilitate discussions<br>Lead groups<br>Work with groups  | “Teachers playing an active role in the intellectual life and decision making of the school” (p. 71).   |
| Bagley & Margolis (2018) | Classroom teaching expert<br>Compensated for leadership<br>Demonstrates classroom success<br>Will move outside the classroom  | Model lessons<br>Demonstrate instruction<br>Work with students   | “A K-12 classroom teacher who has some sort of formal role (which can be loosely or tightly constructed) designed to influence the instructional practice of their colleagues” (p. 34).                   |
| Carver (2016)            | Trustworthy, passionate, inquisitive, and reflective<br>Experienced educator<br>Understands rigors of teaching<br>Exemplary teacher<br>Influence<br>Resource for teachers<br>Sense of agency<br>Lifelong learner<br>Team player<br>Takes Initiative<br>Instructional expert | Lead curricular reforms<br>Plan meetings<br>Lead team-building<br>Conduct action research<br>Model and coach<br>Build relationship | “Teacher leadership as the art of ‘leading from where you stand,’ a non-positional perspective . . . about exerting influence based on credibility and trustworthiness, not power or authority.” (p. 164) |

(continued)

| Study                | Representative Codes for “Who Are Serving as Teacher Leaders?”   | Representative Codes for “What Duties Do Teacher Leaders Perform?”  | Quotes on “How Is Teacher Leadership Defined?”  |
|----------------------|--|---|---|
| Cooper et al. (2016) | Learning guides<br>Change agents<br>Trustworthy<br>Openminded<br>Respected<br>Facilitators<br>Knowledgeable about students<br>Mentor                                       | Change agent<br>Promote inquiry<br>Facilitate discussion-based teaching<br>Mentor   | “Teacher leadership occurs within and outside classrooms to influence school-wide instructional practice [through] work with the principal to . . . manifest a school-wide vision” (p. 87). |
| Cosenza (2015)       | A formal role<br>Empowers fellow teachers<br>Continuous learners<br>Approachable<br>Uses influence<br>Models of effective practices<br>Advocate for change<br>Change agent | Collaboration<br>Contribute to decision making<br>Share best practices<br>Work with the community<br>Mentoring new teachers<br>Disaggregate student data<br>Improve student achievement<br>Guide learning | “Teachers extending their presence beyond the classroom by seeking additional challenges and growth opportunities” from Institute for Educational Leadership (p. 79)                        |

(continued)

| Study                      | Representative Codes for “Who Are Serving as Teacher Leaders?”   | Representative Codes for “What Duties Do Teacher Leaders Perform?”  | Quotes on “How Is Teacher Leadership Defined?”   |
|----------------------------|--|---|--|
| Eckert et al. (2017)       | Hybrid teacher<br>Curriculum leader<br>Provide professional development<br>Model and mentor<br>Effective teacher<br>Poised<br>Taking on additional roles   | Give advice<br>Share knowledge<br>Influence students<br>Provide professional development<br>Work with pre-service teachers<br>Collaborate   | “Teacher leadership encompasses the practices through which teachers – individually or collectively – influence colleagues, principals, policymakers, and other potential stakeholders to improve teaching and learning” (p. 700). |
| Fairman & Mackenzie (2014) | Respected and influential<br>Initiates change<br>Reflective, humble, and collegial<br>Takes initiative<br>Trustworthy and appreciative<br>Visionary, wise, and valuable<br>Able to listen see potential<br>Ambivalent about leadership | Model and coach<br>Collaborate and share<br>Advocate and encourage<br>Build trust and encourage risk taking<br>Respect individual strengths<br>Organize and shared data<br>Plan professional development<br>Lead group learning | Used York Barr and Duke, 2004 (p. 5).  |

(continued)

| Study                   | Representative Codes for “Who Are Serving as Teacher Leaders?”  | Representative Codes for “What Duties Do Teacher Leaders Perform?”   | Quotes on “How Is Teacher Leadership Defined?”   |
|-------------------------|---|--|--|
| Hunzicker (2017)        | Inspire and influences others<br>Deep knowledge of content and pedagogy<br>Seek to improve their own practice of teaching<br>Foster open communication and sense of community<br>Flexible, caring, and creative<br>Honest, approachable, and humble<br>Motivated, empowered, and proactive<br>Self-confident and risk taker | Mentor<br>Provide professional development<br>Collaborate and share work<br>Seek school-wide improvement<br>Connect with community<br>Cooperate<br>Facilitate and team build | “Teacher leadership is a stance, or way of thinking and being, rather than a set of behaviors” (p. 1).   |
| Nicholson et al. (2016) | Mentors and is an instructional coach<br>Leads professional development<br>Reflective and learns from mistakes<br>Change agent  | Facilitate professional development<br>Mentor and coach<br>Use data and make learning visible<br>Strengthen collegial relationships  | “Teacher leadership as a process of influencing others to improve their educational practice and exemplifying a learning stance as part of a more inclusive construct where teachers in all positions within schools are believed to have the capacity to develop and strengthen their leadership capacities” (p. 30). |

(continued)

| Study                | Representative Codes for “Who Are Serving as Teacher Leaders?”   | Representative Codes for “What Duties Do Teacher Leaders Perform?”   | Quotes on “How Is Teacher Leadership Defined?”  |
|----------------------|--|--|---|
| Nordengren (2016)    | Expert on teaching and learning<br>Formal designation<br>Collaborator<br>View of self as a leader<br>Member instructional team<br>Model and advocate for change                | Help and support fellow teachers<br>Facilitate school improvement and systemic change<br>Plan and facilitate learning<br>Build shared vision<br>Model and collaborate<br>Engage in professional learning and meaningful research | Used Harris (2003) - Teacher leaders, “translate principles of school improvement into classroom and individual teacher practice, . . . promote and participate in collaboration about problems of practice and improvement, . . . position as sources of expertise and information about teaching and learning, . . . and forge relationships with colleagues that emphasize mutual learning” (p. 95). |
| Portin et al. (2013) | Instructional specialist<br>Mentor or coach<br>Communication skills<br>School level leadership teams<br>Build relational trust<br>Teacher with release from classroom practice | Provide instructional support<br>Lead professional development<br>Analyze data<br>Coordinate assessments<br>Coordinate curriculum<br>Mentor and coach<br>Build relationships<br>Serve on leadership team                         | “A wide range of individuals, some released from part- or full-time to leadership duties and others maintaining full-time classroom assignments but regularly participating in some recognized leadership activity” (p. 226)  |

(continued)

| Study              | Representative Codes for “Who Are Serving as Teacher Leaders?”   | Representative Codes for “What Duties Do Teacher Leaders Perform?”  | Quotes on “How Is Teacher Leadership Defined?”  |
|--------------------|--|---|---|
| Sato et al. (2014) | Sense of stewardship<br>Have significant teaching experience<br>Respected and influential<br>Relationship builder<br>Curriculum expert<br>Understands adult learning<br>Collaborative<br>Can use data<br>Grow professionally | Mentor and support teachers<br>Provide professional development<br>Serve as department chair<br>Serve on various committees<br>Fundraise and grant write<br>Participate in university-based projects<br>Collaborates  | “Teacher leadership as the actions that the teacher takes within the context or situation and values the purposes that drive those actions” (p. 5).   |
| Supovitz (2018)    | Member leadership team<br>Collegial<br>School-level resource<br>Responsible<br>Flexible<br>Trainer<br>Team leader<br>Teacher developer   | Lead professional development<br>Facilitate learning communities<br>Set organizational goals<br>Develop curriculum<br>Lead change efforts<br>Collaborate on instruction<br>Support colleagues’ teaching<br>Foster faculty collegiality<br>Demonstration teaching<br>Coaching and feedback | Teacher leadership is “focused on instructional improvement that differentially emphasize the development of teacher leadership capacity and the creation of specific roles for teacher leaders” (p. 53). |

(continued)

| Study                    | Representative Codes for “Who Are Serving as Teacher Leaders?”   | Representative Codes for “What Duties Do Teacher Leaders Perform?”  | Quotes on “How Is Teacher Leadership Defined?” |
|--------------------------|--|---|--|
| Swan Dagen et al. (2017) | Resources provider<br>Instructional and curriculum specialist<br>Mentor<br>Data coach<br>Catalyst for change<br>Department chair<br>Advanced degree<br>Specialized certification<br>Experienced educator | Partner with other teachers<br>Provide professional development<br>Advance and evaluate schoolwide efforts<br>Mentor new teachers<br>Develop curriculum<br>Work collaboratively<br>Affect policy<br>Nurture collaboration | Used York-Barr & Duke, 2004 (p. 323).          |
| Weiner & Woulfin (2018)  | Sense of empowerment<br>Exercise control   | Support instructional change<br>Engage in policy making<br>Assume administrative duties   | Used York-Barr & Duke, 2004 (p. 213).          |



## APPENDIX C

### IRB Exemption



Date: Dec 4, 2018 10:18 AM CST

TO: Robert Michaels-Johnson  
 Rebecca Bustamante  
 FROM: SHSU IRB  
 PROJECT TITLE: TEACHER LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT IN THE URBAN SETTING  
 PROTOCOL #: IRB-2018-189  
 SUBMISSION TYPE: Initial  
 ACTION: Exempt  
 DECISION DATE: December 3, 2018

EXEMPT REVIEW CATEGORY: Category 1. Research conducted in established or commonly accepted educational settings, involving normal educational practices, such as (i) research on regular and special education instructional strategies, or (ii) research on the effectiveness of or the comparison among instructional techniques, curricula, or classroom management methods.

Category 4. Research involving the collection or study of existing data, documents, records, pathological specimens, or diagnostic specimens, if these sources are publicly available or if the information is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that subjects cannot be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects.

Greetings,

Thank you for your submission of Initial Review materials for this project. The Sam Houston State University (SHSU) IRB has determined this project is EXEMPT FROM IRB REVIEW according to federal regulations.

**Since Cayuse IRB does not currently possess the ability to provide a "stamp of approval" on any recruitment or consent documentation, it is the strong recommendation of this office to please include the following approval language in the footer of those recruitment and consent documents: IRB-2018-189/December 3, 2018.**

We will retain a copy of this correspondence within our records.

**\* What should investigators do when considering changes to an exempt study that could make it nonexempt?**

It is the PI's responsibility to consult with the IRB whenever questions arise about whether planned changes to an exempt study might make that study nonexempt human subjects research.

In this case, please make available sufficient information to the IRB so it can make a correct determination.

If you have any questions, please contact the IRB Office at 936-294-4875 or [irb@shsu.edu](mailto:irb@shsu.edu). Please include your project title and protocol number in all correspondence with this committee.

Sincerely,

**VITA****Robert R. Michaels-Johnson**

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**Academic Degrees**

**Master of Divinity** - Oral Roberts University, Tulsa, Oklahoma  
*Concentrations in Christian Education and Historical Theology*  
*Senior Topic: Overcoming the Legacy of a Dysfunctional Family*

**Bachelor of Arts** - Allegheny College, Meadville, Pennsylvania  
*Major in Dramatic Arts with minors in English Literature and History*  
*Senior Project: Next Please! An Audition Handbook*

**Professional Certifications****Texas State Board for Educator Certification**

**Principal** (EC-12) - Since 2007  
**Middle Grades Generalist** (4-8) - Since 2006  
**Social Studies Composite** (8-12) - Since 2005

**Professional Experience in Education**

2017-Present **Principal** - Hamilton Middle School  
Houston Independent School District  
Houston, Texas

2010-2017 **Dean of Instruction** - Heights High School (formerly Reagan)  
Houston Independent School District  
Houston, Texas

2008-2010 **Campus Testing Coordinator** - Reagan High School  
Houston Independent School District  
Houston, Texas

Fall 2008      **Adjunct Professor** for English as a Second Language  
Houston Community College  
Houston, Texas

### **Publications**

Michaels-Johnson, R. R. & Slate, J. R. (2018) Differences in student participation and performance in advanced coursework as a function of economic status. *Global Journal of Human Social Sciences* 17(4).

### **Presentations**

Michaels-Johnson, R. R. (2018). *Teacher leadership in an urban setting: A research proposal update*. Presented at Southwest Educational Research Association Conference, San Antonio, TX.

Lazar, K. L., Merchán, R. A., Michaels-Johnson, R. R., & Ustinoff-Brumbelow, R. (2017). *Exploring the impact of 1:1 technology initiatives: A case study*. Presented at Southwest Educational Research Association Conference, New Orleans, LA.

Michaels-Johnson, R. R., & Smith, D. (2011). *Discussion on effective grading practices*. Presented at 12 Under 12 Network of National Staff Development Council Conference, Saint Louis, MO.

### **Professional Association Memberships**

American Educational Research Association  
Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development  
National Association of Secondary School Principals  
Texas Association of Secondary School Principals  
Houston Association of School Administrators