

ABSTRACT

Title of Document: TEACHER LEADERS' PERCEPTIONS OF
 DISTRIBUTED LEADERSHIP PRACTICES
 IN MIDDLE SCHOOLS

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 Education

The primary purpose of this case study was to examine teacher leaders' perception of distributed leadership practices in two exemplary middle schools. Eight teacher leaders were selected to participate in this study. Qualitative data were gathered via one-on-one interviews and a review of artifacts from four teacher leaders at each school. The data were coded, categorized and clustered to produce themes. The research questions were addressed and descriptions were developed for each case. Findings indicate that there are several dimensions of distributed leadership that shape teacher leaders' practice. This study concluded with recommendations that center on the reconceptualization of teacher leadership practice, district and school based supports. Implication for practice and areas for future research was explored.

TEACHER LEADERS' PERCEPTIONS OF DISTRIBUTED LEADERSHIP
PRACTICES IN MIDDLE SCHOOLS

by

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents. I know the sacrifices you made for me to have this opportunity. I appreciate the many lessons that you have taught me – perseverance, hard work and faith are the principles to build a successful life. I know that the both of you are watching over me. You continue to be the light that provides direction and strength. Thank You.

In loving memory of Squire and Joyce Williams.

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The steps of a thousand miles begin with one step. I am grateful for the support that I have received from family, mentors, friends, colleagues and professors each step of the journey. I am grateful to God for placing individuals in my life that helped me along the way. With this in mind, I owe a number of individuals a great deal of gratitude for their prayers, encouragement, support and patience during each step of the journey

To my parents, Squire and Joyce Williams – your memory lives on and I reflect often on the lessons and sacrifices you made on my behalf. I hope to continue making you proud. I valued the constant words of encouragement from my brothers and sisters – Gregory, Charlesretta, Squire, Michael, Joseph, Cleveland, Willie and Audrey. I also appreciate the prayers and loving support from my in laws – Mr. and Mrs. Fisher.

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I owe a special thanks to my Advisor, Chair, and Mentor, Dr. Carol Sheffey Parham. I thank you for believing in me and sticking with me on every step of this journey. I could not have made it this far without your guidance and direction. I also appreciate your honest and constructive feedback. I have been privileged to have had the opportunity to work with you and learn from you. I am so appreciative of the words of wisdom that you have shared to help me improve as a person and grow professionally. I thank you for being a great example of a scholar and mentor.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The onset of the 21st century has witnessed increased calls for improved student performance at all grade levels in K-12 public education. It is conceivable that the most significant reason for this renewed cry for public school accountability since the Elementary and Secondary Education Act was passed in 1965 is the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), signed into law in January 2002. The intent of this law was to ensure that all students, regardless of race, disability, or socioeconomic background, receive a high-quality education. This act has propelled a renewed focus on accountability requirements for individual schools. Specifically, NCLB has forced schools to allocate significant portions of fiscal resources for an array of remedial, intervention, and accelerated learning programs to meet established performance targets for all student population groups.

The No Child Left Behind Act, in concert with district and state accountability demands, has compelled educators and policymakers to aggressively monitor performance levels of all student populations. In Maryland, the Maryland School Assessment (MSA) determines a middle school's performance. The MSA measures student performance on the Maryland Content Standards. Student performance on these measures determines whether or not an individual school or the school system has met its Annually Yearly Performance (AYP) targets. As is the case in other states, Maryland schools that fail to meet performance targets face sanctions and being deemed underperforming schools or districts. The implications of this accountability context, along with various sanctions and rewards, have caused many educators to rethink leadership configuration in schools. It has been suggested that the complex role and

responsibilities placed on the school principal and the unstable environments within which they operate make the task of improving student achievement more daunting (Lee, 1991).

The Race to the Top (RTTT) initiative was launched as a federal grant program by the Obama administration as a continuation of NCLB: “Its aim is to advance educational reforms by rewarding high-achieving schools with funds and ultimately helping children get prepared for success and competition in society” (Jahng, 2011, p. 100). Hershberg and Robertson-Kraft (2010) wrote,

RTTT has challenged the educational status quo. For states and school districts to secure grants from the \$4.35 billion Race to the Top (RTTT) funds, President Barack Obama required them to use data effectively to reward effective teachers, to support teachers who are struggling, and when necessary, to replace teachers who aren't up to the job. (p. 129)

As does the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, RTTT emphasizes the importance of standards and assessments as well as data systems for improving teacher quality as a vehicle for accelerating student progress and closing achievement gaps. The new policy, however, redefines the indicators used to measure student outcomes—and, in turn, teacher effectiveness—by focusing on the growth that individual students make over the course of the year, rather than on their achievement level at a particular point in time. To receive funds, states' RTTT proposals must include student growth as one of the multiple measures in an enhanced teacher evaluation system and must propose plans to use this information in decisions related to teacher compensation, career advancement, and tenure (Hershberg & Robertson-Kraft, 2010).

RTTT and NCLB accountability statutory levers increased the pressure for academic progress for all student groups including students with disabilities and students

with limited English proficiency. Arguably, this accountability context has caused a continuation of a paradigm shift from an accountability-only culture to a student learning culture. Firestone stated,

The distinction between the accountability and student learning cultures reflects a division between two recommendations for reforming schools. The accountability culture tightens control from the top. The student learning district develops a more organic, democratic form of integration. In student learning districts, teaching is assumed to be more complex and variable, requiring more discretion for teachers. As a result, teachers are assumed to be more professional. This form of organization requires more shared influence and joint problem solving in which teachers work alongside administrators to make critical decisions. (Firestone, 2009, p. 670)

In light of this paradigm shift, skilled leadership is necessary at both the macro (central office and district leadership) and the micro (school-based) levels. First, district leadership must provide the structural conditions to empower principals and teachers to engage in collaborative work centered on teaching and learning. Second, a focus on efficiency and timely dispatch of resources must be at the forefront of assisting school-based practitioners with creating better academic outcomes for all students. Likewise, there are several implications at the micro level. First, a distributed leadership perspective must be considered not only as a leadership tool but also as a cultural building mechanism that creates a cascading portrait of dispersed leadership among teachers and administrators that ultimately leads to better outcomes for students. Second, the changing role of the principal is at the heart of the paradigm shift. Harris summarized this shift as follows:

This shift is quite dramatic and can be summarized as a move from being someone at the apex of the organization, making decisions, to seeing their core role as developing the leadership capacity and capability of others. What distributed leadership means for principals is a fundamental change in their understanding of leadership and in the ways they enact their leadership roles. It

implies the relinquishing of some authority and power, which is not an easy task, and a repositioning of the role from exclusive leadership to a form of leadership that is more concerned with brokering, facilitating and supporting others in leading innovation and change. (Harris, 2012, p. 8)

As states and individual school districts conform to the accountability levels and make progress toward creating better outcomes for students, leadership and new configurations are spotlighted. Research in this area has suggested that effective school leadership no longer need reside exclusively in the hands of school administrators. Under this current era of accountability, effective leadership can be dispersed successfully among multiple actors within the school (Day, Harris, Hadfield, Tolley, & Beresford, 2000; Harris, 2002). Murphy (1994) noted the importance of teacher participation in developing a school's vision. Arnow (2006) stated, "Department leaders can be the impetus to achieving school reform success as they serve in the capacity of middle management, providing a buffer between teachers and a school's administration" (p. 5). As Copeland (2003) asserted, if distributed leadership is to take root, new, more supportive structures will need to be forged and, more broadly, schools will need to be restructured in significant ways.

Leadership is thought to be a major influence in school improvement. If school leaders and districts are to meet the challenges of the 21st century, such as closing the achievement gaps among racial and ethnic groups, modernizing school facilities, and building teacher capacity to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse student population within an unstable economic environment, successful leaders will need to build mechanisms and create processes that lead to long-term and lasting school improvement. Sustainable school leadership builds a leadership culture based on moral purpose that

makes success accessible to all students (Davies, 2002). Davies asserted that sustainable leadership has nine key components that focus on (a) outcomes, not simply outputs; (b) balancing short- and long-term objectives; (c) process, rather than plans; (d) personal humility and professional will; (e) strategic timing and strategic abandonment; (f) building capacity and creating involvement; (g) developing strategic measures of success; and (h) building sustainability.

Changing Role of the Principal

The role of the principal has evolved over time, from the charismatic figure of the 1980s, focused primarily on budgeting, scheduling, staff morale, discipline, and routine management tasks, to the leader of the 1990s, involved in early forms of shared decision making. The first wave of educational reforms and restructuring called for teacher empowerment through a participatory style of leadership (Blasé & Blasé, 2001). A second evolutionary wave saw the emergence of total quality management (TQM) and site-based management (SBM) teams' operating in schools (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001). A third wave has caused the principal's role to evolve into one that focuses on school improvement, democratic community, and social justice (Murphy, 2002). This era has witnessed principals' working in a cooperative fashion with the school community to develop shared visions, increasing teacher leadership capacity, and creating professional learning communities.

There is no doubt that the school principal influences a school's climate, which can impact teacher development and student learning. Wilson's (2005) study of several exemplary high schools in Montana found a strong and significant relationship between the principal's use of instructional leadership elements and the principal's degree of

supportiveness. In addition, teachers in the study perceived that principals were actively engaged in all areas of leadership and actively shared that leadership with their staff. Finally, five of the eight schools in the study perceived that the more supportive the principal and the more engaged the teachers, the more open the school climate and the more distributed the leadership throughout the staff in that school (Wilson, 2005).

Hallinger and Heck (1998) provided a review of the body of empirical research on principal effects that was conducted from 1980 to 1995. After their exhaustive review of the literature, Hallinger and Heck called for future research to consider the unit of analysis used to uncover the degree to which principals influence school outcomes.

There is agreement among practitioners and researchers alike that one individual or even a small group of committed individuals cannot do the job of improving schools. Rather, leadership that is dispersed throughout an organization among multiple people and roles is being advocated as a possible solution to the challenges that principals and school districts face.

One person, regardless of his or her knowledge, skills, and disposition, cannot create the kind of middle school that will meet the criteria established by the National Middle School Association and the National Forum to Accelerate Middle-Grades Reform. Highly qualified middle school grade principals understand the need to develop and nurture the leadership capabilities of every faculty member (Thompson, 2004, p. 23).

Because much of the work and many of the organizational tasks performed in schools are usually carried out by teams, workgroups, committees, and departments, exploration into effective team or group functioning may yield findings that will benefit practitioners, researchers, and policymakers alike. Chrispeels and Martin (2002)

conducted a study that explored how middle school teams, participating in a professional development program, began to understand their roles as part of the larger organizational structure and culture of their schools. The questions that guided their research included the following:

1. How did the teams situate themselves in the overall organizational structure of the schools?
2. What actions did the middle school teams take to enhance instruction and build professional community?
3. What cultural and political factors supported or constrained the roles teams were able to negotiate and construct?
4. How did the leadership teams use the expert knowledge they acquired at trainings as a source of power and influence to achieve their goals?

Several key findings from the study by Chrispeels and Martin (2002) provide insight into the nature and function of school leadership teams:

1. New structure and arrangements can be catalysts of change; “however, the degree of shift that occurs from such a policy initiative will depend upon the local structural, cultural and political conditions” (p. 359).
2. School leadership teams must have knowledge of organizational structure, rules, and relationships to maximize impact.
3. Training gives teams the authority to act as school leadership and the knowledge and skills needed to affect their school.
4. There appears to be no set formula for understanding school leadership team impact on environment.

5. Teams must understand the micropolitics of the organization.
6. Preparing teachers as teacher leaders is a slow process. This process requires direction and support.

Chrispeels and Martin's (2002) study is important to consumers of research on leadership teams and to practitioners because it highlights the complexity of the roles that individuals who serve on school leadership teams face at the middle school level. One might argue that individuals who serve on school leadership teams assume four roles: communicators, staff developers, problem solvers, and leaders of change (Chrispeels & Martin, 2002). Nevertheless, practitioners will benefit from the uncovering of skills and strategies needed to support school leadership team members in influencing the direction of the school when there is opposition to the direction mandated by policymakers or when there is ambiguity regarding the direction. Thus, this study compels research on how middle school leadership teams function and carry out their work through a distributed leadership framework within the present accountability mandate.

An earlier study conducted by Leithwood, Steinbach, and Ryan (1997) yielded insights regarding collective team functions. The study set out to learn more about the nature of collective team learning and the conditions that influence such learning. Qualitative and quantitative evidence collected for the study identified a large number of within-team conditions that helped to explain variation in the nature and amount of learning across the teams. The study also identified both in-school conditions (including leadership) and out-of-school conditions affecting such learning. A future study of middle school leadership teams that are involved in a reform initiative may provide further insights to practitioners and address research questions that have not been

effectively addressed in this research community:

1. What types of school administrator practices can contribute to the work of the team?
2. How important are constraints as stimuli to learning?
3. How are the constructs in the framework linked in practice?
4. What is the actual relationship between the team learning process and outcomes?

Distributed Leadership

Distributed leadership is an emerging concept. A number of articles have been written about this approach to leadership; however, empirical evidence is needed to answer how or to what extent distributed leadership should be implemented (Lashway, 2003). Efforts also have been made to examine the relationship between distributed leadership and student achievement, school climate, and instructional leadership.

Why Is Middle School Important?

The challenges of achievement and accountability are especially calamitous for middle school leaders because of the unique needs of preadolescent learners. The unique needs and challenges can be described as follows:

It is the time when young people experience puberty, when growth and development is more rapid than during any other developmental stage except that of infancy. Dramatic physical changes are accompanied by the capacity to have sexual relations and to reproduce. It is a time, too, of emotional peaks and valleys, of trial and error, of vulnerability to emotional hurt and humiliation, of anxiety and uncertainty, that is, sources of unevenness of emotions and behavior associated with the age. (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development [CCAD], 1989, p. 21)

The middle grade years represent critical stages of development for

preadolescents between the ages of 10 and 14. The work done in middle grade schools to prepare preadolescents for the rigor and social aspects of high school is too important to be left in the hands of one or two individuals. Katzenmeyer and Moller (2001) wrote,

Within every school there is a sleeping giant of teacher leadership, which can be a strong catalyst for making change. By using the energy of teacher leaders as agents of school change, the reform of public education will stand a better chance of building momentum. (p. 2)

An essential challenge that middle school principals must meet in creating sustainable leadership is obtaining the best personnel and creating the leadership capacity for the school.

Accountability Context of a Middle School Reform Effort

In 2005, a large suburban school system in Maryland began to examine the state of middle schools within the districts. Previously, the district had implemented reforms in early childhood programs and elementary schools and high schools. Because of these early efforts, the district witnessed gains in elementary math and reading achievement and in high school student enrollment in Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate courses. The district was not pleased, however, with the performance level at the middle school level. During the 2005-2006 school year, the concerns included the following:

1. Of the 38 middle schools, 21 did not make AYP during the 2005-2006 school year.
2. A significant achievement gap existed between White and Asian American students and their African American and Hispanic peers. Approximately 90% of White and Asian American students earned proficient or advanced scores

in both reading and mathematics on the Maryland School Assessment (MSA), whereas about 70% of African American and Hispanic students earned proficient or advanced scores.

3. Academic performance was lower for students impacted by poverty or limited English proficiency (LEP). Results from the 2006 MSA in reading indicated that 31.2% of LEP students and 51.8% of students eligible for free or reduced-price meals scored proficient or advanced compared to 76.5% of all middle school students.
4. Students with disabilities were performing at lower levels than were their nondisabled peers. Although 76.5% of all middle school students scored at proficient or above on the reading MSA in 2006, only 39.5% of students receiving special education services scored at proficient or above.
5. Only 50% of middle school teachers were certified in specific content areas.
6. Differences existed in course elective offerings as well as remediation and acceleration programs.

After months of deliberation and study, the district established a middle school reform process to be phased in over a 3-year period (Phase I, school year 2007-2008; Phase II, school year 2008-2009; and full implementation, school year 2009-2010).

Middle schools participating in this reform process were to adopt the following goals and actions:

- Ensure effective leadership that promotes shared ownership for student and staff success and establishes a culture of high expectation.
- Engage all students in effective and differentiated instructional practices using

a rigorous, standards-based curriculum and challenging assessments.

- Implement organizational structures that maximize time for teaching and learning, cultivate positive relationship, and promote increased student achievement.
- Ensure that middle school staff has the knowledge, skills, and content expertise to meet the learning and developmental needs of middle school students.
- Engage parents and the community as partners to promote school and student success.

This accountability situation was ripe for inquiry regarding middle school leadership team members' experience with distributed leadership during implementation of a reform initiative.

Practitioner Lens

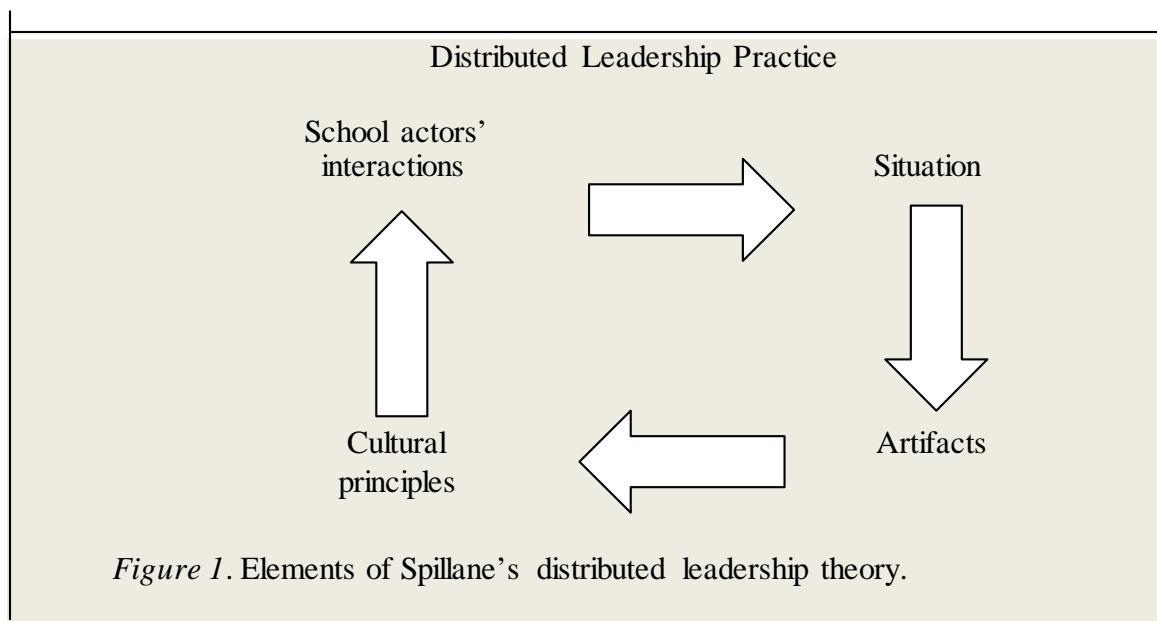
School culture, professional learning communities, and leadership have long been the subjects of research. Nevertheless, the current accountability context, combined with calls for myriad types of educational reform, leaves many unanswered questions regarding the school leadership team's function, effectiveness, and impact on student achievement in the middle school. Practitioners who serve on school leadership teams or the persons responsible for leading the teams will benefit from an understanding of how leadership is dispersed and the impact of this dispersion on student achievement and school culture. According to Spillane, Halverson, and Diamond (2001), the distributed leadership perspective suggests that intervening to improve school leadership by focusing exclusively or chiefly on building the knowledge of individual formal leaders may not be

the most effective use of resources: “If expertise is distributed, then the school, rather than the individual leader, may be the most appropriate unit for thinking about the development of leadership expertise” (Spillane et al. 2001, p. 27).

Conceptual Framework

The foundation for this study on distributed leadership is rooted in the theories of distributed leadership as defined by James Spillane and Peter Gronn. These two researchers have propelled the scholarly pursuit for a more refined understanding of distributed leadership practices (Harris, 2005).

Conceptual framework of Spillane et al. Spillane and his colleagues (2001) viewed leadership as the interaction between school actors and their environment. Spillane’s contextual lens extended beyond the traditional view of leadership that tended to focus on “an individual’s ability, personality and other character traits” (Spillane et al., 2001, p. 11). Spillane’s conceptual framework did not center on the acts of a singular individual but rather the group of actors involved in various dimensions of leadership. As a result, Spillane’s work moved away from leadership as a sole proprietorship and toward leadership as a collective endeavor. Thus, leadership was defined by Spillane as the product of the connective web of the school actors’ interactions, use of artifacts, and the situation. Figure 1 depicts the elements of Spillane’s distributed leadership theory.



Spillane's work on distributed leadership yielded a new focus on the concept of multiple individuals' or actors' taking part in school leadership, including formal leaders, informal leaders, and their followers. Elmore (2000) stated, "The idea behind distributed leadership is that the complex nature of instructional practice requires people to operate in a network of shared and complementary expertise rather than in hierarchies that have a clearly defined division of labor" (p. 24).

The web of interaction among school personnel is just one component of Spillane's theory of distributed leadership practice. Spillane's theory also focuses on the way in which artifacts are used (e.g., agendas, pacing guides, data monitoring, etc.) and the fact that cultural principles are apart from but also included under the umbrella of artifacts (e.g., school's vision, goals, norms).

Gronn's conceptual framework. Gronn (2002) added an additional concept to distributed leadership by introducing *concertive action*, which means that people work in

concert to pool their initiative and expertise so that the outcome is greater than the sum of their individual actions. Gronn (2002) outlined three forms of concertive action that can be observed in the practice of distributed leadership: spontaneous collaboration, intuitive working relationships, and institutionalized practices. Gronn, as did Spillane, argued that the study of leadership consisting of solo or heroic leaders is not an accurate portrayal of the reality within schools. He described an additive or multiple leadership approach that redefines leadership to mean the aggregated leadership of an organization, which is dispersed among others in the school. This distributed leadership framework requires a division of labor that Gronn defined as the totality of the tasks and the technological capability used for the completion of those tasks by workers.

Taken together, the work of Spillane and Gronn makes the case that leadership in schools is much more than the traits, leadership style, and knowledge of an individual person. The challenge of improving the educational outcome for students involves multiple actors, operating within various policy environments and accountability contexts.

Both the appeal and the shortcomings of distributed leadership are centered on its meaning. Distributed leadership has been used to describe various types of leadership practices, including, but not limited to, shared leadership, facilitative leadership, and collaborative leadership. Terms that are associated with distributed leadership include democracy and empowerment. Wilson (2005) wrote, "Schools that will effectively produce the kinds of reforms that accountability demands must have administrators who build capacity for leadership in the school and who help to focus the efforts of the school on learning" (p. 4).

Purpose of Study

The current accountability context calls for exemplary middle schools that (a) produce higher levels of achievement among all student populations; (b) foster effective parent engagement and community partnerships; (c) recruit and retain competent staff with the knowledge and disposition to work with preadolescent learners; and (d) maintain a focus on continuous improvement through data monitoring and implementation of remedial, intervention, and accelerated learning supports. To create and sustain exemplary middle schools, leadership practice needs to be examined for the express purpose of building leadership capacity so that those who work with, give direction to, or support middle grade learners will be able to meet the daunting challenges that are present as well as those to come. Those middle schools must be learning communities in which the leadership is distributed. Spillane et al. (2001) wrote, “Much work has been done to analyze what leaders do, but not how they do it” (p. 24).

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to help develop an understanding of how exemplary middle school leadership team members perceive their role and function relative to distributed leadership. Specifically, this research utilized a case study methodology to analyze the ways in which leadership was dispersed and shared from the perspective of teacher leaders who served on a middle school leadership team. Teacher leaders, who are commonly the recipients of distributed leadership, provided a glimpse into the complex nature of the roles, beliefs, constraints, and practices that shaped their practice. There were eight teacher leaders selected for this study. The teachers were selected based on a ranking of all 38 middle schools within the district. The ranking was based on the Algebra 1 completion rate by 8th grade, reading/ math MSA scores, and

FARMS (Free and Reduced Priced Meals) rate among the student body.

Sites

The sites for this study were two middle schools serving sixth, seventh, and eighth grades, both located within a mid-Atlantic suburban school district. The district had a diverse student population of 140,000 students. The schools in this study mirrored the demographic makeup of the overall district. Each participating middle school was headed by a principal, two assistant principals, and in some cases, an assistant school administrator. Both middle schools had school leadership teams; these teams usually included eight department heads (resource teachers) and other formal or informal leaders appointed by the principal, such as staff development teachers and literacy coaches.

Teacher leaders that head curricular departments perform a number of roles: ordering textbooks; maintaining policies and procedures; analyzing and monitoring student performance data; and keeping department members informed of the direction, needs, and progress of the educational program.

Research Questions

This study investigated the following research questions:

1. How do teacher leaders who serve on school leadership teams in exemplary middle schools perceive their role?
2. What organizational structures support distributed leadership in middle schools and what organizational structures impede it?
3. What are the leadership activities that influence instructional decision making?
4. What are the team processes that support leadership practice?

Limitation of the Study

This study involved exemplary middle schools as determined by their meeting national, state, and local standards. In addition, “exemplary middle schools” were identified based on middle school performance targets within the school system in a Mid-Atlantic state; therefore, this study was limited to that school system. This study was limited to middle schools that had met all standards of accreditation and been identified as exemplary middle schools based on a guiding conceptual framework grounded in the literature.

Significance

Although there was tremendous depth and breadth of research on principal leadership, professional learning communities, and school culture, there were limited empirical studies investigating leadership at the level of a school rather than an individual. Furthermore, there was a gap in the research literature on the practice of distributed leadership with a focus on interaction among educators and certain contextual factors. Research on distributed leadership from the perspective of middle schools has been limited. The vast majority of the research on distributed leadership as a practice has been conducted from the perspective of elementary or senior high schools. This study facilitates the widening of the target of leadership. The study results also will make leaders more conscious of the tools they use and design in the practice of leadership.

Definitions of Terms

The following terms are defined to provide the reader with a common language regarding the research study.

Key distributive leadership terms.

Cultural artifacts. This term refers to the intangible principles, such as a school's vision, goals, or expectations, which drive the collective patterns and beliefs of the leaders' and followers' activities to enable or constrain the leadership practice (Spillane et al., 2001).

Distributed leadership. This leadership model recognizes that the complex nature of instructional practice requires people to operate in networks of shared and complementary expertise rather than in hierarchies with clearly defined division of labor (Elmore, 2000). Researchers Spillane et al. (2001) asserted that the idea of an activity's being "distributed or stretched over multiple people and the tools they use would be helpful to understand the practice of leadership in schools" (p. 23).

Tangible artifacts. This term refers to instructional tools, such as meeting agendas, curriculum guides, assessment data, student work, school improvement plans, lesson plans, daily schedules, and observation forms, which are used by leaders and their followers to enable or constrain the leadership practice (Spillane et al., 2001).

Terms related to forms of distributed leadership.

Intuitive working relations. This term refers to the leadership practice that involves two or more members' relying on one another to discern what is needed to solve the problem or complete the task without its being stated (Gronn, 2002).

Institutionalized practices. This term refers to practices dictated by the formal structures in a school that include role assignments, grade level organization, or schedules (Gronn, 2002).

Spontaneous collaboration. This form of leadership is characterized by interaction that is not assigned or planned between individuals as they use their expertise and work side by side to solve a problem or complete a task (Gronn, 2002).

General key terms.

Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). AYP is a provision of the No Child Left Behind Act that specifies the annual academic performance in mathematics and reading that each school must attain. According to the law, all students must be proficient by the 2013-2014 school year.

Exemplary schools. Exemplary schools meet all standards of accreditation and are deemed effective schools of quality based on the nomination of community superintendents.

Middle schools. Middle schools serve grades six, seven, and eight and include recognized leadership teams and interdisciplinary teams to support the social, emotional, and academic development of young adolescent learners.

No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB). NCLB refers to the legislation that reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), also known as Public Law 107-87 (NCLB, 2002). NCLB focuses on (a) testing and achievement of all students, (b) adequate yearly progress, and (c) highly qualified teachers.

Teacher leaders. These teachers are individuals who may hold formal roles on school leadership teams (i.e., department heads, team leaders, literacy coaches, special education resource teachers, staff development teachers, etc.). Teacher leaders may also be influential members who operate within the school community without holding a formal leadership role.

Race to The Top - The Race to the Top (RTTT) initiative was launched as a federal grant program by the Obama administration as a continuation of NCLB: For states and school districts to secure grants from the \$4.35 billion, proposals must include student growth as one of the multiple measures in an enhanced teacher evaluation system.

Teacher leadership practice from a distributed perspective is an appropriate unit of analysis. There is an opportunity at the school level for service in leadership roles. School leaders with and without formal leadership titles have the opportunity to influence instructional improvement among their colleagues and achievement improvement among students. Teachers discuss instructional strategies to help one another solve problems (B. G. Davis, 2009).

This chapter provided an overview of the practice of distributed leadership, including discussion of two theoretical frameworks, developed by Spillane and Gronn, regarding collective and team leadership and middle school achievement. The purpose of the study, research questions, summary of the methodology, definitions of terms, and the study's limitations also are outlined. The next chapter includes a critical review of the literature on distributed leadership and a focus on middle school achievement that is relevant to this study.

Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

This chapter highlights several empirical studies and literature tracing aspects of school leadership. Several empirical studies highlighted the various theories associated with principal leadership and their impact on school improvement efforts and climate. Because much of the work in middle schools is carried out by teacher leaders and committees, several studies examined the role of teacher leadership. In addition, studies providing insight about collective forms of leadership including teacher teams are presented. Moreover, a synthesis of selected empirical studies examines the evolution of the distributed leadership conceptual framework. Due to the current accountability context under which teachers and principal operate, examination of the literature elicits a call for exemplary middle school leadership from a distributed leadership perspective.

Principal Leadership

Theories on leadership continue to receive much attention from researchers as well as debate from consumers of leadership. The various theories are generally thought to consist of four approaches developed in succession during the 19th and 20th centuries. These approaches can be summarized as follows:

1. *Trait approach.* A successful leader has influence because of personal traits, such as bearing dominance, intelligence, and tone of voice. According to this way of thinking, “great persons” shape the events of their day by virtue of their exceptional talents.
2. *Situational approach.* A successful leader has influence because he or she appears to match the fixed expectations for leadership among “followers” in a given situation.
3. *Contingency approach.* A successful leader, based on something testable like a leader quality score, gains influence by picking the situation that corresponds favorably with his or her score.
4. *Transactional approach.* A successful leader earns influence by adjusting to the expectations of “followers.” This approach focuses on the process by which an individual gains influence and sustains it over time. (Heifetz, Sinder, Jones,

Hodge, & Rowley, 1989, p. 539)

Murphy, Smylie, Mayrowetz, and Louis (2009) investigated the role that formal leaders play in helping create leadership-dense school organizations. Their study focused on an urban middle school, one of six cases in a larger 3-year investigation of distributed leadership in two mid-Atlantic states. The researchers used interview and document-based data to illustrate ways in which the principal of a middle school worked to overcome cultural, structural, and professional barriers to create a leadership-dense organization. The researchers focused on two broad functions: (a) crafting organizational structures and (b) shaping organizational culture to capture the formal administrative work involved in distributed leadership in schools.

Leech and Fulton (2003) explored the relationship between teachers' perceptions of the leadership behaviors of secondary school principals in a large urban school district and their perceptions of the level of shared decision making practiced in their schools; they found a weak relationship between the leadership behaviors of the principal and the level of shared decision making in schools. The study found, however, a slightly stronger correlation when teachers perceived their principals as challenging the process. In other words, the more risk-taking behavior exhibited by the principal the greater the teachers' perceptions of their own level of input into decisions in the area of policy development (Leech & Fulton, 2003).

There is no doubt that school principals have an impact on a school's climate, thereby having an ultimate impact on teacher development and student learning. Findings from a descriptive case study of Montana high schools found a strong and significant relationship between the principal's use of instructional leadership elements

and the principal's degree of supportiveness. In addition, teachers in that study perceived principals as being actively engaged in all areas of leadership and actively sharing that leadership with their staff. Finally, five of the eight schools in the study perceived that the more supportive the principal and the more engaged the teachers, the more open the school climate and the more extensive the distribution of leadership throughout the staff in that school (Wilson, 2005).

Hallinger and Heck (1998) provided a review of the body of empirical research on principal effects that was conducted from 1980 to 1995. Hallinger and Heck set out to understand what had been learned about the substance of claims that principals' leadership practices make a difference in school effectiveness. More than 40 published journal articles, dissertation studies, and papers presented at peer-reviewed conferences were included in the review. Eleven of the studies were conducted outside the United States. The Hallinger and Heck study suggested that future research regarding the impact of principals' leadership practices should carefully consider the unit of analysis (e.g., teachers, principals, individual level or group level, and the multilevel nature of schooling) used to examine principals' impact on school outcomes. Furthermore, future studies should set out to discover the means by which principals achieve an impact on school outcomes as well as the interplay with contextual forces that influence the exercise of school leadership.

In a study of high-performing schools, Picucci, Brownson, Kahlert, and Sobol concluded that principals at these schools established tangible goals, held teachers accountable, challenged their staff to improve upon their own success, and communicated high expectations through dialogue, action, and symbolic gestures (as cited in Gohn,

2004). In *Turning Points 2000*, Jackson and Davis (2000) reported that “no single individual is more important to initiating and sustaining improvement in middle grade school students’ performance than the school principal” (p. 157). In a correlational study exploring the relationship between teachers’ perceptions of the leadership behaviors of secondary school principals in a large urban school district and their perceptions of the level of shared decision making in their schools, the researchers found a weak relationship between the leadership behaviors of the principal and the level of shared decision making in schools (Leech & Fulton, 2003). Nevertheless, the study found a slightly stronger correlation when teachers perceived their principals as challenging the process. In other words, the more risk-taking behavior exhibited by the principal the greater the teachers’ perceived level of their own input into decisions in the area of policy development (Leech & Fulton, 2003, p. 638).

Gurr, Drysdale, and Mulford (2006) provided a summary of research involving the role and contribution of the principal with regard to the quality of a school. Data from their examination demonstrated the significant contribution of the principal to the quality of education in each school. Data also suggested that principals make a significant contribution to building the capacity of others and that a successful leader fosters shared decision making to motivate and empower others.

Yager, Pedersen, and Pedersen’s (2010) qualitative study that focused on understanding how distributed leadership, collaboration, and team learning affected school improvement through the implementation of a schoolwide professional development initiative highlighted several principal traits that supported implementation efforts. They wrote,

The traits are: 1) Principal is a co-learner with the teachers willing to engage in the learning process alongside them, the depth of implementation will be dramatically increased. 2) When teachers view their principal as isolated and not committed passionately to instructional improvement, their own level of engagement and follow-through with the implementation of professional development initiatives will be diminished. 3) Absence of top-down mandates to implement the professional development initiative allowed a core group of teachers to continue to focus on implementation efforts. (Yager et al., 2010, p. 4)

Harris's (2012) survey of the available empirical evidence about distributed leadership and organizational outcomes produced key findings that highlighted the shift in the principal's role. This shift includes requiring the surrendering of some authority and power. Harris elaborated on this shift as follows:

What distributed leadership means for principals is a fundamental change in their understanding of leadership and in ways they enact their leadership roles. It implies the relinquishing of some authority and power, which is not an easy task, and a repositioning of the role from exclusive leadership to a form of leadership that is more concerned with brokering, facilitating and supporting others in leading innovation and change. It requires a different conception of the organization, one that moves away from the bureaucratic to the collaborative. (Harris, 2012, p. 8)

Consequently, policymakers and district leaders need to think about the development of the new skills; dispositions, and approaches that effective principals need to lead their school communities.

A synthesis of research findings from several studies that examined how principals and teachers contribute to shared instructional leadership and the relationship of shared instructional leadership to teacher and student learning produced several key findings. Foremost, principals and teachers add to the leadership dynamics but do so in different ways.

Teacher Leadership

Thus, a reconceptualization of leadership in the school setting proposes that the

work of designated leaders, including principals, assistant principals, department chairs, literacy coaches, and para-educators, may need to be the focus of more empirical studies to inform leadership practice.

There has been growing attention on ways to promote teachers' involvement in school leadership. The strategies used to promote teacher involvement include site-based management, site-based decision making, and participative decision making (Pounder, 1996). The efforts to increase teacher involvement have also caused policymakers and practitioners to reconceptualize school leadership. Pounder wrote,

Educational leadership most typically has been framed with the individual as the unit of emphasis or focus. Further, leadership by those in a position of formal authority (e.g., the principal) has probably received proportionately more attention than informal leadership by others in the school setting. (Pounder, 1996, p. 119)

A study conducted by Pounder, Ogawa, and Adams (1995) in a larger urban school district documented the presence of organizational leadership, or leadership distributed across organizational roles and hierarchies in the school. The study examined the influence exercised by various individuals or groups in the school setting and assessed the relationship between the influence of these individuals or groups and school effectiveness outcomes including student achievement, student attendance, turnover rates of certificated staff, and perceptions of effectiveness. Findings of the study indicated that most of these individuals or groups exercised "some influence" to "a lot of influence." Teachers' acting alone reflected no direct or indirect relationship to school-level outcomes or perceptions of effectiveness; however, teachers who acted as a group exercised a high degree of influence second only to that of the principal (Pounder, 1996).

Collective Leadership

Leithwood and Mascall (2008) defined collective leadership as “the combined effects of all sources of leadership and the possible differences in the contribution to such effects by each source including administrators, teachers, students, parents” (p. 530). A multiple-perspective case study conducted by Gurr et al. (2006) found three collective themes that are pertinent to the principal’s challenge in building collective leadership structures. First, the study showed the significant contribution of the principal to the quality of education in each school. Principals in the study possessed a set of common traits, such as honesty and openness, highly developed communication skills, flexibility, commitment, passion, empathy with others, a sense of “innate goodness,” being supportive of equity and social justice, having a belief that all children are important and capable of success, being other-centered, setting high expectations, and holding a belief that schools can make a difference. Second, the study found that the principals contributed significantly in the areas of capacity building, teaching, and learning. Moreover, all case study sites found evidence “that a successful leader fosters shared decision making to motivate and empower others” (Gurr et al., 2006, p. 376). The work of Gurr et al. compels principals to reflect on their practices; thus, their work stimulates scholarly inquiry to address several operative questions, such as the following:

1. What are the collaborative dispositions that are necessary to sustain instructional leadership in schools?
2. How do principals mediate competing demands from policymakers, parents, student groups, and teachers?
3. To what extent do distributed leadership practices build collective teacher

capacity?

4. Does capacity building lead to improved student performance?

Kennedy, Deuel, Nelson, and Slavit (2011) discussed the findings of a 5-year study of five middle and high schools in which teacher groups moved from voluntary to compulsory schoolwide professional learning communities. They wrote,

The findings highlight three important features of distributed leadership that help create an environment characterized by ongoing professional development. They are: 1) A leader's recognition and use of internal intellectual and experiential resources, 2) differentiated top-down and lateral decision-making process, and 3) culture building through dialogue and collaborative inquiry. (Kennedy et al., 2011, p. 22)

The research by Kennedy et al. emphasized that distributed leadership permits teachers to share their expertise and create collective responsibility for improving student learning.

Furthermore, district leaders learn the value added when extending leadership to teachers.

Hallinger and Heck's (2010) research described findings from a series of related quantitative studies in which researchers sought to understand how leadership contributes to school capacity for improvement and student learning. Specifically, the study compared four conceptual perspectives or models: (a) a direct effects model in which leadership is conceptualized as the primary driver for changes in student learning; (b) a mediated effects model in which leadership drives growth in student learning by shaping and strengthening the school's capacity for improvement; (c) a reversed mediated effects model in which the school's results—i.e., changes in student learning outcomes—drive changes in school improvement capacity and leadership; and (d) a reciprocal effects model in which leadership and school improvement capacity are conceptualized as a mutual influence process that contributes to growth in student learning.

In sum, the findings from the research reviewed by Hallinger and Heck (2010) endorsed the view that collaborative school leadership can impact student learning in reading and math positively through building the school's capacity for academic improvement. Thus, this research further heightens the scholarly call for empirical studies that focus on strategic school wide actions to support school improvement efforts. Furthermore, this study compels principals and other school leaders to rethink governance structures, organizational processes, and strategies to promote collaborative leadership to facilitate improved student achievement.

Teacher Teams

In a comparative case study (Meyers, Meyers, & Gelzheiser, 2001) that examined the shared decision-making teams from three schools (primary, middle, and high) in one district, the researchers found two elements to be necessary for effective team functioning. First, for teams to accomplish their goals, they must receive ongoing training regarding their roles, responsibilities, and the decision-making process. Principals must be willing to share leadership by facilitating educators' active involvement in making and implementing important school-based decisions. Second, principals must lead teams by establishing a clear mission statement to guide team functioning.

The study by Meyers et al. (2001) used quantitative and qualitative methodologies to permit examination of differences that might be attributed to school level (i.e., elementary, middle, or high school). The use of multiple data sources that included systematic direct observations provided a description of the decision making and distribution of power on these teams. Interviews, researcher memos, and summaries

of meetings constituted the data captured for this study.

Findings from each data source were summarized separately by two researchers who observed each team. The research team (the two observers from each team and a third researcher) sought confirmation or disconfirmation of the quantitative findings derived from observations. The study highlighted variability in efforts to implement shared decision making. The primary school team in the study functioned differently from the middle and high school teams in use of shared leadership as measured by the decision-making processes. In contrast with the middle and high school teams, the primary team did not make substantive decisions. The data suggest that the dominant role of the primary principal and the limited involvement of those on the leadership team may have been factors that contributed to this phenomenon. The middle and high school teams, which made more substantive decisions, reflected active involvement from all team members and developed goals for their school based on input from a range of educators. The impact of facilitative power was also highlighted in the study. This research suggests that facilitative power can promote effective implementation of shared decision making and that role ambiguity and conflict appeared to be related to the use of facilitative power.

Although the conclusions from the study by Meyers et al. (2001) must be interpreted with caution because of the small number of teams studied, this study provides guidance for future research regarding organizational and system issues, methodological considerations, and educators' implementation of shared decision making. First, organizational issues such as history of reform efforts, size of the school or district, school level, administrator characteristics, and communication were relevant

areas in this study and should be considered in future investigation. Second, this study used both quantitative and qualitative data to understand the functioning of three shared decision-making teams during their 1st year of operation. Future research involving school teams that have been engaged in a shared decision-making process over a longer period of time may illuminate findings that did not surface in this study. Finally, research is needed to clarify the degree to which a strong school vision impacts the work of teams.

Researchers and practitioners have been exploring *leadership* and *team leadership* for several decades; however, the recent interest has centered on collective forms of leadership, such as shared leadership, distributed leadership, social network forces for leadership, and leadership capacity (Day et al., 2000, p. 212). The research community and those who work or operate within team-based organizations thirst for a better understanding of team effectiveness. In addition, a need to understand the interactive nature among the actors who lead team-based organizations, as well as the environmental constraints that leadership teams face, appears to be receiving increased attention among researchers and practitioners alike.

Hulpia and Devos (2009) conducted a study that explored the link between distributed leadership and job satisfaction of school leaders. They surveyed 130 leaders of 46 large secondary schools. Participants completed a self-report questionnaire. The findings from this study were the following:

1. Cooperation of leadership team was the strongest predictor of school leaders' job satisfaction. The more school leaders perceived the leadership team as a team characterized by group cohesion, unambiguous roles, and goal orientedness, the higher their job satisfaction.

2. Different facets of the cooperative leadership team had a major impact on school leaders' job satisfaction, if they corresponded to the operation of the leadership team, and did not pertain only to the individual role of the school leaders.
3. Participation of teachers in school decision making had no effect on the job satisfaction of school leaders. The results from this study appear to reject popular notions found in much of the distributed leadership literature that "formal distribution of leadership functions and participatory decision making of teachers in schools is the panacea for school leadership in secondary schools" (Hulpia & Devos, 2009, p. 163).

Because teams (i.e., committee, work groups, etc.) carry out much of the work in schools, policymakers and practitioners have sought to discover the qualities that contribute to successful team leadership in schools. A multisite case study (Møller et al., 2005) involving three upper secondary schools that received the distinction of "good practice schools" highlighted important aspects of school leadership. First, leadership in these schools is an interactive process involving many people and players. Second, the distribution of leadership can best be interpreted in light of historical, cultural, political, and social contexts. Third, trust and power within an organization are closely interrelated. Trust creates the conditions and mobilizes people to action and collaboration; power without trust is not sustainable.

Although the study by Møller et al. (2005) contributed to the existing literature on team leadership by using a distributed leadership perspective to frame the complex nature of school leadership teams and their functions, the study leaves many unanswered

questions. First, what are the collaborative dispositions needed by members of the school's leadership team to effectively carry out tasks? Second, how do district and school leadership policies promote or hinder leadership team effectiveness?

Furthermore, this study was limited because the researchers chose to present findings from the Norwegian part of a much larger longitudinal study of the "Successful School Leadership Project." A case study of distributed leadership practices may be able to build on the work presented in this research. A study examining the distribution of leadership, which extends beyond a mere acknowledgment of division of labor and examines leadership practice that is spread over the work of multiple leaders, would benefit researchers, practitioners, and consumers of distributed leadership practices in schools.

Distributed Leadership in Practice

RTTT and The No Child Left Behind Act, along with state and local policy mandates, have caused those responsible for leading, managing, or supporting schools to view school leadership as a collaborative activity. An increased focus on improving the educational outcomes of all students, especially student populations that have traditionally underperformed, has compelled principals to work in a collaborative fashion with parents, teachers, and students. The realization that successful school leadership does not occur in a vacuum but is shared among various stakeholders has led the research community to better understand the nature of those who choose to participate in leadership in schools. Conventionally, those who participate in the leadership process in schools are the principal, assistant principal, department heads, grade level coordinators, and various content specialists (i.e., math and literacy coaches, special education

coordinators, or staff development teachers). The leadership team supports the principal in promoting the school's vision and goals and assists with shaping the school improvement plans. Nevertheless, Zappulla (2002) stated,

Research into the phenomenon of leadership teams in education demonstrates that schools utilize these teams for various reasons: consultative purposes, participative decision making, strategic planning, policy development, monitoring and co-coordinating programmes and to maintain a commitment to collaboration and shared leadership. (p. 29)

A reflective case study involving school-based literacy coaches' experience with the school leadership team identified focused conversations, tools and processes, and opportunities to reexamine work with children and each other as critically important factors that contribute to effective leadership team functions (Morgan & Clonts, 2008). Although the case study provided strategies that members of leadership teams might adopt to improve their dialogue and productivity, the study did not yield insights regarding the nature of the decisions that school leadership teams make and their impact on student achievement. In addition, this study was limited because it highlighted literacy coaches' experience with a single primary school leadership team. A study to examine the nature of the school leadership team's work at the middle school or secondary level would provide further insight regarding the ways in which leadership teams work together to increase the educational outcomes for all students, especially student groups that have not realized high academic achievement.

Chrispeels and Martin (2002) conducted a study that involved four school leadership teams participating in the California School Leadership Academy (CSLA). The school leadership teams received ongoing training consisting of 15 full days over a

3-year period. The leadership teams were purposefully selected from four middle schools in three school districts representing three geographical areas of California. Chrispeels and Martin set out to examine the roles and responsibilities of the school leadership teams and explored how perceptions of their place in the organization influenced team members' roles. Furthermore, the study examined the types of actions the team could take in support of student achievement and within the overall organizational structure (Chrispeels & Martin, 2002). Findings of the study suggest that teams and educational leaders need to recognize the influence of existing organizational structures on teams and the actions they are able to take. The researchers also argued that knowledge of the organizational structure as well as micro political dynamics can serve as advantages in constructing team roles and initiating change. Chrispeels and Martin's study described how members of school leadership teams must navigate both the political and relational terrain that exists within school organizations. The study highlighted several key issues that will intrigue both practitioners and researchers:

1. New structure arrangements can be the catalyst of change.
2. School leadership teams must have knowledge of organizational structure including rules and relationships to maximize impact.
3. Training, authority, and change are interrelated concepts.
4. There is no set formula for understanding school leadership team impact on environment.
5. Teams must understand micropolitics of the organization.
6. Change is slow.

Chrispeels and Martin's (2002) study provided a methodological approach that

should be replicated in future studies. Using quantitative (survey) data and qualitative (interviews, observations, and video) data appropriately captured the interplay among school leadership team members' roles, perceptions, and formal organizational structures. A study incorporating aspects of the micro political perspective within the context of a distributed leadership context will build on the understanding of the nature of the work that members on school leadership teams perform and the results they influence. Copeland (2003) stated, "It should be obvious at this point that if distributed leadership is to take root, new, more supportive structures will need to be forged and more broadly, schools will need to be restructured in significant ways" (p. 379).

Middle Schools

The reality of the current accountability context has influenced middle schools in particular. Middle schools, generally with no grade lower than fifth and no grade higher than eighth, face the unique challenge of educating young adolescents who are at various stages of social, emotional, and physical development. Although middle schools face challenges that are similar to those faced by elementary and secondary schools, a few distinct features make this area worthy of reflective exploration. First, according to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2000), departmentalized middle school teachers of mathematics, science, English, and social studies are more likely than their secondary school counterparts to lack certification in these respective fields. A possible reason for this phenomenon is that states allow elementary teacher certification to cover grades taught in middle schools. Second, middle school teachers are slightly less likely than those at other levels to remain teaching at the same school the following year (NCES, 2000). Third, middle schools teachers are more likely than teachers at the other

two levels to report that two problems—physical conflicts among students and student disrespect for teachers—are serious (NCES). Moreover, results of the Third International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) and the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) have raised several concerns about the state of middle school instruction and achievement. Concerns that have been highlighted include the following:

1. Eighth-grade mathematics classes in the United States are not as advanced and not as focused as those in Japan and Germany;
2. Topics taught in U.S. eighth-grade mathematics classrooms are at a seventh-grade level by international standards;
3. The content of U.S. mathematics classes requires less high-level thought than classes in Germany and Japan;
4. U.S. mathematics teachers' typical goal is to teach students how to do something, while the Japanese teachers' goal is to help their student understand mathematical concepts (excerpted from *A Sourcebook of Eighth Grade Findings: TIMSS, Mid-Atlantic Eisenhower Consortium for Mathematics and Science Education, 1997*). (as cited in Thompson, 2004, p. 7)

Efforts to create and sustain exemplary middle schools can be traced to many professional associations, foundations, and organizations that have authored reports and conducted research, thereby contributing significantly to the creation of exemplary middle schools. Thompson (2004) reported on early research: "In 1975, ASCD published *The Middle School We Need* that reasserted the need to develop schools around the needs and characteristics of young adolescents. Recommendations offered from this work included practices like team teaching, individualized instruction, and flexible scheduling" (p. 3). In 1982, the National Middle School Association (NMSA) published *This We Believe*. This position paper set forth the essential characteristics of the middle school:

1. Educators knowledgeable about and committed to young adolescents,
2. A balanced curriculum based on the needs of young adolescents,
3. A range of organizational arrangements (flexible structures),
4. Varied instructional strategies,

5. A full exploratory program,
6. Comprehensive counseling and advising,
7. Continuous progress for students,
8. Evaluation procedures compatible with the nature of young adolescents,
9. Cooperative planning, and
10. Positive school climate. (NMSA, 1982, p. 19)

In 1985, the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) released *An Agenda for Excellence at the Middle Level*, which focused on 12 areas: core values, culture and climate, student development, curriculum, learning and instruction, school organization, technology, teachers, transition, principals, connections, and client centeredness. In 1989, the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development issued *Turning Points: Preparing American Youth for the 21st Century*, which offered seven key components that middle schools were to adopt:

1. create small learning communities,
2. teach a core academic curriculum,
3. empower teachers and administrators,
4. staff middle schools with teachers who are expert at teaching young adolescents,
5. improve the academic performance of students,
6. reengage families in the educational process, and
7. connect schools with communities. (CCAD, 1989, p. 9)

A decade later, the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development published *Turning Points 2000* (CCAD, 2000). The updated recommendations called for middle schools to do the following: (a) teach a curriculum grounded in standards, relevant to adolescents; (b) use instructional methods that prepare all students to achieve; (c) organize relationships for learning; (d) govern democratically, involving all school staff members; (e) staff middle-grades schools with teachers who are expert at teaching young adolescents; (f) provide a safe and healthy school environment; and (g) involve parents and communities in supporting student development.

Angelle (2010) provided an in-depth view of one middle school in which leadership being spread throughout the organization was practiced regularly by administrators, teachers, and staff. Findings from this qualitative study suggested a model in which necessary preconditions for successful distributed leadership include a strong collaborative leader who practices shared decisions making, a culture in which trust permeates the organization, and continuous building of strong, positive relationships. The researcher reported,

These pre-conditions work through the organization structure, culture, and affiliation to provide a system in which distributed leadership can flourish and outcomes from this organization are a greater sense of teacher efficacy in their abilities to meet the needs of students, an increased level of trust among stakeholders, and greater job satisfaction for teachers and administrators. (Angelle, 2010, p. 18)

One might argue that policymakers, parents, and teachers will continue to grapple with issues regarding teacher turnover, achievement, discipline, and the unique needs of middle school adolescent learners. Nevertheless, it remains unclear whether or not past attempts to address these and other academic performance issues at the middle school level will be successful today. The need for remedies to these challenges and yet to be discovered challenges throughout the 21st century will call for a closer examination of past strategies with hope of building on these efforts so that schools and districts can realize high levels of academic achievement for all middle school learners.

Distributed Leadership

Harris (2007) highlighted the conceptual ambiguity surrounding distributed leadership by noting the different ways in which this concept has been addressed in the literature. First, the lens through which distributed leadership is viewed is the theoretical

frame. The conceptual framework for a study of distributed leadership is rooted in the theories of distributed leadership as defined by James Spillane and Peter Gronn. Spillane et al. (2001) viewed leadership as the interaction of school actors with their environment. Gronn (2002) outlined three forms of concertive action that can be observed in the practice of distributed leadership: spontaneous collaboration, intuitive working relations, and institutionalized practices. Considered together, the work of Spillane et al. and Gronn makes the case that leadership in schools represents much more than the traits, leadership style, and knowledge of an individual person. First, the challenge of improving the educational outcome of students involves multiple actors, operating within various policy environments and accountability contexts. Second, the empirical frame that currently exists concerning distributed leadership is still emerging. A number of articles have been written about this approach to leadership; however, empirical evidence to answer how, or to what extent, this theory influences improved student achievement and organizational effectiveness is needed (Lashway, 2003). In addition, efforts have been made to examine the relationship between distributed leadership and student achievement, school climate, and instructional leadership. As Harris (2007) wrote, “while specific studies of distributed leadership practice have been undertaken, they remain limited in number and have focused mainly on small school samples” (p. 318). Third, a normative lens on distributed leadership is primarily concerned with how leadership is distributed in schools and by whom. This study’s lens moves the distributed leadership to a predictive stance, focused on generating the most effective forms of distributed leadership practice (Harris, 2007, p. 320).

Both the appealing factors and the shortcomings of distributed leadership are

centered on its meaning. Distributed leadership describes various types of leadership practices, including, but not limited to, shared leadership, facilitative leadership, and collaborative leadership. Terms that are associated with distributed leadership include democracy and empowerment.

A number of researchers and practitioners have settled on a contemporary definition of distributed leadership put forth by Spillane. Spillane et al. (2001) suggested that distributed leadership is best understood as “practice distributed over leaders, followers and their situation and incorporate[ing] the activities of multiple groups of individuals” (p. 920). This definition implies a social distribution of leadership.

Alix and Gronn (2005) expanded the theoretical work of Spillane et al. by viewing distributed leadership as an emergent property of a group or a network of interacting individuals. Gronn (2002) suggested that *concertive* forms of distributed leadership may take three forms:

1. *Spontaneous collaboration*: From time to time, individuals with differing skills and knowledge capacities, and from across different organizational levels, coalesce to pool their expertise and regularize their conduct for the duration of the task, and then disband.
2. *Intuitive working relationships*: This form of concertive distributed leadership emerges over time “as two or more organizational members come to rely on one another and develop close working relations” and, as Gronn argued, “leadership is manifest in the shared role space encompassed by their relationship” (Gronn, 2002, p. 657).
3. *Institutionalized practice*: Citing committees and teams as their most obvious

embodiment, Gronn described such formalized structures as arising from design or through less systemic adaptation.

Leithwood et al. (2007) offered elaboration and refinement of Gronn's holistic forms of distributed leadership:

1. *Planful alignment*: The tasks or functions of those providing leadership have been given prior thoughtful consideration by organizational members.
2. *Spontaneous alignment*: Leadership tasks and functions are distributed with little or no planning.
3. *Spontaneous misalignment*: This configuration mirrors spontaneous alignment in the manner of leadership distribution, as well as its underlying values, beliefs, and norms.
4. *Anarchic misalignment*: This configuration is characterized by active rejection, on the part of some or many organizational leaders, of influence from others about what they should be doing in their own sphere of influence.

The models of distributed leadership set forth by Spillane et al. and Gronn also were advanced by Elmore (2000), whose interpretation connected the model to the improvement of instruction and school performance. The foundation of Elmore's theory of distributed leadership lies in the earlier researchers' principles of utilizing multiple sources of leadership, emphasizing individual expertise, and working in concert toward a common goal (M. W. Davis, 2009). Moreover, Elmore's framework emphasizes that the primary function of multiple sources of leadership is to provide guidance and direction throughout the organization. Thus, this guidance and direction develops a common culture for the purpose of improving instruction and school performance (Elmore, 2000,

p. 15). In sum, distributed leadership has been derived from the notion that large-scale improvement requires concerted action among people with different areas of expertise.

Distributed Leadership as an Emerging Construct

Distributed leadership is a term that has become widely used in the educational leadership community. Efforts to provide a definitive description of distributed leadership practice in schools have caused confusion and ambiguity. Distributed leadership tends to take on multiple meanings in capturing leadership activity. First, a theoretical lens is used for examining the activity of leadership. Researchers Spillane et al. (2001) asserted that the idea of activity's being "distributed or stretched over multiple people and the tools they use would be helpful to understand the practice of leadership in schools" (p. 920). Second, distributed leadership for democracy is another descriptive lens that some proponents of distributed leadership use to convey the belief that leadership activities should not rest in the hands of an individual but be shared among a number of people in an organization or team. A third use of the term distributed leadership centers on efficiency and effectiveness. Supporters of this descriptive view argue that expertise should be an important consideration when dispersing leadership activities. Fourth, distributed leadership usage in the literature focuses on the idea that collective action leads to the expansion of individual expertise: Simply, teachers expand their knowledge base by working together. Thus, collective action leads to collective goal setting, which in turn, leads to collective capacity building (Mayrowetz, 2008).

One aspect of distributed leadership theory rests on the belief that leadership distributed across various people and situations is a valuable conceptual lens through which to understand the school environment and efforts of leaders to improve

organizational effectiveness and student achievement. An empirical study involving seven elementary schools and literacy leaders' work with teachers to improve instruction and student achievement from a distributed leadership perspective found that embedding a vision, task enactment, boundary spanning, and relationship between leaders and followers are important constructs with regard to school improvement (Timperley, 2005). Timperley's study adequately brought to life the theoretical frameworks of distributed leadership practice set forth by Spillane et al. (2001) and Gronn (2002). Spillane et al. suggested that distributed leadership is best understood as "practice distributed over leaders, followers and their situation [that] incorporates the activities of multiple groups of individuals" (Spillane et al., 2001, p. 25). This definition implies a social distribution of leadership. Gronn expanded the theoretical work of Spillane et al. by viewing distributed leadership as an emergent property of a group or a network of interacting individuals. Nevertheless, Timperley's study was limited in that the leadership activity observed was restricted to team meetings. A future study that examines the interaction of multiple leaders at the secondary level may add a dimension to the body of literature on distributed leadership practices in schools.

It is evident that principals have a daunting challenge. The current educational climate holds schools accountable for results that are evidenced through students' yearly performance on statewide assessments. It is also evident that sustained performance cannot be left solely in the hands of the principal. Thus, frameworks for distributed leadership have been developed to provide a potential approach for policymakers and principals to extend the challenge of improving student performance to teacher leaders in schools. Opportunity to participate in leadership tasks should be extended to others as

they work together toward a singular purpose.

The limited research in the area of distributed leadership has described how this practice looks in the school house (Lashway, 2003; Spillane & Orlina, 2005; Timperley, 2005; Wilson, 2005). Distributed leadership is grounded in several conceptual models; it has been described using divergent definitions and has been studied using both quantitative and qualitative methodologies. The review of the literature revealed a need for empirical studies on teacher leaders' leadership practice from a conceptual framework rooted in distributed leadership.

It can be argued that the theoretical frameworks of Spillane et al. (2001), Gronn (2002) and Elmore (2000) are ripe for application in the present-day accountability and policy contexts that impact teacher leaders and those who are responsible for developing and nurturing teacher leadership (See Figure 2).

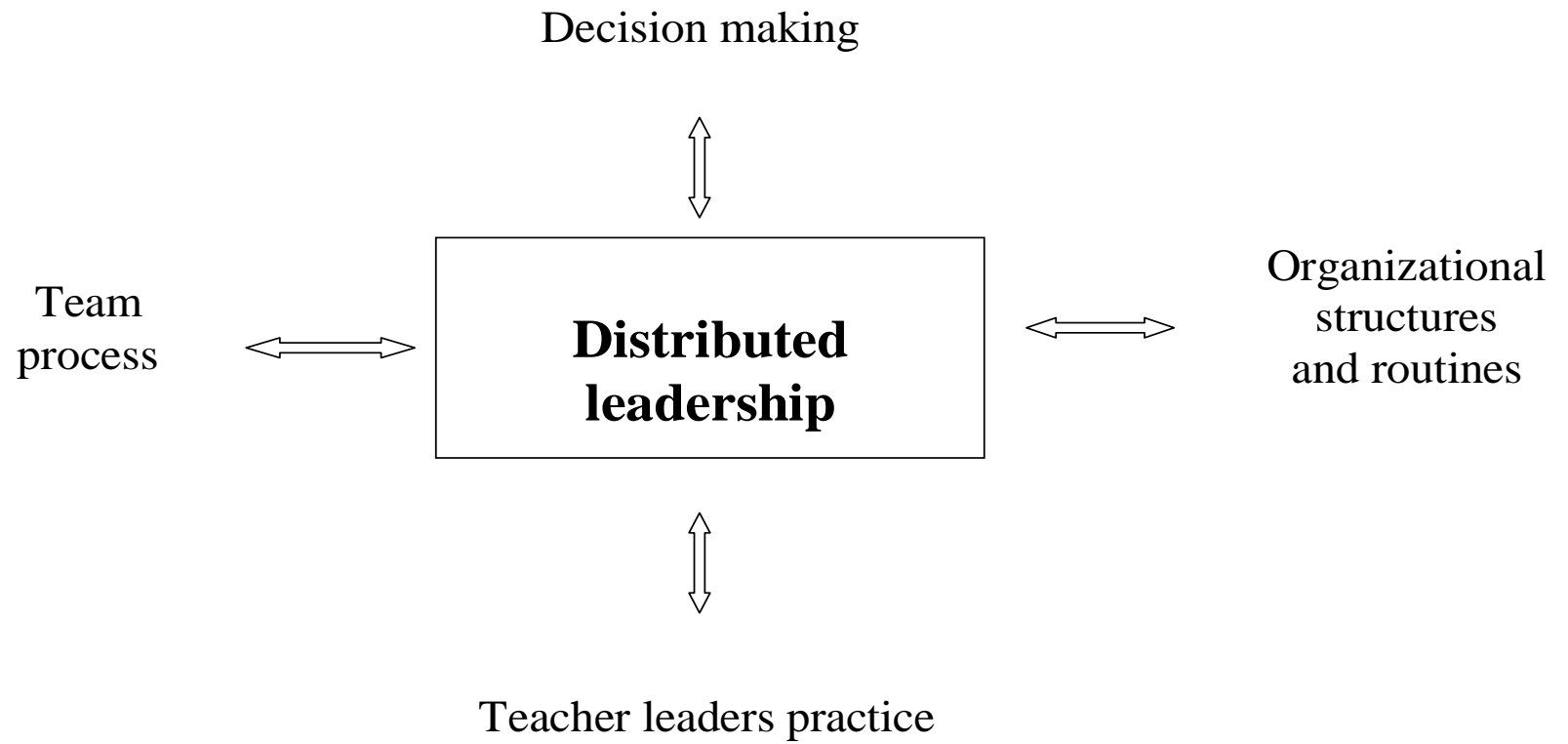


Figure 2. Distributed leadership impact on teacher leaders' practice.

This chapter presents a summary of empirical studies on distributed leadership. The chapter highlights recent research literature arguing that the traditional heroic-leadership models be replaced by shared-leadership models that stress the distribution of leadership and participative decision making (Copeland, 2003; Leithwood & Mascall, 2008; Leithwood & Riehl, 2003). Further, this chapter summarizes the theoretical frameworks of Spillane (2006), Gronn (2002), and Elmore (2000) and their contributions to this field of inquiry. Although Gronn and Spillane defined distributed leadership theoretically, it remains a nebulous concept to operationalize through empirical research. This study sought to add to the research literature regarding distributed leadership practice in schools by situating Spillane's, Gronn's, and Elmore's theoretical constructs in the present-day reality of demanding accountability and policy environments. This study adds to the empirical literature, not only by illuminating teacher leaders' perceptions of distributed leadership in middle schools but also by providing a glimpse of how the current policy and accountability environment impacts teacher leaders' practice.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Review of Methodology

Research on distributed leadership in middle schools has been scarce. The units of analysis for a vast number of empirical studies have focused on organizational components but not on the people who play a vital role in performing leadership tasks within a school. Consequently, empirical studies that investigate leadership at the level of a school rather than an individual are limited. Furthermore, there is a gap in the research literature on the practice of distributed leadership with a focus on interaction between educators and certain contextual factors. Thus, this study examined the perception of teacher leaders regarding the sharing of leadership.

This study sought to add to the existing body of knowledge regarding distributed leadership practice by illuminating the voice, tasks, and interactions among teacher leaders in exemplary middle schools. For several reasons, careful consideration was given to the methodological approaches to best accomplish this ambitious scholarly pursuit. First, an essential goal of this study was to shed light on the interplay of team processes, organizational structures, and decision making from a distributed leadership perspective. Second, developing a vivid and rich portrayal of teacher leadership practices was necessary to capture the essence of teacher leadership practice in an era of increased calls for accountability and better outcomes for students. As a result, a qualitative case study approach was found to be applicable for this context. This study was conducted in four phases—pilot study, negotiation of entry, data collection, and data analysis—before final reporting.

Phase one – pilot study. A pilot study was conducted prior to the start of the research to check for validity in the protocol and categorization system. Marshall and Rossman (1999) wrote, “Description and assessment of a qualitative pilot study support the researcher’s claim that he is capable of conducting the proposed research” (p. 64). The researcher practiced interview questions and the prescribed protocol with a peer reviewer experienced with qualitative research. The researcher and the peer reviewer met to review the questions and the categorization plan. After a review of the interview protocol and categorization system, the researcher and the peer reviewer agreed on modifications to the protocol. In the next phase of the pilot study the researcher and peer reviewer scheduled an interview with a teacher leader; the interview was audiotaped. During the interview the researcher and peer reviewer scripted the respondent’s answers to the interview questions. After the interview was completed, the researcher and peer reviewer independently coded the data. At various points the researcher and peer reviewer played back portions of the audiotape to ensure that scripted data were captured accurately. Upon completion of the coding of the data, the researcher and peer reviewer compared results and discussed findings; they reached final agreement on interview questions and processes to strengthen the protocol.

Phase Two – negotiation of entry. In accordance with the school division’s Institutional Review Board process, a protocol was established to identify participants for this student.

The protocol centered on the researcher’s ranking the 38 middle schools based on middle school performance targets. The performance targets included Algebra I completion rate by the end of the eighth grade, math and reading performance on a

statewide assessment, and the number of students qualifying for free or reduced-price meals. One school with the highest ranking on the performance targets was selected for this study. The second school selected for the study was a middle school ranking high on the performance targets and having the highest number of students participating in the free or reduced-price meals (FARMS) program.

After the protocol was established, the researcher met with or provided a written overview of the study to four individuals, including the accountability officer, chief performance officer, area superintendent, and deputy superintendent, to seek endorsement for the proposed study. Once the endorsements were received from several senior executive leaders, the school system granted permission for the study. The next step in negotiating entry involved sending a letter to each of the two school principals, requesting a meeting to provide an overview of the proposed study. The researcher followed up with a personal phone call to each school's administrative secretary to coordinate the meeting with the principal. During the meeting, the researcher provided each principal with copies of endorsement letters, consent forms, and an overview of the research study. The researcher explicitly sought the principals' support and endorsement of this study. Upon receiving verbal commitments from each principal, the researcher requested support in scheduling individual on-site interviews with each principal and four teacher leaders, the department chairs for the math, science, social studies, and English departments from each school. In one of the schools all interviews were conducted in one full day. Interviews in the other school required the researcher to schedule meetings individually with teacher leaders over a period of a month and a half. Each of the interviews lasted from 45 minutes to an hour. The interview was audiotaped and

transcribed verbatim. A thank you letter and a \$5.00 Starbucks gift card were sent to each participant after the interview sessions.

Phase Three – data collection. For this study, data were collected via on-site interviews, review of artifacts, and follow-up information requested by telephone or e-mail with participants.

Interviews were conducted on site (at each school) with the exception of one interview with a teacher leader that was conducted after the school year had ended. Because the teacher-leader was changing jobs, the researcher and the teacher leader met at another site.

Although one hour was allocated for each interview, most of the interviews lasted only about 45 minutes. In one school the teacher leaders' interviews were conducted in one full day in a conference room away from the main office. The principal interview was conducted in her office. In the other school the teacher leaders' interviews were conducted after the work day in teacher offices or work spaces; the principal interview was conducted in her office. The researcher followed the protocols outlined and previously approved for the study. All interviews were recorded using the Sound Note digital computer application while the researcher took copious notes.

Phase Four – data analysis. The fourth phase involved data analysis of the interviews and review of artifacts.

Organizing and preparing the data for analysis. Data analysis was an ongoing process from the initial onset of collection to the presentation of the results of the study. After conducting the interviews, the researcher completed a participant profile sheet (Appendix C) and an interview contact summary form (Appendix D). All interviews

were audiotaped, and the audiotapes were submitted to a transcriber to be processed. All transcripts were placed in a three-ring binder. Transcripts were divided using standard three-ring dividers and labels. The labels identified the school site and participants' roles for each school. The researcher created two additional binders for the school sites to maintain summary forms, interview notes, protocols, collected documents, signed consent forms, and other pertinent information regarding the school.

The researcher read through the copious notes taken during the interviews to obtain a general sense of the information. The researcher also listened to the audiotapes of the interviews to gain further insights regarding the phenomenon being studied.

The data were coded using a preliminary coding matrix. An Excel spreadsheet was created to manage the categorization process. Specifically, the Excel spreadsheet contained cells color coded according to participants, interview questions, and preliminary codes. The Excel spreadsheet also included miscellaneous columns to capture other themes that emerged outside the preliminary codes. This coding system aided the researcher in breaking down the data and using thematic codes to yield preliminary meaning for the data.

A secondary analysis of the data was conducted by the researcher. This secondary analysis involved the researcher's clustering specific codes into themes within a school and then using a cross-case analysis matrix to make connections between the two schools included in this study. The researcher examined the data for multiple perspectives from individuals supported by direct quotations. The essential data were organized, compacted, and displayed in a series of matrices.

The researcher wrote up each case individually, using a similar outline for each case. This process was followed by a comparison across cases using cross-case matrices. The researcher examined all of the data, looking for similarities and differences.

Upon completion of the initial coding of the transcript data as well as secondary analysis, the researcher identified a peer reviewer. Peer review provides an external check of the research process and interpretations: “The role of the peer reviewer is to keep the researcher honest; ask hard questions about methods, meanings, and interpretations” (Creswell, 1998, p. 202). The peer reviewer was given a few transcripts and asked to use the coding matrix to categorize the data. The peer reviewer and the researcher compared notes and discussed themes and information relevant to the data collection process.

The collective cases are described with numerous narrative passages, providing a rich account of the data to allow the teacher leaders’ perceptions of distributed leadership practices to be fully conceptualized and interpreted by those who did not have the opportunity to engage in structured dialogue. Charts, figures, and tables are presented to provide a visual and conceptual representation of the meaning of the data. Pseudonyms are used for districts, schools, and individuals that participated in this study. Documents were renamed to maintain anonymity of schools or individuals. A peer reviewer was consulted at various points throughout the study.

In sum, the data analysis and representation employed by the researcher followed key components of qualitative case study research: (a) creating and organizing files for data; (b) reading through text, making margin notes, forming initial codes; (c) describing the case and its context; (d) using categorical aggregation and establishing patterns of

categories; (e) using direct interpretation and developing naturalistic generalizations; and (f) presenting narrative augmented by tables and figures (Creswell, 1998).

Rationale for Methodology

Design of the study. There is limited empirical research regarding the relationship of distributed leadership to middle school teacher leaders' practice. Through the use of qualitative methods, this researcher provided an analysis of teacher leaders' perceptions of organizational structures and supports and uncovered the extent to which teacher leaders' interactions and activities enabled or constrained leadership practice.

A qualitative method is a suitable approach for this study designed to develop an understanding through rich descriptions of the complex work of middle school teacher leaders who serve on school leadership teams and their perceived notions of organizational structure and its influence on practice. Stake (1994) asserted that instrumental case study and collective case study are appropriate techniques to employ for qualitative research. Instrumental case study research is an appropriate mode of inquiry to gain insight into an issue or refinement of theory. Collective case study is appropriate when the research is extended to several cases. Stake stated,

Individual cases in the collection may or may not be known in advance to manifest the common characteristic. They may be similar or dissimilar, redundancy and variety each having voice. They are chosen because it is believed that understanding them will lead to better understanding, perhaps better theorizing, about a still larger collection of cases. (Stake, 1994, p. 237)

Using Stake's (1994) case study considerations, Table 1 highlights the logic embedded in this study.

Table 1. *Logic Embedded in Study*

Issue	Case study consideration
Topical issue	What is the distribution of leadership among teacher leaders who serve on middle school leadership teams?
Foreshadowed problem	Whereas the current accountability context requires leaders to interact with other leaders and school actors and their environment, what are the enabling and constraining forces that influence teacher leaders' leadership practice?
Issue under development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. To what extent do teacher leaders' perceptions impact teacher leaders' practices? b. What are the leadership activities that influence instructional decision making? c. To what extent do teacher leaders' interactions and activities enable or constrain leadership practice?
Assertion	Practitioners and policymakers will benefit from an understanding of teacher leaders' leadership practice in an effort to navigate the accountability terrain.

Marshall and Rossman (1999) described the qualitative research process:

Qualitative researchers rely quite extensively on in-depth interviewing. Typically, qualitative in-depth interviews are much more like conversations than formal events with predetermined response categories. The researcher explores a few general topics to help uncover the participant's views but otherwise respects how the participant frames and structures the responses. (p.108)

Because of increased calls for improved academic outcomes for middle school students, it has become more critical to understand the many factors that contribute to a school's effectiveness. This study adds to the empirical literature regarding the

relationships among school leadership teams, organizational effectiveness, and student achievement. Further, this study analyzed the relationship between middle school leadership teams' perceived notion of distributed leadership and the structures prevalent in exemplary middle schools that not only support distribution of leadership but also influence instructional decision making. The current accountability context makes it clear that a successful middle school principal must work in concert with staff and build collective expertise to lead school improvement efforts. This study analyzed the relationship between distributed leadership and teacher leaders' practices within exemplary middle schools district during the 2011-2012 school year.

Statement of research questions. The central questions of this study focuses on understanding how teacher leaders who serve on school leadership teams in exemplary middle schools perceive roles. How do teacher leaders who serve on school leadership teams in exemplary middle schools perceive their role? What organizational structures support distributed leadership in middle schools and what organizational structures impede it? What are the leadership activities that influence instructional decision making? What are the team processes that support leadership practice?

Site and population selection. The schools utilized in this study were from a large urban school district in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States. Participants in the study were members who served on the school leadership teams during the 2011-2012 school year. At the time of this study, the school district had 38 middle schools. The district had taken steps toward distributed leadership in schools that participated in the early phases of a middle school reform initiative by allocating to each school a full-time literacy coach and a math content lead teacher who did not teach classes but served

as support to teachers. In addition, members of the school leadership teams in middle schools in Phase 1 of the reform initiative received comprehensive training on data analysis. Each school received unique software that allowed school teams to analyze real-time data (i.e., leading and lagging indicators) to inform instruction and implement immediate interventions for students. Moreover, school-based leadership teams received comprehensive training on the components and characteristics of effective leadership teams.

Data-gathering methods. Upon identification of the schools for this study, this researcher selected schools based on the student demographic data (i.e., socioeconomic status, race, gender, and school size). In addition, the researcher considered the length of the principal's service at a school in the event of a tie or like schools.

Once the schools were selected, the researcher conducted in-depth interviews with teacher leaders from three middle schools in the district. Purposeful selection techniques ensured that a representative sample of teacher leaders was included in this study. The researcher selected an equal number of teacher leaders from each school to represent the spectrum of years of experience and educational attainment. Each teacher leader in this study held a formal role on a school's leadership team as a math, science, social studies or English department chair. These individuals participated in interviews with this researcher.

Marshall and Rossman (1999) noted, "Qualitative researchers typically rely on four methods for gathering information: (a) participation in the setting, (b) direct observation, (c) in-depth interviewing, and (d) analyzing documents and material culture" (p. 105). Consistent with qualitative methods for gathering data, this research study

utilized direct observation, in-depth interviewing, and document analysis. Observation can be defined as “the systematic noting and recording of events, behaviors and artifacts (objects) in the social setting chosen for study” (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 107). The observer’s notes are referred to as field notes, which can be defined as “detailed, nonjudgmental, concrete descriptions of what has been observed” (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 107).

In-depth interviewing is used extensively in qualitative research. The technique requires the researcher to explore a few broad topics to help reveal the participant’s views. The researcher remains neutral and allows the participants to frame their responses based upon their understanding of the phenomena being examined (Marshall & Rossman, 1999).

Review of documents is another technique that is consistent with a qualitative mode of inquiry. As Marshall and Rossman (1999) stated, “researchers supplement participant observation, interviewing, and observation with gathering and analyzing documents produced in the course of everyday events or constructed specifically for the research at hand” (p. 116). For the purpose of this study, several documents were solicited from the school leadership team, including mission statements, memos, action items, meeting notes, and other items created by the participants to represent their work.

Data-analysis procedures. The researcher employed common features associated with qualitative data analysis. Marshall and Rossman (1999) summarized the features as follows: (a) organizing the data; (b) generating categories, themes, and patterns; (c) coding the data; (d) testing the emergent understandings; (e) searching for alternative explanations; and (f) writing the report.

The researcher recorded and coded data gathered through in-depth interviews with participants. A frequency table and concept matrix captured themes that emerged from the study. This approach is consistent with qualitative research methods. Marshall and Rossman (1999) wrote, “As categories of meaning emerge, the researcher searches for those that have internal convergence and external divergence” (p. 215). They summarized the categorization of data as follows:

That is, the categories should be internally consistent but distinct from one another. Here, the researcher does not search for the exhaustive and mutually exclusive categories of the statistician but, instead, identifies the salient, rounded categories of meaning held by participants in the setting. (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 154)

The current accountability context within which many schools are operating has required them to show improvement in student achievement on standardized tests and district and state assessments. Schools and districts have implemented an array of policies to ensure that leaders are responsive to the accountability mandates. Thus, school leaders have adopted organizational routines to ensure that the local schools are strategically responding to this pressure. For the purpose of this study, the researcher examined school leaders’ actions exhibited through organizational routines designed to improve student achievement and instruction. Spillane and Diamond (2007) stated, “Because organizational routines are a key mechanism through which leaders enact their practice, they offer an important window into leadership practice in schools” (p. 107).

A distributed framework was used to study leadership and management practices in the schools selected for this study. The study captured the essence of people involved in leadership work, the tools they used, and the way that leadership practices were related to leaders, followers, and elements of the situation.

Trustworthiness

Prior to initiation of this study, approval was obtained from the University of Maryland College Park Internal Review Board as well as the participating school district. Participants were informed in a written cover letter, as well as during in-depth interviews, that their responses would be kept confidential and their anonymity maintained. There was no way to identify individual participants. Subsequently, identification of principals of participating schools also was kept confidential. The study's findings maintained the anonymity of the participating schools; therefore, individual principals were not identified. Potential risks to the participants who volunteered to take part in this study were minimal.

The data obtained from this study were kept in a secure manner and used for research purposes only. The researcher assigned unique codes to all data to protect the confidentiality of participants. The researcher converted field notes and interview transcripts into data files. The data files were saved to a memory stick and stored in a locked file drawer. At the end of the study, the individual teacher leaders' interview transcripts were destroyed, and the data files will continue to be kept in a locked file cabinet for a period of 5 years.

Personal Biography

I have had the privilege of serving as a classroom teacher at the middle and senior high school levels for several years. Throughout my classroom-teaching journey, I pursued the discovery of instructional strategies that allowed me to meet the needs of my students on a daily basis. As is the case with most teachers, I considered witnessing the high academic attainment of students to be the most satisfying and rewarding aspect of

the teaching journey. While simultaneously pursuing sound instructional practices, I sought ways to find my voice and embraced opportunities to serve as a teacher leader. Although these opportunities were limited, I often wondered why principals settled for top-down mandates without seeking input from teachers. Thus, there were apparent disconnects between the administrative team and teachers. On those rare occasions when opportunities allowed me to serve as a teacher leader, the experience was often disappointing due to unclear goals, limited time, and other organizational barriers. As a school-based administrator, I have sought ways to build the leadership capacity of others. Nevertheless, I have grappled with the degree to which to extend leadership and how to effectively support the work of teacher leaders within the confines of a daunting accountability context that does not allow for time, professional development, and coaching for performance opportunities. As a researcher and practitioner, I hoped this study would yield insights to strengthen not only my own leadership skills but also the skills of those who strive to build the leadership capacity of teacher leaders in middle schools. Thus, this study has the potential to add to the existing body of literature on distributed leadership. The research fills a void in the literature by examining the perceptions of teacher leaders in middle schools. This study highlighted the ways in which work is “stretched-out” and the kinds of interactions that occur among teacher leaders. Thus, the findings will aid principals in building leadership capacity with teacher leaders.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The literature review conducted for this study identified several components associated with distributed leadership practices. These components formed the preliminary bases for analysis and exploration in this study.

Gronn (2002) and Kennedy et al. (2011) identified several forms of collaboration such as spontaneous, intuitive working relations and institutionalized practices as being linked to the sharing of leadership responsibilities and tasks. Teacher leaders' role in shaping and impacting a school's vision was discussed in several empirical studies by Elmore (2000, 2001), Spillane et al. (2001), Gronn (2002), and Spillane and Diamond (2007).

A few studies asserted that one aspect of distributed leadership practice in schools is the monitoring of student achievement and performance. Elmore (2000) and Davis M.W. (2009) provided accounts of how school leaders monitored school performance from a distributed leadership perspective. Participatory decision making was consistently highlighted in the literature as an essential element of distributed leadership practice. Copeland (2003), Leithwood and Riehl (2003), Leithwood and Mascall (2008), Angelle (2010), and Kennedy et al. (2011) all painted vivid pictures of the ways school leaders participate in decision making and the impact of their participation on their practices.

Moreover, Mayrowetz (2008) noted a striking component of distributed leadership when he advanced the notion of collective actions providing key insights into the conditions or tasks that promote such actions among the recipients of distributed

leadership. In addition to collective action, Mayrowetz (2008) suggested that there are times when teacher leaders engage in work that expands their knowledge.

Researchers, practitioners, and consumers of the philosophical and theoretical orientations of distributed leadership can look to an in-depth study by Murphy et al. (2009) about the organizational structures that impact distributed leadership practice. Hallinger and Heck (1998), Jackson and Davis (2000), and Gurr et al. (2006) cited and analyzed principal leadership practices in their empirical studies. Collectively, these studies contributed to the distributed leadership landscape by examining how principals foster shared decision making to motivate and empower teacher leaders. Leithwood and Mascall (2008) highlighted principal personal traits by identifying certain qualities that support the sharing of leadership. Zappulla (2002) and Elmore (2000) outlined another compelling component of distributed leadership that centers on the role that teacher leaders with formal authority play in shaping the school's vision and school improvement initiatives.

Chrispeels and Martin's (2002) distributed leadership study examined how leadership teams influence the change process. The aforementioned components of distributed leadership were used to examine teacher leaders' perceptions of distributed leadership practices in two exemplary middle schools in Harlan County Public Schools (HCPS).

This chapter presents an overview of the case study methodology used in analyzing the perceptions and experiences with distributed leadership of teacher leaders in two exemplary middle schools.

An analysis of the data collected via interviews with eight teacher leaders and two principals, followed by a cross-case analysis, is presented. Each case study includes description of the context, including the academic and demographic profile of the school and teacher leaders' background information. Interview data were analyzed and coded. The analysis of the data included disaggregation of the data into dimensions of distributed leadership.

One aspect of distributed leadership theory rests on the belief that leadership distributed across various people and situations is a valuable conceptual lens through which to understand the school environment and efforts of leaders to improve organizational effectiveness and student achievement. Thus, teacher leaders' perceptions of distributed leadership were explored in this study. Each case study was summarized and concluded with the researcher's examining the data as related to the research questions guiding this collective case study.

Harlan County Public Schools

District context. At the time of this study, Harlan County Public Schools (HCPS) was the largest school district in a mid-Atlantic state. With an enrollment of more than 140,000 students, it ranked in the top 20 largest school districts in the country. Students from more than 164 countries, speaking more than 180 languages, were represented in this district. The demographic make-up of the division included the following: African American, 21.2%; American Indian, 0.2%; Asian, 14.3%; Hispanic, 26.0%; and White, 33.8%. Students receiving free or reduced-price meals (FARMS) represented 32.3%. The percentage of students ever receiving FARMS was 41.5%, the percentage speaking English as a second language (ESOL) was 13.1%, and the

percentage of students receiving special education services (SPED) was 11.9%. Harlan County Public Schools was a recipient of the 2010 Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award, the highest presidential honor given to American organizations for performance excellence. HCPS was only the sixth public school system to receive the award. Study participants were members who served on the school leadership teams during the 2011-2012 school year. At the time of the study, the school district had 38 middle schools. The district had taken steps toward distributed leadership by allocating to each school a full-time literacy coach, a staff development teacher, and content lead teachers who either did not teach classes or had a reduced teaching load to provide support to teachers. In addition, members of the school leadership teams in this study were early participants in a middle school reform initiative and had received comprehensive training on data analysis, effective team leadership practices, and professional learning communities. School leadership team members also received training on shared leadership practices as well as extensive training through an in-district institute focused on the characteristics of the adolescent learner, the adolescent brain, and academic and racial identity. The schools in this study received permission to offer unique elective courses focused on literacy, robotics, film, and STEM (Science, Technology, and Engineering and Math) components. Both schools in this study received ongoing professional development and coaching from an array of central office support professionals.

Wilson Middle School

The context. Wilson Middle School was a comprehensive middle school. During the 2011-2012 school year there were 908 students enrolled in the school. The following programs were offered in the school: Deaf and Hard of Hearing, Learning and

Academic Disabilities, Middle School Reform Phase 1, and Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS). Table 2 summarizes the enrollment composition of the school.

Table 2. *Wilson Middle School Enrollment Composition*

	%									
	Total	Female	Male	AM	AS	BL	HI	PI	WH	MU
All students		49.4	50.6	≤ 5.0	11.5	15.4	33.5	≤ 5.0	35.0	≤ 5.0
ESOL	< 5.0	≤ 5.0	≤ 5.0	≤ 5.0	≤ 5.0	≤ 5.0	≤ 5.0	≤ 5.0	≤ 5.0	≤ 5.0
FARMS	34.4	17.6	16.7	≤ 5.0	≤ 5.0	8.5	20.0	≤ 5.0	≤ 5.0	≤ 5.0
SPED	13.5	5.1	8.5	≤ 5.0	≤ 5.0	≤ 5.0	≤ 5.0	≤ 5.0	≤ 5.0	≤ 5.0

*Racial/ethnic composition figures reflect state abbreviations: American Indian or Alaskan Native (AM); Asian (AS); Black or African American (BL); Hispanic/Latino (HI); Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander (PI); White (WH); Two or More (Multiple) Races (MU)

The Harlan County Public Schools (HCPS) Strategic Plan identified several performance targets that middle schools were expected to meet. The academic performance targets included meeting or exceeding annual measurable objective (AMO) on the state assessment in math and reading.

Table 3 summarizes the Wilson Middle School's proficiency rates in math and reading during the 2010-2011 school year.

Table 3. *Wilson Middle School Proficiency Rates 2010-2011*

	Grade 6		Grade 7		Grade 8	
	Math	Reading	Math	Reading	Math	Reading
All students	95.0	95.0	95.0	95.0	95.0	95.0
Asian	95.0	95.0	95.0	95.0	95.0	95.0
Black	95.0	95.0	00.5	85.7	87.5	93.8
Hispanic/Latino	91.3	95.0	95.0	86.2	85.3	91.2
White	95.0	95.0	95.0	95.0	95.0	95.0
Two or more races	95.0	90.5	95.0	95.0	90.9	95.0
FARMS	95.0	90.0	92.9	71.4	77.8	88.9
LEP	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----
SPED	79.3	86.2	88.6	65.7	71.1	86.8

*Outcome data reflect 2010-2011 school year.

**Results are not reported (---) for groups with fewer than 10 students enrolled.

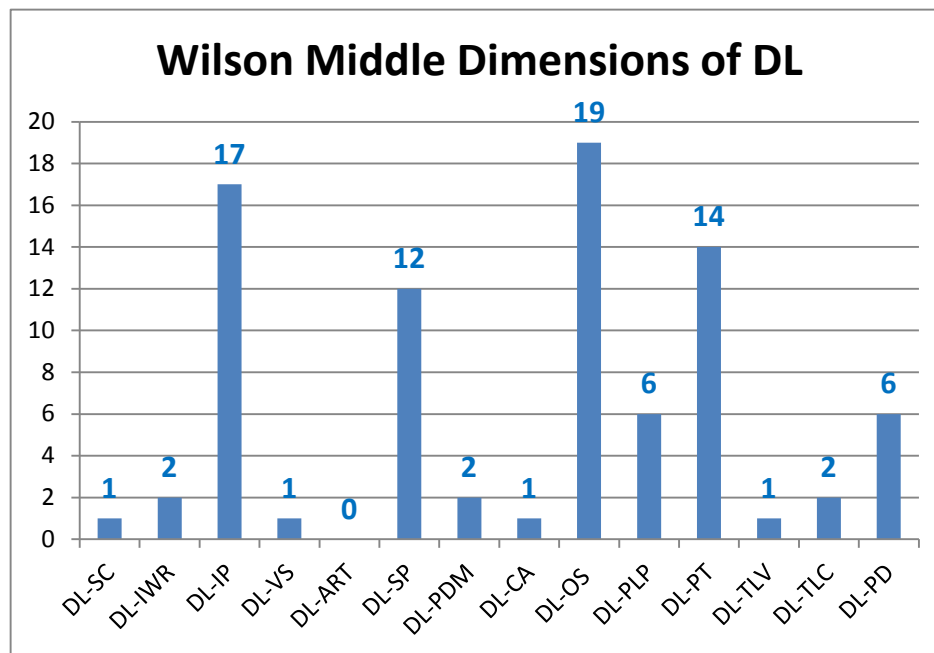
Middle Schools in HCPS were expected to meet district benchmarks for Algebra I enrollment and completion rates by the end of grade eight. In 2010-2011 Wilson Middle School had the third highest Algebra I enrollment of 88.2% with a 76.1% completion rate. Of all 38 schools that met the AMO in math and reading on the state assessment, Wilson Middle School had the highest free or reduced-price meals (FARMS) rate of 34.4%. Wilson Middle School had a diverse student population and a significant portion of students adversely impacted by socioeconomic factors.

The teacher leaders in Wilson Middle School had varied backgrounds and years of experience. Table 4 summarizes the profile of the Wilson Middle School teacher leaders who participated in this study.

Table 4. *Wilson Participant Profile Sheet*

Teacher leader	Gender	Ethnicity	Number of years working at present school	Number of years as a teacher	Number of years as a department chair	Department chair	Highest degree
Masters	Male	White	4	11	4	Science	Master's
Jefferson	Male	White	13	13	7	Math	Master's
Girard	Female	African American	9	9	4	Social Studies	Master's
Ridge	Female	White	14	19	5	English	Master's

A preliminary analysis of the data identified several dimensions of distributed leadership that shaped Wilson Middle School teacher leaders' perceptions of distributed leadership practice. The dimensions that were more frequently identified in the data from the teacher leaders at Wilson Middle School included institutionalized practices, monitoring school performance, organizational structures, and principal traits. Figure 3 identifies the frequency with which dimensions of distributed leadership were identified.



DL – Distributed Leadership; SC – Spontaneous Collaboration; IWR – Intuitive Working Relationships; SP – School Performance; PDM – Participatory Decision Making; CA – Collective Action; OS – Organizational Structures; PLP – Principal Leadership Practice; PT – Principal Traits; TLV – Team Leadership Visioning; TLC – Team Leadership Change; PD – Professional Development

Figure 3. Wilson Middle School dimensions of distributed leadership.

Research Question 1. How do teacher leaders who serve on school leadership teams in exemplary middle schools perceive their role?

Teacher leaders at Wilson Middle School described their roles and work in three broad categories: monitoring and supporting the instructional program, building instructional coherence, and serving as a conduit for communication.

Monitoring and supporting instructional program.

Ridge stated,

So we meet formally once a week and then other days where people have second period off, then; like—the sixth-grade team—they meet to plan their lessons on Wednesdays and another one—the eighth-grade team—meets Mondays and so on. And that way they try to have consistency with their lessons. They determine kind of by grade levels what’s coming up and what needs to be done. It also gives me—as the content specialist (department chair)—a chance to drop in on planning with the different grade levels.

Jefferson stated,

One, we like getting into the classroom as often as possible to see what's happening with students and what's happening with teachers and recognizing where we need to have coaching conversations with our teachers about where they can get better. And we also use a slew of data.

Building instructional coherence. Building instructional coherence is another facet of the teacher leaders' roles in Wilson Middle School. This was evident when the head of the English department explained her efforts to work with other departments to develop clear expectations about brief and extended constructed writing responses that students were expected to complete across content areas. Ridge stated,

The social studies and the science department chair and I met at the beginning of this year and also last year collaborated on trying to have the same writing rubrics. Using the English writing rubric—the social studies rubric was already set up, but science's wasn't, so we set up so that we put the science words into the English set up—so that it kind of made sense, and that really helped. We made it science friendly, but it was still the same 5, 4, 3, 2, 1, and then we put that in our agenda book side-by-side so the kids have that.

Ridge's aforementioned description also painted a vivid portrait of teacher leaders' willingness to collaborate in an effort to develop their collective expertise to improve writing processes across content areas. Ridge provided further elaboration of attempts to build instructional coherence:

We also collaborated as a department—English department—to create a “What does a paragraph look like, and what do you call a paragraph; it could be a BCR, it could be a paragraph, it could be a well written response, it can be a constructive response”...we're trying to give them anything that they would hear someplace else. So we tell them, “It isn't that you don't know how to write it in science because you've been writing it in English.” We did that for our paragraphs and essays and we also put that in the agenda book. So we try to figure out ways that we can be....we're not in lock step with one another here but we try to have a consistent kind of flow so that it's not different in every subject and it's not different in every classroom.

The strategy that the social studies department chair used to build instructional coherence centered on leading teachers through focused discourse on teaching practice with reflection. Ms. Girard shared the following description:

So we got these three readings in our county-wide meeting and we read them and I thought they were pretty good. I divided them up by grade level so sixth grade is reading an article, seventh grade is reading an article, and eighth grade is reading one: "Teaching for Historical Literacy." I gave them 2 weeks to create a promethean board presentation about the article and describe a practice they think came out of it and what they've done in their classroom. Each member of the department is going to teach the instructional strategy to the rest of the department

The ability to establish and communicate a vision to teachers within the department is another way that instructional coherence is built by teacher leaders at Wilson Middle School. Mr. Masters, head of the science department, provided an interesting view about instructional coherence:

I know as a department head, I had a vision for my department; we talked about that vision and where we wanted to go with it and everything that we did in my department was in line with that vision. Our vision was fostering a love for science through rigor and relevancy, so we tried to make sure that every piece of staff development that we did or professional development was in line with that.

Wilson Middle School teacher leaders strongly perceived that a major part of their work was to serve as a conduit for communication. This communication could take many forms including sharing with colleagues the goals adopted by the leadership team, keeping the principal apprised of teacher performance, and speaking with one voice as an instructional leadership team.

Conduit of communication. Jefferson stated,

The content specialists for math, science, English, social studies, arts, PE, and special ed all meet with our principal biweekly and just talk about what are the needs within our departments, what are we seeing with our teachers. So we're on the same page—what staff development do our teachers need so when we go back to our departments.

Teacher leaders also facilitate the sharing of best practices among teachers as an essential part of communicating the school's vision. This was captured vividly by

Masters:

I would always ask my department to share our best practices, to present to the other science teachers what you are doing in your classroom that aligns with what our vision is or what we need to be doing or changing in our classrooms, and they were happy to do so. Nobody ever said, "No, I don't want to present to the rest of the staff," because they want to share what they're doing.

Serving as a conduit of communication can involve a back-and-forth cycle in which teacher leaders appear to serve as the intermediaries. This type of interaction was described in great detail by Ridge:

The content specialists meet twice a month; the team leaders meet as a group with the principal twice a month and then they determine what needs to be done and you bring up ideas, you bring up issues, and if you see something working well in the school you say that or the other way around if you see the ball is being dropped somewhere. Then we form a plan to generally take it again back to the ILT. But sometimes again, it might be that we need to take something back to our department or the team.

In addition to facilitating the sharing of best practices, engaging in dialogue on instructional issues with the principal, teacher leaders also believed it was important that they speak with one voice regarding decisions that were made by the instructional leadership team. Girard stated,

Well, we all decide together what we're going to change; we all agree that whatever the final decision that's going to be...the final decision is made by majority or by committee, based on, you know, if we're all talking about together and if most people agree on something, it's by majority. Unless it's like something like...our principal does not hardly...I mean we don't really veto anything.... I don't, I mean like I've said ILT, like pretty much everybody is on the same page. We all make decisions together, either by majority or by the small group, and that's what we're all going to support and be positive about. We get that information out to the staff ASAP.

In summary, teacher leaders at Wilson Middle School perceived the main functions of their jobs to be to monitor and support the instructional program and to build coherence among lead teachers about the goals and objectives for the school. The teacher leaders also stressed the importance of serving as a conduit for communication in the school while also speaking with “one voice” as a leadership team.

Research Question 2. What organizational structures support distributed leadership in middle schools and what organizational structures impede it?

The teacher leaders at Wilson Middle School repeatedly indicated that organizational structures were paramount to them and their work as teacher leaders. Wilson Middle School teacher leaders perceived that having dedicated time for instructional planning was essential to their work. Specifically, having designated time working with teachers within the department, meeting in interdisciplinary teams, participating in professional development, or collaborating with other teacher leaders were cited as organization structures that supported distributed leadership. In several instances, when teacher leaders were asked to describe the ways in which teacher leaders and others collaborated or to identify organizational structures that supported teacher leaders’ practice, overwhelmingly, the teacher leaders described dedicated time as an element essential to their work and role. Girard stated,

We make our schedule so that all the leadership team is off first period so that we can meet every Thursday for our instructional leadership team meetings first. So we have that and that gives us a chance to collaborate and go through some of the decisions that were made. We also meet every other Friday; we also meet separately so that all of the content specialists, which will be resource teachers (department chairs), meet separately to discuss curriculum and instruction, observations, how people are doing, supplies, staff development, best practices, all that kind of thing.

Jefferson, as did Girard, highlighted how time can be orchestrated to support the work and practices of teacher leaders. Jefferson emphasized this aspect as follows:

Well, I think the master schedule is huge; you've got to have a master schedule that obviously is built for students, but also allows teachers time to meet and talk. It's all about collaboration, and they need time to get together and work together to really improve themselves as teachers and improve the whole group whenever they are meeting.

Girard's and Jefferson's descriptions depicted their views of the structural configurations in place to support their roles as department chairs. Masters and Ridge provided further elaboration regarding ways in which the master schedule can impact their roles:

Masters stated,

It really helped us for our master schedule because in our master schedule we have built in time, common planning time, so all departments had the exact same period off every single day; so the science department, for instance, always has period four off together. Our ILT are always scheduled so that they're off at the same time, so whatever information we received at ILT as department heads we were able to deliver that to our whole department at the same time and do professional development with our department.

Ridge stated,

Well, in the summer...I think most of the work is done and that's where we (Instructional Leadership Team) determine our school improvement plan goals. Content specialists (department chairs) meet twice a month; the team leaders meet as a group with the principal twice a month and then they determine what needs to be done and you bring up ideas, you bring up issues, and if you see something working well in the school you say that or the other way around if you see the ball is being dropped somewhere. Then we form a plan to generally take it again back to the ILT for follow up.

Research Question 3. What are the leadership activities that influence instructional decision making?

Three broad themes emerged from the data describing the types of activities that influence instructional decision making among the teacher leaders at Wilson Middle

School. These themes are collaborative cohort planning, reflecting on practice, and professional development initiatives.

Collaborative cohort planning. Collaborative cohort planning at Wilson Middle School can be described as any group's working together collaboratively to accomplish tasks related to designing, implementing, evaluating effective instruction, or aligning targeted interventions for students. It appeared that cohorts at Wilson Middle School were directed or influenced by teacher leaders for the most part. Cohorts generally worked to identify a school improvement goal that was connected to the school improvement plan. Cohorts consisted of teachers, content specialists (teacher leaders), and in some cases administrators. Collaborative cohort planning at Wilson Middle School was manifested in many forms, including the following: (a) kid talk, (b), lesson planning, (c) review of school improvement goals, and (d) development of department instructional foci.

Ridge stated,

We had a whole school initiative that we came up with about 3 years ago. I guess that we called it a vocabulary initiative. So we used Marzano's book on how to teach vocabulary. Specifically, Marzano's work stress[es] having kids talk about the meaning and then they draw a picture of things. We came up with 10 content specific words that were important to our contents. So this was helping us focus on how to teach and build academic vocabulary among our students.

Jefferson stated,

So, we have department meetings weekly where our content leaders can meet with everybody in their department to have their own meeting and really talk about what, you know, especially with math, we will focus in on where our student's needs are. What do we need to do as teachers to build our teaching capacity and how can we grow?

Reflecting on practice. Teacher leaders at Wilson Middle School indicated a strong belief that leading teachers in focused discourse about their teaching practices and

compelling deep reflection led to better outcomes for students and enhanced the instructional program. The following description provides insight into the unique role that teacher leaders play in leading their colleagues in reflecting on their instructional practices. Masters stated,

At my county-wide content specialist meeting, we were talking about literacy. I gave my teachers 2 weeks to create a PowerPoint presentation about it and present what they learned and what they had done in their classrooms based on the new learning. Each teacher will share to the rest of the department at an upcoming department meeting.

Girard described the use of classroom observational data to inform coaching conversations with teachers within the math department. The following depiction offers a perspective about how data are used to engage discourse around teaching practices to promote deep reflection. Girard stated,

We like getting into the classrooms as often as possible to see what's happening with students and what's happening with teachers and recognizing where we need to have coaching conversations with our teachers about where they can get better. And we also use a slew of data, so I mean obviously it's probably easier for some areas than others; for math it's pretty easy to get data and really talk about what does this data mean for us and what are we going to do about it?

Teacher leaders' use of observational data can spur collaboration among them in an effort to refine practices. This phenomenon was evident in Jefferson's description of an experience:

So, I guess through staff surveys some of the things that we found that are needs in our school were vocabulary development, for instance, of our students. So, we looked at vocabulary development and saw what kinds of needs our students had and what fosters good development of vocabulary. We discussed what kinds of visuals we could use in our classrooms that would help students and improve our instructional practices. Where you are using those visuals as a tool and not just something to look at and relating it to the vocabulary that the kids were trying to learn. So, we did walkthroughs. We (content specialists) conferenced about the data and asked teachers what worked, what didn't work and how to add pieces to our strategy to improve in the future.

Professional development initiatives. Ridge stated,

I learned at my recent county-wide content specialist meeting about close reading strategies and the importance of complex text and to go about choosing text that is engaging for kids. So, I shared this learning with my department and we discussed using the techniques in our classes. We share the results and how this strategy worked in our classes and the impact on students.

Research Question 4. What are the team processes that support leadership practice?

It was apparent there was a strong expectation that the leadership practice of teacher leaders at Wilson Middle School focus on an array of continuous improvement strategies. These strategies included, but were not limited to, monitoring student performance data and conducting classroom visits. Girard stated,

We have a data check monitoring tool to look at. So, when we meet with our departments we (teacher leaders) all work on developing questions that we want to ask about, so teachers can reflect on their grading practices at interim time and at the end of the quarter, so we have questions that we ask teachers and they have to fill out a chart on their grade distribution at the end of interim and each quarter.

Ridge stated,

The department chairs have administrative access to monitor teachers' grade book[s]. So, I can take a look to see, you know, if people have been putting grades in. We have expectations that everybody put in a variety of grades, at least two grades a week. So we don't get to enter them on time and then some kids have three or four grades and another kid has one grade (because the teacher fails to keep up with grading).

Teacher leaders at Wilson also emphasized the importance of classroom visits as data points to inform their conversations with teachers in their departments. This view was articulated by Jefferson:

One, we like getting into the classroom as often as possible to see what's happening with students and what's happening with teachers and recognizing where we need to have coaching conversations with our teachers about where they can get better.

In sum, teacher leaders at Wilson Middle School described their roles and work in three broad categories: monitoring and supporting the instructional program, building instructional coherence, and serving as a conduit for communication. Specifically, having designated time working with teachers within the department, meeting in interdisciplinary teams, participating in professional development, or collaborating with other teacher leaders were described as organization structures that supported distributed leadership. Three broad themes emerged from the data that described the types of activities influencing instructional decision making among the teacher leaders at Wilson Middle School. These themes were collaborative cohort planning, reflecting on practice, and professional development initiatives. A strong expectation that teacher leaders at Wilson Middle School engage in focused work centered on continuous improvement was apparent.

Hannover Middle School

The context. Hannover Middle School was a comprehensive middle school. During the 2011-2012 school year there were 1000 students enrolled in the school. The following programs were offered in the school: partial Chinese immersion, Asperger and emotional disabilities, and learning and academic disabilities programs. Table 5 summarizes the enrollment composition of the school.

Table 5. *Hannover Middle School Enrollment Composition*

	%									
	Total	Female	Male	AM	AS	BL	HI	PI	WH	MU
All students		48.2	51.8	≤ 5.0	23.4	6.1	7.8	≤ 5.0	56.9	5.5
ESOL	≤ 5.0	≤ 5.0	≤ 5.0	≤ 5.0	≤ 5.0	≤ 5.0	≤ 5.0	≤ 5.0	≤ 5.0	≤ 5.0
FARMS	≤ 5.0	≤ 5.0	≤ 5.0	≤ 5.0	≤ 5.0	≤ 5.0	≤ 5.0	≤ 5.0	≤ 5.0	≤ 5.0
SPED	9.0	≤ 5.0	≤ 5.0	≤ 5.0	≤ 5.0	≤ 5.0	≤ 5.0	≤ 5.0	5.7	≤ 5.0

*Racial/ethnic composition figures reflect state abbreviations: American Indian or Alaskan Native (AM); Asian (AS); Black or African American (BL); Hispanic/Latino (HI); Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander (PI); White (WH); Two or More (Multiple) Races (MU)

The Harlan County Public Schools (HCPS) Strategic Plan had identified several performance targets that middle schools were expected to meet. The academic performance targets included meeting or exceeding annual measurable objective (AMO) on the state assessment in math and reading.

Table 6 summarizes the Hannover Middle School's proficiency rates in math and reading during the 2010-2011 school year.

Table 6. *Hannover Middle School Proficiency Rates 2010-2011*

	Grade 6		Grade 7		Grade 8	
	Math	Reading	Math	Reading	Math	Reading
All students	≥ 95.0	≥ 95.0	≥ 95.0	≥ 95.0	≥ 95.0	≥ 95.0
Asian	≥ 95.0	≥ 95.0	≥ 95.0	≥ 95.0	≥ 95.0	≥ 95.0
Black	≥ 95.0	≥ 95.0	90.5	85.7	87.5	93.8
Hispanic/Latino	91.3	≥ 95.0	≥ 95.0	86.2	85.3	91.2
White	≥ 95.0	≥ 95.0	≥ 95.0	≥ 95.0	≥ 95.0	≥ 95.0
Two or more races	≥ 95.0	90.5	≥ 95.0	≥ 95.0	90.9	≥ 95.0
FARMS	≥ 95.0	90.0	92.9	71.4	77.8	88.9
LEP	--	--	--	--	--	--
SPED	79.3	86.2	88.6	65.7	71.1	86.8

*Outcome data reflect 2010-2011 school year.

**Results are not reported (---) for groups with fewer than 10 students enrolled.

Middle schools in HCPS were expected to meet district benchmarks for Algebra I enrollment and completion rates by the end of eighth grade. In 2010-2011 Hannover

Middle School had the highest Algebra I enrollment of 90.6%, with a completion rate of 88%. Of all 38 Schools that met the AMO in math and reading on the state assessment, Hannover Middle School had the fewest number of students participating in free or reduced-price meals (FARMS), with a rate of < 5%.

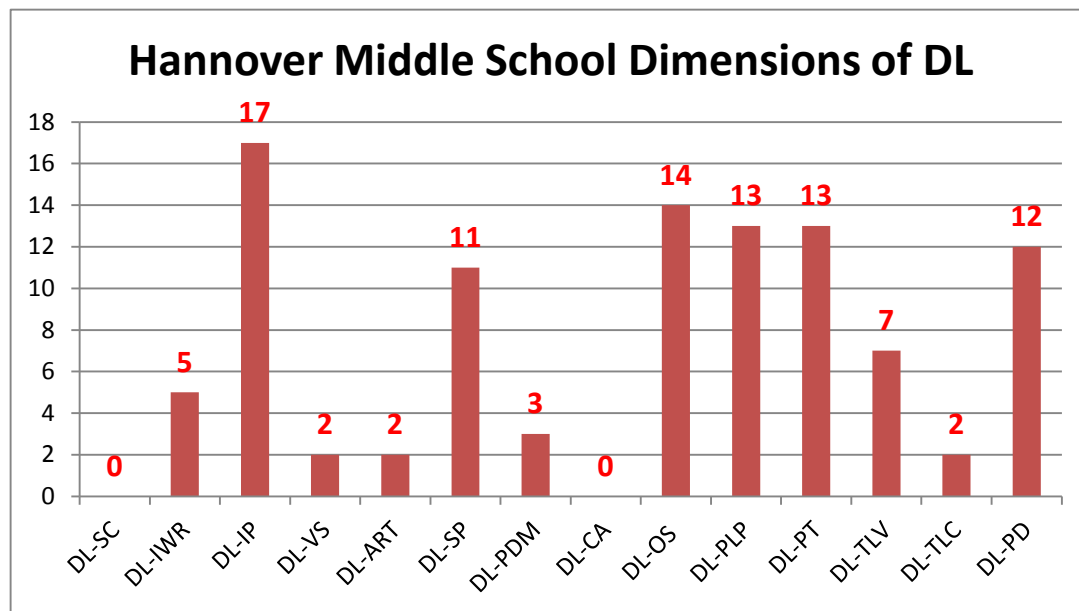
The teacher leaders in Hannover Middle School had varied backgrounds and years of experiences. Table 7 summarizes the profile of the Hannover Middle School teacher leaders who participated in this study.

Table 7. *Hannover Participant Profile Sheet*

Teacher leader	Gender	Ethnicity	Number of years working at present school	Number of years as a teacher	Number of years as a department chair	Department chair	Highest degree
Gratz	Female	White	19	36	19	Social studies	Master's + 60
Oxford	Female	White	17	31	15	Math	Master's
Columbia	Female	NR	NR	NR	NR	English	NR
Thompson	Male	White	6	10	2	Science	Master's

*NR – Not Reported

A preliminary analysis of the data identified several dimensions of distributed leadership that shaped Hannover Middle School teacher leaders' perceptions of distributed leadership practice. The dimensions that were more frequently identified in the data from the teacher leaders at Hannover Middle School included institutionalized practices, organizational structures, principal leadership practices, and principal traits. Figure 4 identifies the frequency with which dimensions of distributed leadership were identified.



DL – Distributed Leadership; SC – Spontaneous Collaboration; IWR – Intuitive Working Relationships; SP- School Performance; PDM – Participatory Decision Making; CA – Collective Action; OS – Organizational Structures; PLP – Principal Leadership Practice; PT – Principal Traits; TLV – Team Leadership Visioning; TLC – Team Leadership Change; PD – Professional Development.

Figure 4. Hannover Middle School dimensions of distributed leadership.

Research Question 1. How do teacher leaders who serve on school leadership teams in exemplary middle schools perceive their role?

Teacher leaders in Hannover Middle school perceived an essential part of their role to be assisting with shaping the school’s vision, articulating a unified message and organizational purpose, and standardizing instructional practices.

Shaping school vision. Thompson stated,

Well, I think everything starts with the leadership team. Whenever we come up with goals that we want to look at towards the school, we analyze the data from the year before and see what kind of direction we want to head and then we kind of take it down each time. Maybe we’ll bring it down to the team first, then down to the department, but basically, like any discussion of what our school’s vision is; it starts in ILT and then it makes its way down the group.

The teacher leaders at Hannover stressed the importance of the leadership team’s meeting in the summer and noted that their interaction helps them identify goals and

targets they want to reach for the upcoming school year. This was evidenced by Gratz's detailed account of their summer planning:

For teacher leaders, we collaborate, starting in the summer, and we meet for a week in July with the start of the new fiscal year, as they do in every school, but we spend basically half of each day as a leadership team looking at the goals that we want to establish for that school year, and that meeting really sets the tone for what happens during the school year.

Consistent with Gratz's account, another teacher leader provided a rich account regarding the importance of the summer work performed by the leadership team.

Columbia stated,

It's our leadership team in the summer where we will develop our vision for the school. We'll look at our School Improvement Plan (SIP) and we will reshape our SIP plan depending on the data that we have, and that is our vision, our mission statement, our vision, which we then roll out to the staff, and this is rolled out by grades, at team meetings, it's rolled out at department meetings, and so the school's vision is what we develop through our summer and our SIP plan but then it's rolled out in various ways. A lot of what we develop in the summer is based on the data; it's based on...the data that we've been receiving from county reading and math assessments (administered three times a year) and from state assessments, teacher surveys, student surveys, so all of that data kind of rolls into our vision for the school. And then it's kind of like each of us takes, like, a little piece of it; like the English department, which I lead, will look at the data and we'll see how it impacts our program and our practices, and the team will do the same, for example, with the climate survey. So it begins in the summer and then it just kind of rolls and rolls out.

Articulating a unified message and organizational purpose. Although shaping the school's vision was described by teacher leaders in this study as an important part of their work, the manner in which aspects of the vision were created and how decisions were made by the principal and teacher leaders also were cited as important. The concept of a unity of message and purpose was described well by Ms. Oxford, head of the math department:

What is important, what I always feel and what our principal feels is, when we go out of that room, that there is unity amongst the people so we're not going out of

there saying, “She wanted this but I didn’t want it,” so that there’s unity and cohesiveness with the leaders in the school. And some years are better than others; this has been a very good year so that’s good. Sometimes there are people in that leadership group who kind of undermine, which is not good for the whole school or the leaders themselves. I think the more honest and open people are the more we keep to a unified message is very important.

Standardizing instructional practice. Hannover Middle School teacher leaders strongly perceived that another major part of their work was to standardize instructional practices. Gratz stated,

I do a quarterly survey with my department, and this quarterly survey basically has teachers meeting with their counterparts, and we really are a collaborative group. The questions that are asked in the survey will allow the teachers to see where they are in relationship with each other and their grade point average with each class period. I ask—to analyze the point value—are they pretty consistent with the number of points in assessments and the number of total points for the quarter and in their projects and some of the other assessments?

It appears that one aspect of standardizing instructional practices is minimizing variance in grading and reporting practices. This theme was reiterated by Oxford’s comments:

I pull up one of the monitoring tools and it shows all the As and Bs and Cs by all the algebra teachers, so, a teacher, we can analyze this data. Not that anyone is right or wrong, but how come there’s so many As in your class but they’re not in another class? Is it valid or is there more collaboration that’s needed so we can monitor whole class performance? I often pull up teachers’ grades to ensure that grades are being entered and for consistency.

Teacher leaders at Hannover stressed the need for standardizing instructional practices for several reasons, including teacher absences or student schedules’ needing to be changed. Columbia provided a detailed view and rationale for this practice:

Teacher leaders are a part of a collaborative team. One of my teachers went home Friday not feeling well. I was able to step into her class and teach her lesson because I was doing the same lesson with my own students. Her style is different, but what we’re presenting, our program is the same, so even if students are moving around, we’re moving students, say, in semesters or for any kind of other

reason, any kind of schedule change. Regardless of where our students land, they are receiving the same program.

Research Question 2. What organizational structures support distributed leadership in middle schools and what organizational structures impede it?

Teacher leaders at Hannover Middle School described having dedicated time during the school day as an organizational structure that supported their ability to lead their departments. In addition, the school district provided teacher leaders 20 summer work days to plan for the upcoming school year. Also, having dedicated time in the summer to participate in professional development courses was cited by teacher leaders at Hannover as an important organizational resource. Thompson stated,

You get that extra period (reduced teaching load) to provide support to teachers within the department. Taking the things that the county requires is a good one... [observing and analyzing teaching] will be taken this summer. They encourage us to take different courses...they encourage us to pass that along to other people. We're going to be doing a lot of the core training this summer.

Gratz stated,

Well, I would say that the way that the structure works within meetings, it is timed out, and it is followed very closely, and the meetings always start on time. I'm not an on-time person so this was quite a difference for me. For this administration, when the meeting starts at 3:00 o'clock, at 3:00 o'clock the meeting started; there was no kind of gabby talk here or there so, I mean, it's down to business, and that's something that I appreciate and I think that helps us to do it with our groups as well. So it's kind of modeling...I think they do a good job. The agenda is, again, *Baldrige* generated, and we always have a note taker, and it's very important to make sure that the notes from the meeting are distributed to the staff through Outlook pretty quickly.

Although there were defined structures in place at Hannover, there was a subtle, implicit perspective that the length of time someone has held their leadership position yields greater influence in decision making. Thus, seniority is an aspect of an organization culture that could impede change and limit the perceived voice of new

leaders. This perception was evident in the comment of Mr. Thompson, a new member of the leadership team at Hannover:

We try to reach consensus, I think, often times; to be honest, the people that have been here and are in positions for a long period of time tend to have more of the power than those of us who are new. So even if we want to make some sort of changes or see something that could be adjusted, we don't really have much play in that.

Research Question 3. What are the leadership activities that influence instructional decision making?

Two themes emerged from the data describing the types of activities that influenced instructional decision making among the teacher leaders at Hannover Middle School. The monitoring of student performance and the principal's openness to others were described as important factors influencing instructional decision making.

Monitoring student performance. Teacher leaders at Hannover not only used grading practices to standardize practices but also appeared to use it to influence discussion at team and department meetings. Thompson's explanations provide a descriptive view of this practice:

The big one that we're doing now is looking at our minority students and how they're performing. We seem to do that very often in team. For example we do sixth grade, so we look at sixth grade, how all of our sixth-grade students are doing, kind of analyze where their trend is, how they did first quarter, second quarter, third quarter, and where they are currently in the fourth quarter.

A further account of how grading data were used to inform practice can be seen in the following account by Oxford. Oxford's statement provides a glimpse into how data were used by teacher leaders to engage in outreach activities for underperforming students:

One of the things we have—we use grade point average, and we look at below 2.0, we look at 2.0 to 2.4, we look at above 2.4, we look at 3.0. And we look at

the disaggregated data, and our African American data has been lower than what we'd like so we're working on that. There's always a list; we see this continuously at our team meetings during the year, how many As, how many Bs, how many Cs, Ds, Es, who are the particular students so we know who we need to help. Then we also have our state accountability test data and that comes in every year, and we're always looking at the students who not only are in basic and we need to move up to proficient, but who are the students in proficient who we could be moving up to advanced.

In addition to examining GPA data by student population, teacher leaders appeared to view their data from an equity perspective. This view was shared by Columbia:

Regardless of what class a student lands in, that student is receiving the same program whether he's in my English A or in another teacher's English A, so we monitor and learn a lot from looking at the data. If we have one teacher who has a high percentage of As and another who doesn't, it kind of raises questions about instruction. We also will spend a lot of time on observations; I don't mean formal observations but maybe five-by-fives. I try to get into teachers' classes often, even whether it's doing a formal five-by-five or just walking through.

Gratz stated,

I do a quarterly survey with my department, and this quarterly survey basically has teachers meeting with their counterparts, and we really are a collaborative group. The questions that are asked in the survey will allow the teachers to see where they are in relationship with each other and their grade point average with each class period. I ask—to analyze the point value—are they pretty consistent with the number of points in assessments and the number of total points for the quarter and in their projects and some of the other assessments? Initially, we really were way apart, but now we're even getting to the point where we name the assessments identical on our grading sheet, and then we talk about how much time are we collaborating and is it enough time and set goals for the next quarter.

Principal's openness to others. The principal's ability to be open and receptive to new ideas was another element viewed by some teacher leaders as an important factor that supported instructional decision making. Thompson stated,

Again, we have our meetings, and it's not done simply based on what she's going to decide as our action; we talk about all of our things ahead of time. There's not a specific decision that she's made; she's open, she listens to all of our ideas and

then we kind of share what we think about. Sometimes we'll come up with a solid decision; sometimes we'll compromise. One particular thing that came up this year was with our parent conferences; we had kind of brought up the idea of having a little more open situation, but then there were other teachers who wanted to kind of keep it the same, and eventually what we did is she allowed us to come up with a compromise where we had a certain amount of time for planned conferences and then that more open session at the end.

This theme was further elaborated by Gratz with a particular focus on the
interplay among teacher leaders and the administrative team:

Well, it'll be one of two ways, and it depends. I would say that there are times when a decision has been made, and it's more or less "this is the way we're going to do it," but that is not often. More and more, maybe it is about knowing your staff and being comfortable with your leadership team, but the administration has become more open to inquiry and getting ideas from us.

Principal openness was viewed in terms of how stakeholder voice was sought
by the principal through the work of teacher leaders. This phenomenon was captured by
Columbia's rich description:

In terms of decision making it's kind of a trickle down, because if there's a decision to be made it will be discussed at the instructional leadership team meeting. If it's something specific, for example, to my department, maybe it has to do with scheduling or ordering or something specific. Then I might speak with the principal privately, but if it involves the whole school then it would be discussed at the instructional leadership team; then it would be carried to the team and it will be discussed at the team level. Often times the principal will ask us to take something back to the team and to talk about it, then bring it back to the instructional leadership team. So there is input from all the stakeholders.

Research Question 4. What are the team processes that support leadership
practice?

It is apparent there was a strong expectation that teacher leaders at Hannover
Middle School engage in expanding their knowledge base by participating in county-
wide trainings or actively participating in school-based professional learning and

development opportunities. This expansion of knowledge base can take many forms such as courses, book studies, or professional development workshops. Gratz stated,

One way that comes to mind...let's start with county training for instance, OAT Training; that was one thing that really was a change for us when we were given the new evaluation system. All of us really were lacking in that knowledge base, so the OAT Training really made quite an impact in our success in making valid observations in working with teachers. Also our staff development teacher is very involved in directing us to recent literature that she suggests that we may want follow through and to read it or maybe a course that she feels we might enjoy. I would say that there's nothing from her standpoint that has been mandated or that has been done as a whole group; it's more or less a suggestion. Another area where it has been an entire group extension of knowledge is a book club. We do a book club—you've probably heard about She is open for suggestions, any sort of some of it is management based, a lot of it is really meant for the business world, but we are able to apply it and tie it into the educational field.

Teacher leaders at Hannover also suggested that enrollment in district courses and the use of book studies influenced their practice and work as leaders. This view is evidenced in the descriptions shared by teacher leaders Oxford and Columbia. Oxford stated,

Our principal brings us books that she's reading, and in fact the book *Mindset*—I've read that book. I've got very involved in that; I share that with my teachers. I pull out parts of it. I just went to a training for after you'd finished OAT 1 and OAT 2; it was a 2-day training, and from that training I've developed five lessons for next year for my department meetings. So I think we work with each other to expand our knowledge; we read, we stay informed, we keep current on what's coming out.

Columbia stated,

For my department, for example, I try to communicate always what I've learned that my resource teachers need and share reading materials that I've received, data. At today's department meeting for example, in addition to sharing data and scheduling, I'm also going to be presenting information on the new curriculum that's rolling out in the fall in seventh grade and eighth grade and common core. So there's [*sic*] just a lot of things that are being developed and shared to keep current.

Teacher leaders appeared to align new knowledge gained from book studies with their own leadership practices. Thompson provided an example of dispersing new knowledge with the entire department and with students:

Well, first off we do a book club, which we've read a couple of books. The first was *Focus* and we've just started reading *Drive*; we've only gotten through the first section of that, but it's just kind of looking at those ideas and trying to bring them toward the classroom. Whatever we bring down to the department or team level, we start in instructional leadership team meetings, so we work together maybe doing something with *Mindset* and then *Mindset* was ultimately brought down to the team, and then we went and spoke about it a little more directly with our department, and then it kind of filters down, and then eventually we even did a *Mindset* activity with our students.

Teacher leaders in Hannover Middle School perceived their role to be assisting with shaping the school's vision, articulating a unified message, developing an organizational purpose, and standardizing instructional practices. Teacher leaders at Hannover Middle School referred to having dedicated time during the school day as an organizational structure that supported their ability to lead their departments. There was a subtle, implicit perspective that the length of time someone has held a leadership position yields proportional influence in decision making. Thus, seniority is an aspect of an organization's culture that could impede change and limit the perceived voice of new leaders. The principal's ability to be open and receptive to new ideas was another element viewed by some teacher leaders as an important factor that influenced instructional decision making. It is apparent there was a strong expectation that teacher leaders at Hannover Middle School engage in expanding their knowledge base by participating in county-wide trainings or actively participating in school-based professional learning and development opportunities.

Cross-Case Comparison of Emergent Themes

The following cross-case analysis and matrix illustrate themes that emerged from this study.

Research Question 1. How do teacher leaders who serve on school leadership teams in exemplary middle schools perceive their role?

Table 8 presents the thematic categories that emerged under Research Question 1.

Table 8. *Research Question 1 – Perception of Role*

Wilson Middle School	Hannover Middle School
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitoring and supporting the instructional program • Building instructional coherence • Serving as a conduit for communication 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shaping the school's vision • Articulating unified message • Developing an organizational purpose • Standardizing instructional practices

A synthesis of the research literature regarding distributed leadership practice in schools and situating Spillane's, Gronn's, and Elmore's theoretical constructs within the present-day reality of demanding accountability and policy environments produced a guided conceptual framework for this study that highlighted four key elements: teacher leaders' leadership practice, organizational structures, decision making, and team process. The following elaboration of each of these elements in connection with the emergent themes from this study provides insights into the interplay among teacher leaders, their followers, and various environmental contexts.

Teacher leaders' leadership practice. Table 8 conveys an understanding of how teacher leaders in two exemplary middle schools in this study perceived their roles.

Teacher leaders at Wilson Middle School believed that their primary duties could take one or more of the following forms: monitoring and supporting the instructional program, building instructional coherence, and serving as a conduit for communication. Teacher leaders in Hannover Middle School expressed similar views by indicating that the core of their leadership practice involved shaping the school's vision, articulating a unified message, developing an organizational purpose, and standardizing instructional practices.

Research Question 2. What organizational structures support distributed leadership in middle schools and what organizational structures impede it?

Table 9 depicts the thematic categories that emerged under Research Question 2.

Table 9. *Research Question 2 – Organizational Structures*

Wilson Middle School	Hannover Middle School
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Designated time working with teachers within the department • Meeting in interdisciplinary teams • Participating in professional development • Scheduled time to collaborate with other teacher leaders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dedicated planning time to collaborate with teams of teachers, departments, and instructional leadership team members

In addition to examining how teacher leaders perceive their role and leadership practices, a synthesis of the research literature guiding this study highlighted how organizational structures can influence distributed leadership. Teacher leaders in both Wilson Middle School and Hannover Middle School emphasized *time* as the most important organizational structure influencing distributed leadership practices. Having dedicated planning time to collaborate with teams of teachers, departments, and instructional leadership team members was viewed as an organizational structure by

teacher leaders in this study. This emergent theme tends to be consistent with earlier research literature regarding distributed leadership. Chrispeels and Martin (2002) suggested that teams and educational leaders need to recognize the influence of existing organizational structures on teams and the actions they are able to take. Wilson and Hannover teacher leaders stressed that action cannot be taken without a master schedule built with consideration of how adults will come together to collaborate, reflect on practice, and plan meaningful instruction.

Research Question 3. What are the leadership activities that influence instructional decision making?

Table 10 presents the thematic categories that emerged under Research Question 3.

Table 10. *Research Question 3 – Leadership Activities and Decision Making*

Wilson Middle School	Hannover Middle School
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaborative cohort planning • Reflecting on practice • Participating in professional development initiatives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitoring student performance • Principal's openness

At Wilson Middle School the teacher leaders' leadership practice and decision making centered on collaboration, reflecting on practice, and participation in professional development. These activities appeared to have formalized structures and expectations associated with them that created a cultural norm for teachers at Wilson Middle School. Gronn's (2002) concept of distributed leadership viewed in terms of concertive action—

people working in concert to pool their initiative and expertise so that the outcome is greater than the sum of their individual actions—is an appropriate application to describe the Wilson context. The concertive action that best describes Wilson teacher leaders' perspective is Gronn's concept of institutionalized practices. Citing committees and teams as the most obvious embodiment of institutionalized practices, Gronn described such formalized structures as arising from design or through less systemic adaptation. Leithwood et al. (2007) offered elaboration and refinement of Gronn's holistic forms of distributed leadership, describing one feature as *planful alignment*, in which tasks or functions of those providing leadership have been given prior thoughtful consideration by organizational members. It can be argued that collaborative cohort planning, reflecting on practice, and participating in professional development are attributes of institutionalized practices.

Hannover Middle School teacher leaders' leadership practice and decision making were influenced by two factors: monitoring student performance and principal openness. Hannover teacher leaders perceived their principal as being actively engaged and sharing leadership with the staff. Consistent with findings from Angelle's (2010) qualitative study suggested a model in which necessary preconditions for successful distributed leadership include a strong collaborative leader who practices shared decision making, a culture in which trust permeates the organization, and continuous building of strong, positive relationships.

Wilson and Hannover teacher leaders' perspectives on the leadership activities that influenced their instructional decision making also were consistent with findings from Morgan and Clonts's (2008) reflective case study, which identified focused

conversations, tools and processes, and opportunities to reexamine work as critically important factors contributing to effective leadership team functions. In the cases of both Wilson and Hannover, teacher leaders engaged in focused conversations centered on student performance. This condition flourished as a result of the principal being open to new ideas and supportive of the work of teacher leaders.

Research Question 4. What are the team processes that support leadership practice?

Table 11 depicts the thematic categories that emerged under Research Question 4 as well as their correlation to dimensions of distributed leadership.

Table 11. *Research Question 4 – Team Processes that Support Leadership Practice*

Wilson Middle School	Hannover Middle School
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focused work centered on continuous improvement <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Data checks ➤ Classroom visits ➤ Reflective discourse about teaching and learning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attending county-wide trainings • Participating in school based professional development • Completing workshops or courses

The team processes that supported leadership practices among teacher leaders in both Wilson Middle School and Hannover Middle School can be attributed to active participation in professional learning at the micro and macro levels. In both cases teacher leaders were aided by the use of agendas, decision-making protocols, and scheduled time for other leadership tasks. Analysis of the data beyond the surface clearly indicated that teacher leaders engaged in specific actions that not only supported their leadership practice but allowed for refinement and expansion of leadership skills.

The teacher leaders in Wilson Middle School consistently indicated that

engagement in work centered on continuous improvement supported their leadership practice. This work was conducted at the micro level (school based). The work can be described in many ways such as leading data checks with teachers within the department, conducting peer observations, and leading teachers in reflective discourse centered on teaching and learning. In Hannover, the teacher leaders consistently interpreted team process as participating in county-wide trainings. For example, the teacher leaders attended curriculum meetings monthly. They routinely shared the new learning from the monthly curriculum meetings with members of their departments. In addition, several of the teacher leaders attributed their leadership practice to process that they learned from participation in district trainings and workshops. In many instances, participation in macro learning experiences (district-level professional development) led to refinement of leadership practices or expansion of knowledge. Elmore's (2000) interpretation of distributed leadership was connected to the improvement of instruction and school performance. It can be argued that Wilson and Hannover teacher leaders' practice is aptly attributed to the team process's supporting improvement of instructional and school performance. Moreover, Elmore's framework emphasizes that the primary function of multiple sources of leadership is to provide guidance and direction throughout the organization. Thus, this guidance and direction develop a common culture for the purpose of improving instruction and school performance (Elmore, 2000).

In summary, this chapter reports finding derived from data analysis and representation employed by the researcher. A preliminary analysis of the data identified several dimensions of distributed leadership that shaped Wilson Middle School and Hannover Middle School teacher leaders' perceptions of distributed leadership practice.

A secondary analysis was conducted to report and synthesize the data to answer the research questions for each site. A cross-comparison analysis was conducted and illuminated for this study.

Chapter 5: Summary, Implications for Practice, Recommendations, and Areas for Future Research

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study was to develop an understanding of how exemplary middle school leadership team members perceive their role and function relative to distributed leadership. Specifically, this research utilized a case study methodology to analyze the ways in which leadership is dispersed and shared from the perspective of teacher leaders who serve on a middle school leadership team. This study investigated the following research questions:

1. How do teacher leaders who serve on school leadership teams in exemplary middle schools perceive their role?
2. What organizational structures support distributed leadership in middle schools and what organizational structures impede it?
3. What are the leadership activities that influence instructional decision making?
4. What are the team processes that support leadership practice?

A distributed leadership framework was used to guide this study situated in Spillane's, Gronn's, and Elmore's theoretical constructs within the present-day reality of demanding accountability and policy environments. Spillane et al. (2001) viewed leadership as the interaction of school actors with their environment. Gronn (2002) outlined three forms of concertive action that can be observed in the practice of distributed leadership: spontaneous collaboration, intuitive working relations, and institutionalized practices. Elmore (2000) purported that the purpose of distributed

leadership is to disperse leadership to individuals who, through their interactions, gain expertise and provide guidance and directions to others.

The rationale for this mode of inquiry was spurred by the current accountability context resulting from No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and Race to the Top (RTTT) mandates. Teacher leaders, who are commonly the recipients of distributed leadership, provided a glimpse into the complex nature of the roles, beliefs, constraints, and practices that shaped their practice. Furthermore, this study sought to bring to light the voice of teacher leaders in exemplary middle schools regarding their experiences with both the macro and micro levels under which they operate. This study was conducted in four phases—pilot study, negotiation of entry, data collection, and data analysis—before final reporting. Thus, the current accountability context has caused a continuation of a paradigm shift from an accountability-only culture to a student learning culture.

Summary of Findings

A preliminary analysis of interview data produced dimensions of distributed leadership. The dimensions of distributed leadership that were referenced with the greatest frequency in Wilson Middle School and Hannover Middle School are described in Table 12.

Table 12. *Dimensions of Distributed Leadership in Wilson Middle School and Hannover Middle School.*

Wilson	Hannover
➤ Organizational structure	➤ Institutional practices
➤ Institutional practices	➤ Organizational structures
➤ Principal traits	➤ Principal leadership practices
➤ School performance	➤ Principal traits
	➤ Professional development

The preliminary analysis of the Wilson and Hannover case study data yielded dimensions of distributed leadership that must receive significant consideration for those interested in creating or sustaining exemplary middle schools with leadership that is dispersed among multiple leaders. The dimensions identified in Table 12 are foundational to building and cultivating leadership among teacher leaders. In both Wilson and Hannover, organizational structures and institutional practices were cited with greater frequency during the preliminary data analysis of interview transcripts in this study. Gronn (2002) and Kennedy et al. (2011) identified institutionalized practices as one form of collaboration essential to the sharing of leadership responsibilities and tasks. Murphy et al. (2009) investigated the role that formal leaders play in helping create leadership-dense school organizations. Crafting organizational structures and shaping organizational culture were highlighted; the formal administrative work involved in distributed leadership in schools was also examined. Thus, a signal to policymakers, principals, and district leaders involves consideration of institutional practices and organizational structures as prerequisite elements to creating the necessary conditions for distributed leadership to flourish in and among teacher leaders in exemplary middle

schools.

The preliminary data analysis also highlighted the role of the principal and his or her leadership practice. A multiple-perspective case study conducted by Gurr et al. (2006) found three collective themes pertinent to the principal's challenge in building collective leadership structures, including principal contribution to school quality, capacity building of teachers, and empowerment strategies. First, the study revealed the significant contribution of the principal to the quality of education in each school. Principals in this study possessed a set of common traits, such as honesty and openness, highly developed communication skills, flexibility, commitment, passion, empathy with others, a sense of innate goodness, being supportive of equity and social justice, having a belief that all children are important and capable of success, being other centered, setting high expectations, and holding a belief that schools can make a difference. Second, the study found that the principals contributed significantly in the areas of capacity building, teaching, and learning. Moreover, all case study sites revealed evidence "that a successful leader fosters shared decision making to motivate and empower others" (Gurr et al., 2006, p. 376).

A secondary analysis of the data uncovered answers to specific research questions. The following synthesis of the data assessed the meaning of the results for Wilson Middle School and Hannover Middle School by evaluating and interpreting the results with consideration of the conceptual framework that guided this study.

Research Question 1. How do teacher leaders who serve on school leadership teams in exemplary middle schools perceive their role?

Teacher leaders at Wilson Middle School and Hannover Middle School identified seven

functions as essential to their roles as teacher leaders from a distributed leadership perspective. Examples of the elements of teacher leaders' leadership practices from a distributed leadership perspective are illustrated in Table 13.

Table 13. *Teacher Leaders' Distributed Leadership Practices and Exemplars*

Teacher leaders' distributed leadership practices	Distributed leadership exemplars
Monitor and support the instructional program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Lead common planning sessions among teachers of similar courses ➤ Conduct informal or formal observations ➤ Review grade distribution data from an equity perspective
Build instructional coherence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Facilitate agreements regarding instructional delivery among teachers within the department ➤ Model adult learning strategies
Standardize instructional practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Conduct walk-throughs and classroom visits to chart implementation of professional development goals
Develop an organizational purpose	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Analyze student performance data to set instructional goals
Articulate a unified message	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Use common language about school goals ➤ Discuss in a consistent manner through multiple modes of communication goals and areas of focus
Shape the school vision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Facilitate student focus groups and mentoring programs ➤ Solicit input from other teachers
Conduit of communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Share decisions made by leadership team in a public way ➤ Convey concerns and ideas to leadership from teams or departments ➤ Engage in coaching conversations focused on instruction and strategies with other teachers

Arguably, there is overlap with some of the aforementioned descriptions, but teacher leaders at Wilson and Hannover provided a tacit set of propositions and

descriptive characteristics essential to teacher leaders' distributed leadership practice. These propositions have roots in the distributed leadership perspective research literature. Monitoring and supporting the instructional program, building instructional coherence, and standardizing instructional practices can be viewed in terms of Elmore's (2000) interpretation, which connected the model to the improvement of instruction and school performance. The foundation of Elmore's theory of distributed leadership lies in the earlier researchers' principles of utilizing multiple sources of leadership, emphasizing individual expertise, and working in concert toward a common goal (M. W. Davis, 2009). Moreover, Elmore's framework emphasizes the notion that the primary function of multiple sources of leadership is to provide guidance and direction throughout the organization. Thus, this guidance and direction develop a common culture for the purpose of improving instruction and school performance (Elmore, 2000).

Serving as a conduit for communication, shaping the school's vision, articulating a unified message, and developing an organizational purpose are aspects of teacher leaders' practices that can be viewed in terms of the types of collaboration and engagement of others. The study of a large urban school district conducted by Pounder et al. (1995) documented the presence of organizational leadership, or leadership distributed across organizational roles and hierarchies in the school. Findings of the study indicated that most of these individuals or groups exercised "some influence" to "a lot of influence." Moreover, Wilson and Hannover teacher leaders conveyed attributes previously identified in Zappulla's (2002) study, which found that the leadership team supports the principal in promoting the school's vision and goals and assists with shaping the school improvement plans. Zappulla stated,

Research into the phenomenon of leadership teams in education demonstrates that schools utilize these teams for various reasons: consultative purposes, participative decision making, strategic planning, policy development, monitoring and co-coordinating programmes and to maintain a commitment to collaboration and shared leadership. (Zappulla, 2002, p. 29)

In summary, Spillane et al. (2001) viewed leadership as the interaction of school actors with their environment. Gronn (2002) outlined forms of concertive action that can be observed in the practice of distributed leadership such as planful alignment, spontaneous collaboration, intuitive working relations, and institutionalized practices. Considered together, the work of Spillane et al. and Gronn makes the case that leadership in schools represents much more than the traits, leadership style, and knowledge of an individual person. Thus, creating and sustaining exemplary middle schools must begin with consideration of the seven essential functions gleaned from interviews with teacher leaders from Wilson Middle School and Hannover Middle School.

Research Question 2. What organizational structures support distributed leadership in middle schools and what organizational structures impede it?

Wilson and Hannover Middle Schools teacher leaders identified the importance of having an organizational structure that allows for them to collaborate with each other as well as support the teachers they lead. The teacher leaders in this study indicated that having a master schedule that allows for cohort collaborative planning, department meetings, common planning, or other dedicated time is essential to promoting shared leadership. A study conducted by Pounder et al. (1995) in a larger urban school district documented the presence of organizational leadership, or leadership distributed across organizational roles and hierarchies in the school. Findings from the study indicated that most of these individuals or groups exercised “some influence” to “a lot of influence.”

Teachers' acting alone reflected no direct or indirect relationship to school-level outcomes or perceptions of effectiveness; however, teachers who acted as a group exercised a high degree of influence second only to that of the principal (Pounder, 1996).

Findings from a study by Chrispeels and Martin (2002) suggested that teams and educational leaders need to recognize the influence of existing organizational structures on teams and the actions they are able to take. Specifically, two key findings included the following:

1. New structure arrangements can be the catalyst of change.
2. School leadership teams must have knowledge of organizational structure including rules and relationships to maximize impact.

Danielson (2006) described how the master schedule is important to shaping the educational experience of students and the professional life of teachers: "The schedule defines the time available for teachers and students and therefore influences the type of engagement that students can have with what they are learning" (Danielson, 2006, p. 63).

Danielson also provided a typology in her book *Teacher Leadership* that sets forth the components of established teacher leaders' practices. She stated,

Teacher leaders embrace opportunities to make the most of school organizational structures within their own departments or teams. Teacher leaders take the lead in examining school structure across the school. Teacher leaders participate in district, state, or national networks for critically examining in-school organizational structures. (Danielson, 2006, p. 67)

Hallinger and Heck's (2010) research described findings from a series of related quantitative studies in which they sought to understand how leadership contributes to school capacity for improvement and student learning. In sum, the findings from this research endorsed the view that collaborative school leadership can positively impact

student learning in reading and math through building the school's capacity for academic improvement. Taken together, the findings from the Wilson and Hannover case studies further affirm the proposition that careful attention to the organization structure is paramount to teacher leaders' ability to participate in leadership tasks to support and sustain school improvement efforts. Thus, having dedicated time for an array of collaborative activities to promote adult learning and the refinement of practices is essential to the distribution of leadership within schools. Failure to allow for dedicated time for teacher leader collaboration and learning will impede the sharing of leadership and limit school improvement efforts.

Research Question 3. What are the leadership activities that influence instructional decision making?

The activities that guided Wilson and Hannover teacher leaders' instructional decision making tended to take one of several forms, including professional development initiatives, analyzing student performance outcomes, and reflecting on teaching and learning practices. These forms required interaction among a group of individuals centered on a common purpose. For example, the goal of reviewing student performance data is to refine teaching practices to reach students who may not be performing up to the standards that teacher's desire. The underlying objective for these activities was to improve student performance or refine teaching and learning practices. Gronn (2002) characterized these types of activities as *concertive* actions, which means that people work in concert to pool their initiative and expertise so that the outcome is greater than the sum of their individual actions. The *concertive action* that best describes Wilson and Hannover teacher leaders' activities is Gronn's concept of institutionalized practices.

Citing committees and teams as the most obvious embodiment of institutionalized practices, Gronn described such formalized structures as arising from design or through less systemic adaptation.

Leithwood et al. (2007) offered elaboration and refinement of Gronn's holistic forms of distributed leadership, describing one feature as *planful* alignment, in which tasks or functions of those providing leadership have been given prior thoughtful consideration by organizational members. It can be argued that collaborative cohort planning, reflecting on teaching and learning practice, and participating in professional development are attributes of institutionalized practices and *planful* alignment to support distributed leadership practices among teacher leaders.

The principal's openness was another theme evident in the type of activities that supported teacher leaders' decision making. Angelle's (2010) study noted that the existence of strong collaborative leaders who share decision making leads to a culture in which trust permeates the organization. Morgan and Clonts (2008) characterized the ability of teacher leaders to have opportunities to reexamine work as critically important to effective leadership team functions. The study by Gurr et al. (2006) identified the principal's openness, including being receptive to new ideas and risk taking, as an essential leadership trait for supporting teacher leadership.

It is abundantly clear from findings in this study of Wilson Middle School and Hannover Middle School that principals have tremendous influence on teacher leadership. Harris (2012) wrote, "Effective principals orchestrate the structural and cultural conditions in which distributed leadership are [*sic*] more or less likely. They play a key role in leadership distribution and are a critical component in building

leadership capacity throughout the school” (p. 8).

Research Question 4. What are the team processes that support leadership practice?

The processes illuminated by teacher leaders in this study consisted of many facets. First, in both Wilson Middle School and Hannover Middle School teacher leaders engaged in sustained work during the summer to review student performance data and set goals for the upcoming year. The teacher leaders spent a week or more working together as a leadership team and several days attending district training relevant to their content. The teacher leaders used a cycle of inquiry that guided their work during the summer. Both schools had formal and informal structures in place to reach consensus about goals that needed to be conveyed to the school at large.

Second, in both schools teacher leaders referenced how their principals sought to expand their collective knowledge through the use of book studies. The principals engaged the teacher leaders in book talks and collectively aligned new learning to their practices.

Third, teacher leaders in Wilson and Hannover referenced the use of written and implied protocols for monitoring the instructional program. For example, in both schools the teacher leaders articulated the principals’ expectation that they monitor the grade distribution patterns in their content areas. It was expected that teacher leaders engage in coaching conversations with fellow teachers regarding variance in grading and reporting practices.

In summary, the process that supported teacher leaders’ practices involved focused work centered on continuous improvement of teaching and learning practices.

The teacher leaders engaged in data chats, peer visits with reflection, and district training and used an array of protocols or tools during their interactions with other teachers or among themselves.

Discussion of Summary Findings

The finding revealed several direct links to the literature on distributed leadership. Each link is reviewed in light of the distributed leadership practice, middle school, and teacher leadership.

Distributed Leadership Practice

This leadership model recognizes that the complex nature of instructional practice requires people to operate in networks of shared and complementary expertise rather than in hierarchies with clearly defined division of labor (Elmore, 2000). Researchers Spillane et al. (2001) asserted that the idea of an activity's being "distributed or stretched over multiple people and the tools they use would be helpful to understand the practice of leadership in schools" (p. 23). Guided by a conceptual framework, this study highlighted the influence of team process, decision making and organizational structures impact on teacher leader's leadership practice.

Teacher leaders in this study moved in and out of various networks of interacting individuals. Teacher leaders interacted with other leaders, teachers within and outside of their departments. These interactions were facilitated by institutionalized practices that outlined formal structures, expectations or routines (Gronn, 2002). Leithwood et al. (2007) would characterize the nature of the teacher leaders in Wilson and Hannover interactions as *planful alignment*. Planful alignment of the tasks or functions of those

providing leadership have been given prior thoughtful consideration by organizational members.

Another connection to the literature in the area of teacher leaders' leadership practice was in the use of providing guidance and directions. In both Wilson and Hannover cases, the teacher leaders performed a variety of tasks that can be classified as providing guidance and direction to others such as leading data chats, conducting formal and informal observations or analyzing grade distribution data to inform refinement of instructional practices. These practices are consistent with Elmore (2000) perspective of the purpose of multiple sources of leadership is to use expert knowledge to provide directions to others with the hope of improving outcomes for students.

Barriers to Distributed Leadership

Teacher leaders in this study identified barriers to distributed leadership. Individual factors were teacher leadership perceptions of not having an equal voice in decision making or being heard. School-level barriers that were referenced centered on lack of dedicated time to complete tasks. Similar barriers were found in the literature.

Teacher leaders who perceive that they do not have an equal voice due to seniority or other factors are a potential barrier to the successful distribution of leadership. This perception was captured in the comment of Mr. Thompson, a new member of the leadership team at Hannover:

Mr. Thompson stated,

We try to reach consensus, I think, often times; to be honest, the people that have been here and are in positions for a long period of time tend to have more of the power than those of us who are new.

Angelle (2010) study reported an essential finding that successful distributed

leadership include a strong collaborative leader who practices shared decisions making, a culture in which trust permeates the organization, and continuous building of strong, positive relationships. Principals who work with, and seek to develop leadership competencies of teacher leaders must recognize the importance of group cohesiveness. A finding in Hulpia and Devos (2009) study calls attention to the need to develop group cohesiveness. In this study, cooperation of leadership team was the strongest predictor of school leaders' job satisfaction. The more school leaders perceived the leadership team as a team characterized by group cohesion, unambiguous roles, and goal *orientedness*, the higher their job satisfaction. In sum, careful attention must be given to group cohesion to foster active and sustained engagement of teacher leaders and their practice.

It was amply clear that teacher leaders in this study revealed that having dedicated time to collaborate with other teacher leaders, teachers within their departments and principals was a necessary resource that facilitated their work. Danielson (2006) reaffirmed that careful attention must be given to the structural configurations that impact how teachers engage in their work in various networks in the school environment. Chrispeels and Martin (2002) also stressed the need to re-think how time is configured to facilitate the activities that members of school leadership team can take to support the instructional program.

Middle Schools

Middle School achievement continues to be a concern among parents, policy makers, teachers and principals. In March 2010, the United States Department of Education published "A Blue Print for Reform" - The *Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act*. This blueprint outlined several components such as; 1)

College and career readiness for students. 2). Great teachers and leaders in every school. 3). Equity and opportunity for all students 4). Raise bar and support excellence and 5). Promote innovation and continuous improvement. The impetus for this blue print can, in part, be attributed to the stagnant level of achievement of students especially at the middle school level.

In 2009, less than 1/3 of 8th grade students scored proficient in reading and math on the National Assessment on Educational Progress (NAEP), and nearly 30 percent scored below the basic level in math. The effects of underperforming can be serious: Sixth grade students who do not attend school regularly, who frequently receive disciplinary actions, or who fail math or English have less than a 15 percent chance of graduating high school on time, and a 20 percent chance of graduating one year late. Similar results in reading were found. The average reading score for grade 8 in 2009 was one point higher than in 2007 and four points higher than in 1992 but was not consistently higher than in all the assessment years in between. In 2009, about three-quarters (75 percent) of eighth-graders performed at or above *Basic* level, and one-third (32 percent) performed at or above *Proficient*. Both percentages were higher than 2007 and 1992.

In 2007, 2009 and 2011 efforts were made to pass the Senate bill Success in the Middle Act. The purpose of this bill is to provide underperforming schools and school system grants to ensure that students are taught a rigorous curriculum. U.S. Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan called for more attention on middle level education in a speech entitled. "The New Consensus on Middle Grades Reform."

Duncan stated,

First, the middle grades have not received the attention in education debates that they deserve. Our department intends to correct that historic oversight. I want to affirm that the subject of middle grade reform is vitally important, both to our children and to the future success of our country. As a target for school reform, the middle grades present the last, best opportunity for educators to reach all students—and not just those who persist and thrive in high school. That makes early adolescence a time of great promise and of great peril. It's the wonder years and worry years all wrapped up in one. As a parent with a daughter who just turned 10 last week, I have some sense of what we are in for. (U.S. Department of Education, Press Release February, 2011).

It is argued that the current accountability context has reenergized focus on middle level education. Thus, results from this study compel policy-makers and practitioners to focus on the importance of teacher leadership. Distributed leadership practices can be a powerful link to the development of teacher leadership practice. As a result, development of leadership competencies has the potential to produce school environments that orchestrate the professional work of teachers to create the necessary conditions for student achievement to flourish.

Teacher Leadership

Teacher leadership has the potential to impact leadership practice and teaching and learning in many ways. The teacher leaders at Wilson and Hannover Middle Schools yielded insights into the nature and complexity of teacher leadership practices from a distributed perspective. Teacher leaders are not only the recipients of distributed leadership, but also can distribute leadership within the departments they lead. As a result, there are many issues that need to be considered as a result of this study. First, teacher leaders must be skilled in facilitation and adult learning theory. Repeatedly, the teacher leaders shared various strategies they used to engage colleagues in process or

activities that caused them to reflect on their practice and learning outcomes. This aspect of distributed leadership practice was described by Mr. Jefferson, the head of the math department at Wilson Middle School.

Jefferson stated,

I think again, anytime you look at data you're expanding your knowledge, because you're seeing what's right and what's wrong and coming up with strategies, so I think really having something in place that you can reflect, I think reflection is huge, it's huge. You need time to reflect and really evaluate what's happening in our school and what areas do we have a significant need.

This practice was also described by Ms. Oxford, head of the math department at Hannover Middle School.

Oxford stated,

I had a couple of teachers that had a much greater amount of A's versus the other two teachers that were teaching the same subject and we were trying to see why that may be happening; whether it had to do with their kids, or maybe the way that the teachers were grading; trying to be a little bit more consistent.

Secondly, an analysis of the data from Wilson and Hannover teacher leaders raises the issue regarding the necessary dispositions needed to create the conditions for collaboration to flourish. We know that principal openness and trust are factors that promote dispersing of leadership. However, what is left unanswered is whether or not this holds true for teacher leaders as they work and operate in various networks or contexts.

Hallinger and Heck (2010) endorsed the view that collaborative school leadership can impact student learning outcomes through building the school's capacity for academic improvement. The data from this study supports the argument that teacher leadership

from a distributed leadership perspective can be the impetus for creating collaborative school cultures focused on continuous improvement efforts to positively impact student outcomes.

Implications for Practice

Harris (2007) highlighted the conceptual ambiguity surrounding distributed leadership. Simply put, distributed leadership has multiple meanings. Distributed leadership describes various types of leadership practices, including, but not limited to, shared leadership, facilitative leadership, and collaborative leadership. Terms that are associated with distributed leadership include democracy and empowerment. This confusion creates a challenge to portraying distributed leadership. If it is difficult to define, it is difficult to operationalize. The research literature and this study failed to uncover a model that middle school principals could utilize to distribute leadership among teacher leaders in exemplary middle schools. However, this study, along with the literature, revealed certain dimensions of distributed leadership. In addition, the teacher leaders in this study provided a set up foundational practices that serve as exemplars for teacher leaders distributed leadership practices.

For example, teacher leaders in this study engaged in practices that were classified as monitoring the instructional program, building instructional coherence, standardizing instructional practices, crafting an organizational purpose, articulating a unified message, shaping the school's vision and serving as a conduit of communication. These practices must be internalized by teacher leaders and principals within their context.

The challenge for policy makers is to develop indicators that can be measured regarding teacher leadership from a distributed perspective. Policy makers will have to seek input from principals, district supervisors, human resource officials and teacher leaders themselves in order to develop the indicators. Policy makers will have to grapple with how the indicators will be incorporated in teacher certification and training programs at the collegiate level. Furthermore, policy makers will have to consider to what extent the teacher leaders' practices can be reflected in district evaluations for teachers and principals.

The opportunity to expand knowledge of teacher leadership from a distributed perspective has implication on teacher leaders' practice. First, the role of teacher leaders will need to be redefined to focus not merely on isolated actions, but the interactions with multiple individuals and various contextual factors. Secondly, a distributed perspective suggests that the elevation of teacher leaders' status within schools could lead to an expansion of career ladders for teachers who seek and take on leadership roles. Taken together, redefining the work and elevating teacher leaders' status has the potential to transform our how leadership is dispersed in schools and the impact on school improvement efforts.

Recommendations

Teacher leaders in this study, as a collective group, were the recipients of distributed leadership, practiced various aspects of distributed leadership in their schools, and provided insightful perceptions regarding the complex interaction between leaders, followers and their contexts. Based on the responses of teacher leaders in this study, the following are recommendations for district leaders, human resource officials and

principals; they include a redefining of teacher leadership practice, district and school based supports.

Redefining Teacher Leadership Practice

As states and individual school districts continue to respond to the demanding accountability contexts and make progress toward improving the learning environment for students, effective school leaders will need to be developed and their leadership practices cultivated. This era and the next era of educational accountability will keep a spotlight on leadership while new configurations are being developed. In light of this paradigm transformation from an accountability-only culture to a student learning culture, skilled leadership is necessary at both the macro (district level) and the micro (school-based) levels.

In order to drive this work in redefining teacher leadership practice, colleges and universities should develop curricula that provide training in teacher leadership. The fundamental components of the curricula should include emphasis on the prerequisite skills and dispositions, recognition of the leader-plus and practice aspect of leadership and management from a distributed perspective.

First, teacher leadership must receive careful consideration regarding the prerequisite skills and dispositions of those who seek to take on formal and informal leadership roles in schools. The teacher leaders in this study were responsible for providing guidance and directions to a number of teachers; they impacted all aspects of school life. Thus, a reconceptualization of leadership is necessary to assist schools and district leaders with navigating the terrain of increased accountability.

Secondly, based on the data in this study, teacher leadership must recognize that distributed perspective involves two aspects: the leader-plus aspect and the practice aspect (Spillane, 2006; Spillane and Diamond, 2007). “The leader-plus aspect moves beyond identification of individual leaders and simple aggregations, a distributed perspective presses us to consider how these individuals, as a collective, are arranged in carrying out the work of leading and managing schools” (Spillane & Healey, 2010, p. 5). As a result, this requires a focus on how leadership tasks and responsibilities are shared and the degree to which teacher leaders’ skill sets in leading schools complement one another.

Thirdly, the practice aspect catapults us to move beyond the mere actions of individuals who are participating in leadership. However, the practice aspects oblige us to examine the collaborations that occur within an organization. Thus, from a distributed perspective, practice is framed as a product of the interactions among leaders, followers, and aspects of their situations. “In this framing, school staff-be they the principal, curriculum specialist, or classroom teacher-can move in and out of leadership and management roles depending on the activity or situation” (Spillane and Healey, 2010, p.6).

District Support

School districts seeking to cultivate effective teacher leaders from a distributed leadership perspective will need to consider providing an array of supports such as effective leadership training programs, teacher leader induction programs and on-going professional development for principals.

District and central office leaders should consider the supports provided to principals. The findings from this study support the notion of providing principals with the training they need not only to share leadership but also to create the necessary preconditions in which teacher leadership is developed, cultivated, and sustained. Thus, school districts will need to consider adding or refining existing principal leadership development programs. The refinement of these programs must ensure that the current and next generation of principals understands how to distribute leadership with the ultimate goal of improving teaching and learning practices.

In addition, to revamping leadership training programs, with an emphasis on sharing leadership and building the leadership capacity in others, this study signals a need for induction programs for teacher leaders. The teacher leaders in this study perceived that their participation in summer institutes and district training programs positively impacted their ability to support their departments. As a result, district leaders should implement induction programs for individuals who are new to serving on school leadership teams. The induction programs should provide training in the area of data analysis, leading professional development, group dynamics and adult learning theory.

School-Based Supports

This study offers recommendations at the school level as well. First, principals will need to create the structural conditions for distributed leadership to flourish. It is abundantly clear from both Wilson and Hannover teacher leaders' perspectives that having defined time to collaborate with other teachers and leaders is paramount. Second, principals will need to portray a collaborative disposition based on trust and openness to support and nurture teacher leadership. Third, principals need to explicitly communicate

the duties, routines, and activities that teacher leaders need to perform with the goal of producing better educational outcomes for students. Leithwood et al. (2007) agreed that developing people is a major leadership function and is required when practicing distributed leadership. Principals must recognize this developmental need when distributing tasks to others to increase the teacher leaders' ability to provide guidance and direction successfully.

One must acknowledge potential barriers to the aforementioned recommendations. The recommendations and findings based on this study signal a change to existing power structures and relationships in districts and schools. This paradigm shift may be perceived as a threat to those structures and current arrangements. Thus, implementing these recommendations will involve confronting how and to what degree to engage in processes to overcome long standing institutionalized practices, and governance structures. Several steps should be taken to confront these challenges in order to realize the changes being proposed.

First, policy makers and practitioners will need to work in a collaborative fashion to identify effective process to implement and refine the recommendations being proposed in this study. Multiple stakeholder input should be sought in an effort to produce effective models that can be replicated to various contexts.

Secondly, national organizations and associations that support principals and teacher development will need to ensure that dimensions of distributed leadership practices are highlighted in conferences, publications and action research studies. This would widen our existing understanding of various models of leadership and management of schools from a distributed leadership perspective.

Areas for Future Research

This study is representative of these eight teacher leaders' perspectives. Future studies should include more participants from multiple school districts and contexts.

The findings from this study are limited to exemplary middle schools with a similar context. A future study that involves teacher leaders in middle schools that are in restructuring or turn around status would advance understanding regarding the link between school improvement and distributed leadership. It is recommended that a qualitative study be conducted to include a large number of teacher leaders with a specific focus on the practices that influence their work. Furthermore, a quantitative study that surveys a large sample of teacher leaders who hold formal leadership roles regarding the dimensions of distributed leadership identified in this study would further advance understanding of distributed leadership practices in schools. A vital call for future modes of inquiry that seek to reveal the impact of distributed leadership on the school improvement process would enhance teachers, principals, district leaders, researchers' and policymakers' efforts to understand how distributed leadership is conceptualized and practiced.

Conclusion

To meet the challenges of the current accountability context, a reconceptualization regarding teacher leadership from a distributed leadership perspective is warranted. The days of the principal being the sole arbitrator of leadership in schools is no longer feasible in leading and managing schools. Thus, the leader-plus and the practice aspects of distributed leadership provides both an analytic tool to think about

leadership and provides possible entry points to operationalize practices to support school improvement efforts. Teacher leaders in this study revealed insightful aspects of their interactions with followers and various contexts.

The nature of teacher leaders' practices in this study, viewed through a distributed framework, was complex and varied. If these practices are to be adopted and proven to have a significant impact on school improvement efforts, on-going coaching and other support mechanisms will need to be put in place at both the district and school levels. As a result, human and fiscal resources have to be planned, coordinated and deployed to bring to scale best practices.

Implementation of distributed leadership practices begins with the recognition that new structural considerations need to continue to evolve. Superintendents along with principals and other stakeholders will need to lead this process. Collectively, district and school-based administrators will need to work in concert to elevate the status of teacher leaders and ensure that organizational structures and supports are in place to expand distributed leadership practices district wide. This work requires the development of teacher leaders' standards, evaluation mechanisms and on-going professional development for teacher leaders and principals. Schools will need to be creative in dealing with traditional bureaucratic and departmentalized configurations that still exist in many schools.

Surprisingly, the data from this study did not emphasize issues related to unclear goals, lack of material resources and workload. Teacher leaders in this study viewed much of their work through the lens of how time was orchestrated to facilitate the practice of leadership. Furthermore, teacher leaders were able to express what they

perceived as the expectations of the principal and need to focus on continuous improvement efforts. Thus, practitioners who strive to develop the leadership capacity of teacher leaders should give careful consideration to conveying a clear vision regarding the conditions necessary to support teacher leaders' practices from a distributed perspective. This vision must begin with how the practice of leadership is organized to allow for collaboration, reflection and refinement of practices to support teaching and learning efforts.

Appendix A. Artifacts Matrix

Artifact	Wilson	Hannover
School Improvement Plan	X	X
Leadership Team Agenda	X	X
Mission Statement	X	X
Performance Target Ranking Data	X	X
Writing Rubric	N/A	X
Grade Book Reflection Data Sheet	X	N/A

X – Reviewed N/A – Not Applicable

Appendix B. Research Matrix and Anticipated Coding

Construct	Literature source	Interview question	Code
Collaboration (spontaneous collaboration, intuitive working relations, institutionalized practices)	Gronn (2002) Kennedy et al. (2011)	Describe the ways in which staff (teacher leaders) collaborate in the school.	DL-SC DL-IWR DL - IP
Vision shaping	Spillane et al. (2001) Spillane & Diamond (2007) Gronn (2002) Elmore (2000, 2002)	Describe how the leadership team shapes the school vision.	DL-VS
Artifacts	Spillane et al. (2001) Spillane & Diamond (2007) Gronn (2002)	What kinds of artifacts (i.e. memos, documents, schedules etc.) are developed or used to support leadership tasks?	DL-ART
School performance	Elmore (2000) Davis, M. W. (2009)	Describe how school leaders monitor school performance.	DL-SP
Participant decision making	Leithwood & Mascall (2008) Leithwood & Riehl (2003) Copeland (2003) Angelle (2010) Kennedy et al. (2011)	Describe how school leaders participate in decision making.	DL-PDM
Collective action	Mayrowetz (2008)	How do leaders work together to expand their knowledge? Describe the conditions or tasks that promote collective action.	DL-CA
Organizational structure	Murphy, Smylie, Mayrowetz, & Louis (2009)	What are the organizational structures that support distributed leadership?	DL-OS
Principal leadership practice	Hallinger & Heck (1998); Jackson & Davis (2000); Gurr, Drysdale, & Mulford (2006)	How does the principal foster shared decision making to motivate and empower others?	DL-PLP

(continued)

Appendix B (continued)			
Principal traits	Leithwood & Mascall (2008)	Are there certain qualities or traits that your principal possess that you feel support sharing of leadership?	DL-PT
Team leadership visioning	Zappulla (2002) Elmore (2000)	How does the leadership team support the school's vision, goals and assists with shaping school improvement plans?	DL-TLV
Team leadership change	Chrispeels & Martin (2002)	What role does the leadership team play in the change process?	DL-TLC

Appendix C: Participant Profile Sheet

Participant Profile Sheet	
Name: _____	Gender: _____
School name: _____	
Number of years at current location: _____	
Number of years working as a teacher: _____	
Subject taught: _____	
Highest degree earned: _____	
List formal leadership position: _____	
Describe leadership tasks and activities routinely performed	

Appendix D: Contact Review Summary

Adapted from Miles and Huberman, 1994

Contact Type:

_____ On-site

Code name _____

_____ Telephone

Date of contact _____

_____ Email

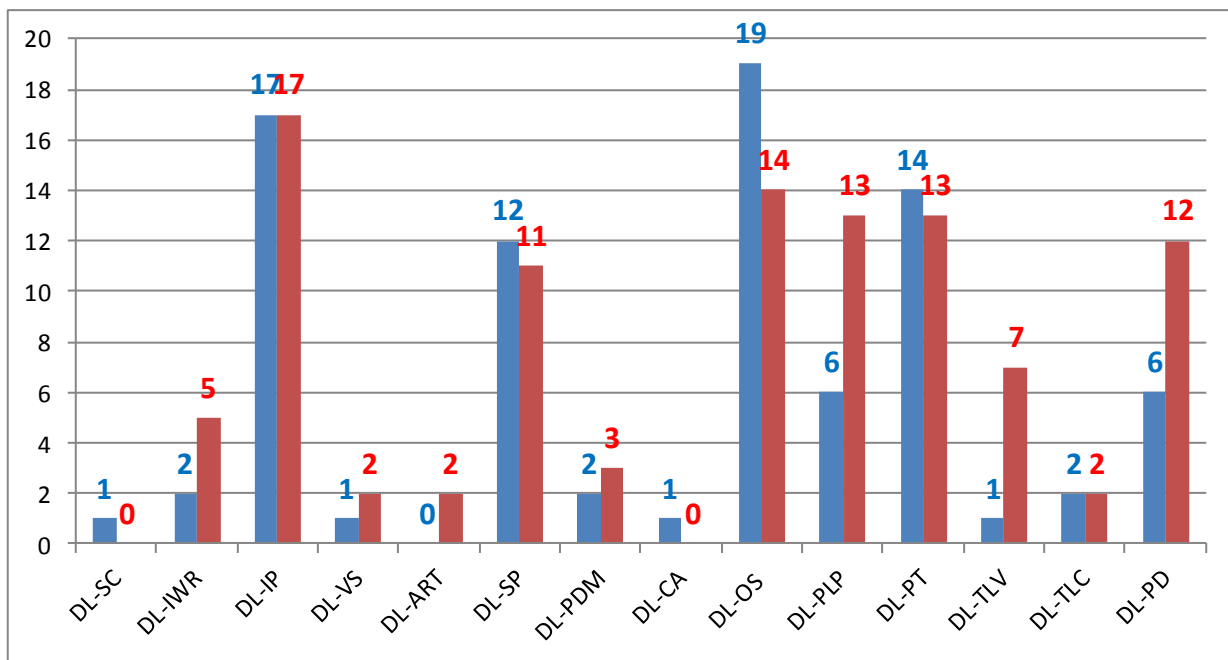
What were the main issues or themes that stood out in this contact?

Summarize the information you got or failed to get on each of the target questions you had for this contact.

Anything else that struck you as salient, interesting, illuminating or important in this contact?

Appendix E: Cross-Case Comparison

Dimensions of Distributed Leadership Wilson and Hannover Middle



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