

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, NORTHRIDGE

PERCEPTIONS OF TEACHER LEADERS ON THE PROCESSES OF DISTRIBUTED
LEADERSHIP IN RELATION TO STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT IN HIGH
PERFORMING ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS IN THE URBAN UNIFIED SCHOOL
DISTRICT

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership

By

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Dedication

To my late mom, for the inspirations and guidance you provided me. Thank you for guiding me into a life in education. Grateful for you being there and the selfless support you gave me. This piece of educational work is for you.

To the greatest uncle ever – Mohammed thank you so much for believing in me and even when things became difficult you were always there for me with your words of wisdom and never ending support.

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Abstract

PERCEPTIONS OF TEACHER LEADERS ON THE PROCESSES OF DISTRIBUTED LEADERSHIP IN RELATION TO STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT IN HIGH PERFORMING SCHOOLS IN THE URBAN UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

By

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Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies

In the educational reform process it is significant to acknowledge that effective leadership matters when it comes to school improvement activities. Educators are constantly faced with federal, state, and local district mandates: it would be unwise to consider the principal as the only individual to provide leadership for school improvement. Therefore, a distributive perspective to leadership is a paradigm shift with a central focus on leadership that is collectively shared by administrators and teachers.

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore teacher leaders' perceptions on the distributive leadership practices and its possible impact on student outcomes. Data were collected by conducting semi-structured interviews with teacher leaders and principals from five participating school sites, ten teacher leaders responded to a paper-pencil anonymous surveys, field observations were completed at participating sites, and document review was completed which included California State Test (CST)

report from three school years (2010 – 2012), and Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) scores for 2014-2015 school year.

The distributed leadership concept offers a considerable platform for studying leadership as collective rather than an individual practice. Based on the literature, five conclusions were drawn and recommendations were made regarding implications for future practice.

First, the findings indicated that the principal has a pivotal role to play in influencing distributed leadership practices which will have a positive impact on student achievement. Second, the findings revealed that teacher leaders were more inclined to participate in distributed leadership when they were encouraged by the principal and invited to perform leadership roles. Third, the findings also indicate that at these participating sites, there were structures within the organizations that harnessed teacher leadership – the ability to encourage colleagues to change,

Fourth, the findings indicated that through collaborative practices, teacher leaders and principals were successful providing leadership for the participating school sites that led to positive impact on student outcomes.

Last, the findings indicated that teacher leaders overwhelmingly shared they wanted to be considered as professionals by allowing them the freedom to practice instructional autonomy. The positive impact of “Enabling Others to Act” and “Inspiring a Shared Vision” implies that a distributive perspective may lead to school improvement.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Distributed leadership is a concept that is of growing interest to theorists, and researchers, in a variety of social science disciplines, including psychology, business, sociology, and education. Increasingly there is evidence in scholarly literature, which points to the concept of distributed leadership overlapping substantially with shared, collaborative, democratic and participative leadership concepts. However, distributed leadership assumes a set of practices that “are enacted by people at all levels rather than a set of personal characteristics and attributes located in people at the top” (Fletcher & Kauffer, 2003, p. 22). The nature and impact of distributed leadership has become the object of recent research, although inquiry about the concept dates back almost 70 years (Gronn, 2002).

Gronn (2002) independently noted that the first known reference to distributed leadership was in the field of psychology in the early 1950s. The concept of distributed leadership fizzled away and laid dormant for three decades, however, it re-emerged in the early 1990s in social psychology. The concepts of leadership like “teacher leadership” (Barth, 2001), “shared leadership” (Sergiovanni, 1995) and “school-based management” (Murphy & Beck, 1995) has been evidenced in the literature for the past five or more decades.

According to Gibb (1951), “There is a maximum of emphasis upon the growth and development of all members of the group. There is no one leader, the leadership is distributed” (p.18). A study by Shaker, Issa and Mustafa (2011) posit that two significant alterations in the perspectives of educational researchers and policy makers have been revealed by previous research findings. Several researchers, such as Owens (2001), Rasik

and Swanson (2001), and Morrison (2002) tend to over-rely on accounts of head teachers to define effective leadership in action and to a certain extent, neglected leadership at other levels, or even from other perspectives. Furthermore, Shaker and colleagues (2011), noted that the findings included; first, the increased curiosity in how leadership is shared or ‘distributed’ among administrators, teachers, and parents in schools (Gronn, 2002; Leithwood, Mascall, & Strauss, 2009; Spillane, 2006).

The advocacy for distributed leadership is growing among scholars, because the argument has been made for the concept of distributed leadership to offer sustainable means of building the type of learning-focused climate that distinguishes high performing schools (Day, Gronn, & Salas, 2006; Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004). Second, the ongoing-focused curiosity on the crucial role leadership plays in school improvement (Leithwood et al., 2004, Luyten, Visscher, & Witziers, 2005; Reynolds, Teddlie, Hopkins, & Springfield, 2000). Earlier research in this area did not effectively address the modeling of change in leadership and related educational processes (Heck & Hallinger, 2003; Kruger, Witziers, & Slegers, 2007).

In the wake of the school reform movement Edmonds (1979) postulates, that strong leaders are components of effective schools. Ever since, the concept of leadership has occupied a major spot on the education agenda. The concept of school leadership is critical to school reform as it relates to creating an environment where best teaching practices and learning takes place. The quality of school leadership determines the motivation of teachers and the quality of classroom instruction (Leithwood, Jantzi, & Steinbach, 1997; Fullan, 2001; Sergiovanni, 2001). Rothman (2009) noted that this issue of leadership has taken on a new sense of urgency in the last decade. Research studies

have found that leadership is second only to teachers in its effect on student achievement (Marzano, Waters & McNulty, 2004), and researchers have identified new conceptions of leadership that represents the realities of school systems as organizations (Rothman, 2009). Furthermore, Rothman (2009) notes that “specifically these conceptions focus more on leadership than on leaders; that is, they look at leadership functions rather than individuals who perform them” (p. 2). Spillane (2006) suggests that leadership is actually distributed across organizations and these functions are not necessarily performed by those at the top of an organizational chart. This thinking is in contrast to traditional scholars of leadership who saw leadership as an individual managing a hierarchical structure. Harris and Muijs (2005) concluded that the school principal does not have a monopoly on school leadership.

King and Balch-Gonzalez (2009) described leadership as a “practice” not a “person”, and the practice of leadership means organizing the roles, relationships, resources, and responsibilities of various groups of individuals with a stake in the outcome of producing well - educated, informed citizens and participants in the work force (p. 13). Furthermore, they pointed out that, The Annenberg Institute for School Reform supports the view that leadership is seen as collective, rather than individual, and as embedded in local context, practice, and relationships, rather than embodied in a particular reform model, leadership style, or individual action. In essence, this concept of leadership has been mentioned in research studies by scholars like James Spillane (2009, 2006) in his seminal work on distributed leadership and a “leader-plus” approach. Hargreaves and Shirley (2009) have gone even further to look at distributed leadership as an essential component of sustainable leadership, which primarily focuses on building

capacity and leadership succession as part of a “dynamic and integrated strategy for change” (p. 97).

This concept of leadership has huge implications for the way schools as organizations are operated in the 21st century. Instead of a school leader running the school by a top-down approach, the school leader can develop a vision, provide a direction, and hold people accountable for achieving it. Therefore it is significant to note that teachers, administrators, and paraprofessionals perform important roles in school leadership (Smylie & Denny, 1990). In that light, Rothman (2009) states that, “many people throughout the organization take the lead in coming up with ideas and seeing projects through” (p. 2).

In the current environment of educational reforms, effective or decisive leadership is generally accepted as the key to school success. Contemporary educational reform demands intense focus on the relationship between leadership and school improvement (Harris, 2005). Increasingly with the wake of “No Child Left Behind” legislation, school leaders and teachers are being held accountable for the achievement of all students (Silva, Gimbert & Nolan, 2000). Within the reform efforts, there has been a tremendous push on principals to sustain and maintain student achievement. This has been emphasized in previous research evidence (Harris, 2004, Hopkins, 2001, West, Jackson, Harris, & Hopkins, 2000). The huge message that is emerging about leadership is one of building the school’s community in its simple sense by developing capacities and engaging others (Harris & Chapman, 2002). In the age of educational accountability of school leadership and student outcomes, pressures requiring the fast growing change falls on school site administrators to make it happen (Protheroe, 2005).

The data from the educational reform literature consistently highlights that effective leaders implement an indirect but powerful influence on a school's ability to improve its programs and upon increasing student academic success (Leithwood et al., 1999; Harris & Muijs, 2004). Fullan (2006), concluded that "it has become increasingly clear that leadership at all levels of the system is the key lever for reform, especially leaders who a) focus on capacity building and, b) develop other leaders who can carry on" (p. 33). While student learning depends first, last and always on teacher quality (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001) it has been shown that the quality of leadership matters in determining the motivation of teachers and the quality of instruction in the classroom (Fullan, 2001; Sergiovanni, 1999).

Distributed leadership is a trendy global concept in the sphere of leadership and school improvement. Additionally, the empirical support for distributed leadership continues to emerge (Gronn, 2000; Harris, 2004; Harris & Chapman, 2002; Heck & Hallinger, 2009; Hopkins & Jackson, 2002; Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2001). Lucia (2004), in her exploratory study, concluded that distributed leadership creates the foundation upon which the more specific styles of leadership, such as teacher leadership, shared leadership and site-based management can be built.

The study of distributed leadership and teacher leadership in essence is a study of relationships and interactions as they are experienced and contextualized. A study of this nature provides the aspiration of understanding another's consciousness, which is the only access others will have to their lived experiences (Van Manen, 1990). If relationship is an essential component of distributing leadership roles, and to deeply understand the

lived experiences, the primary researcher utilized social capital as a conceptual framework – a lens to inform the essence of lived experiences of teacher leaders.

Conceptual Framework

Early research has traditionally focused on the concept of leadership as an individual practice, but current research is showing that researchers and practitioners are increasingly recognizing leadership as a social process (Van De Valk, 2008). A study by Van De Valk (2008), notes that, “social capital has emerged as an important theme in leadership research, and networking and relationship-building are important steps in enhancing social capital” (p. 47).

This study utilized social capital as a conceptual framework in exploring the perceptions of teacher leaders on the processes of distributed leadership. Evidence from the relevant literature on the theory of social capital, shows that it is considered as a byproduct of relationships; hence one may look at social capital at its simplest form as the value of relationships (Minckler, 2011). Transformational leadership works through relationships in order to accomplish organizational goals. A study by Leithwood (1992), asserts that transformational leadership harnesses both individual and collective action by exercising power through people. One can then arguably note that a transformational leader will be very pivotal in distributing leadership laterally through relationships.

Bourdieu (1985) defined social capital as “the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance or recognition” (p. 248). Similarly, Coleman (1988) notes, “Social capital is defined by its function. It is not a single entity, but a variety of different entities having two characteristics in common: They all consist

of some aspect of social structure [obligations, expectations, and trustworthiness, information channels; and norms and effective sanctions] and they facilitate certain actions of individuals who are within the structure.” (p. 302). In the same vein, Paxton (1999) took into consideration earlier studies by Bourdieu (1985) – resources and social networks, and Coleman (1988) – social structures and activation, then concluded that “Social capital involves two components: 1. Objective associations between individuals – there must be an objective network structure linking individuals ... individuals are tied to each other in social space. 2. A subjective type of tie – the ties between individuals must be of a particular type – reciprocal, trusting, and involving positive emotions.” (p. 93). In their conceptualization of social capital, Brehm and Rahn (1997), state “the web of cooperative relationships between citizens that facilitate resolution of collective action problems” (p. 999). Social capital is viewed here as a concept that incorporates lateral and shared relationships that will lead to solving problems through a shared-decision making process across the organization.

The key to understanding distributed leadership is in recognizing that meaningful relationships have value and that this value can be considered as a form of capital. To answer the question “under what conditions are the perceptions of teacher leaders on the processes of distributed leadership a form of capital valuable to schools?” helps in identifying the components of a conceptual model of social capital. According to Minckler (2011), “relationships have value to the individual when his/her associations accomplish two major goals; (1) help the individual accomplish things he or she cannot do alone (task or instrumental outcomes), and (2) and satisfy the individual’s needs (expressive outcome)” (p. 8). Additionally, Minckler (2011) surmises that to be

successful at a task or instrumental outcome, members working collaboratively in a learning community share or exchange both tangible (e.g., instructional materials) and intangible resources (e.g., shared information). Minckler (2011), posits that as time progresses, networks of individuals form to increase the quantity and quality of resources available for exchange within the group.

Statement of the Problem

The idea of distributed leadership continues to be very popular within the educational community and as suggested by The National College for School Leadership (2003), “The relationship between distributed leadership and learning is a crucially important issue” (p.12). When you consider schools as learning organizations, the concept of distributed leadership becomes of particular significance to school reform efforts. Harris & Spillane (2008), in conceptualizing leadership concluded that “in the complex world of education the work of leadership will require diverse expertise and forms of leadership flexible enough to meet changing challenges and new demands” (p. 31). Similarly, Spillane et al., (2001), surmise that a distributed view of leadership “incorporates the activities of multiple groups of individuals in a school who work at guiding and mobilizing in the instructional change process” (p. 20). This implies a social distribution of leadership where the leadership function is stretched over the work of a number of individuals where the leadership task is accomplished through the interaction of multiple leaders. (Spillane et al., 2001).

The concept of distributed leadership has been in existence for several decades and is a precept that is growing in popularity within the Urban Unified School District. There is anecdotal evidence in growing popularity however the problem is the lack of

empirical evidence. This study investigated if there was empirical evidence that supports the practice of leadership that is lateral, less hierarchical staff structures and its relationship to student outcomes in high performing schools within this large urban school district. Additionally, even though scholars like Spillane, Halverson and Diamond (2001), Hopkins and Jackson (2002), Harris and Chapman (2008), Harris and Muijs (2005) and, Smylie and Denny (1990) have identified democratic, shared, distributed and other concepts of leadership characteristics and leadership qualities associated with school improvement, there is a need for more data to better understand which forms of distributed leadership may have significant educational consequences (National College of School Leadership, 2003).

As the demands of accountability continues to grow, the mind set of educators may have moved towards accountability systems, however the significance of collaborative processes and participation have never decreased. Distributed leadership as well as teacher leadership are ways to foster school site relationships that will lead to higher student achievement. However, the literature on how teacher leaders perceived their roles in leadership practice, and the possible impact of distributed leadership practices, and student achievement is limited. The educational implication here is there is still much to be understood about how educational leadership practices are able to bring about school transformation (Leithwood & Reihl, 2003). Furthermore, in order for school leaders – including administrators, teachers, paraprofessionals and parents to support school reform efforts which may bring about increased student achievement, they will need to be involved in distributed leadership practices in elementary school settings. Additionally, through the perceptions of the teacher leaders on the processes of

distributed leadership practices, the researcher was able to understand how principals' leadership is perceived and how the concept of distributed leadership is practiced in these elementary schools.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research was to explore the perceptions of teacher leaders on the characteristics of distributed leadership in relation to the structures of the organizations, and student learning outcomes in five selected California elementary school settings. In the current atmosphere of the No Child Left Behind law, there is an enormous need for shared-decision making at school sites. In that light, many unanswered questions have emerged about how teacher leadership is defined, developed, and what role should it play at selected school sites. Wasley (1991), defines teacher leadership as “the ability to encourage colleagues to change, to do things they wouldn't ordinarily consider without the influence of the leader” (p. 64). Similarly, Katzenmeyer & Moller (2001), define teachers as leaders as: “teachers who are leaders within and beyond the classroom, identify with and contribute to a community of teacher learners and leaders and influence others toward improved educational practice” (p. 5). Lieberman (1992), asserts that “teacher leadership roles are proliferating in greater variety than many thought possible” (p. 161). Teacher leadership roles may be informal or formal, and are as varied in nature as differing school contexts (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001).

There is a significant gap in the existing research between the normative definitions of distributed leadership in elementary schools and the empirical descriptions of relationships and its effect on student academic outcomes. In the midst of varied definitions of distributed leadership and ascribed characteristics, this study explored those

factors that are influencing shared leadership at five high performing elementary school sites and how it affects student outcomes.

The researcher would like to find out in the current environment of profound popularity for school transformation, if there is evidence of an emerging culture of inquiry into the role of distributed leadership in multiple elementary school settings. Utilizing a phenomenological study method, the researcher looked to see if there is evidence of a relationship between the roles of teacher leaders, the processes of distributed leadership, and student achievement. While support of the concept of distributed leadership continues to grow, empirical evidence concerning the nature and effects in any organizational context remains extremely thin (Bryman, 1996). This is true of the Urban Unified School District. The researcher examined the perceptions of teacher leaders regarding distributed leadership practices at selected elementary schools. An examination of the perceptions of teacher leaders from a distributive perspective will contribute to the knowledge base of school leadership studies. Also, examining the possible impact of distributed leadership practices and student outcomes may provide clarification of the concept of distributed leadership and how it is practiced.

Elmore & Gronn (2004), summarized that, the concept of distributed leadership has more relevance today than it ever has in the past. The researcher intended to examine if this relevance existed in the five selected high performing elementary schools within the Urban Unified School District empirically.

Significance of the Study

This study provides a unique contribution to the school reform literature by developing an education prism for how distributed leadership is practiced. This study also

added to the school reform literature by informing the body of research the effects of teacher leadership. Finally, this study validated the effects of purposeful collaboration among teachers, and teacher leaders by providing a new lens through which to look at these effects at school sites.

The term ‘distributed leadership’, argued Harris & Spillane (2008), has representational power. “It represents the alternative approaches to leadership that have arisen because of increased external demands and pressures on schools” (p. 31). There is a significant gap in the existing research between the normative definitions or specialized contextual meanings of distributed leadership in elementary schools and the empirical descriptions of relationships and its effect on student academic outcomes (Lucia, 2004). This study will attempt to close some of the gaps. It is very significant if it can be determined that schools as organizations can establish systems “which distribute leadership by recognizing individual attributes while working collaboratively, then the distributed perspective has implications on reform efforts to improve the practice of leadership inside our public schools” (Lucia 2004, p.11).

In spite of all the arguments postulated for studies that examine policy prescriptions for shared leadership against empirical evidence, most studies have been descriptive rather than analytical (Heck & Hallinger, 2005, Leithwood et al., 2009), whereas this study examined distributed leadership and its impact on student outcome in depth, seeking the answers to four key questions.

Research Questions

RQ: What are the perceptions of teacher leaders on the processes of distributed leadership in relation to student achievement in five high performing schools in the Urban Unified School District?

Sub-Questions:

- How does the principal identify and foster teacher leadership?
- What are the perceptions of teacher leaders regarding distributed leadership?
- How does teacher leadership get distributed throughout the school?
- How do teacher leaders perceive their role in impacting student achievement?

Definition of Terms

Distributed Leadership

Distributed leadership is defined as one of the forms of leadership that involves all the different forms of collaboration experienced by the principal, teachers, and members of the school's improvement team in leading the school's development (Heck & Hallinger, 2009)

Spillane et al. (2001) considered distributed leadership as a form of collective agency integrating the individuals' activities at school to guide other teachers in the process of instructional change.

Elmore (2002) defines distributed leadership as multiple sources of guidance and direction, following the contours of expertise in an organization, made coherent through a common culture.

Harris (2007), states that a distributed model focuses on leadership activities that are widely shared within and between organizations.

Teacher Leadership

According to York-Barr and Duke (2004), “Teacher leadership is the process by which teachers individually or collectively, influence their colleagues, principals, and other members of school communities to improve teaching and learning practices with the aim of increased student learning and achievement” (p. 256).

Wasley (1991), defines teacher leadership as “the ability to encourage colleagues to change, to do things they wouldn’t ordinarily consider without the influence of the leader” (p. 64).

Similarly, Katzenmeyer & Moller (2001), define teachers as leaders as: “teachers who are leaders within and beyond the classroom, identify with and contribute to a community of teacher learners and leaders and influence others toward improved educational practice” (p. 5).

Lieberman (1992), asserts that “teacher leadership roles are proliferating in greater variety than many thought possible” (p. 161).

Teacher leadership roles may be informal or formal, and are as varied in nature as differing school contexts (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001).

High Performing Schools

According to the California Department of Education, a school can be defined as a high performing school when the school’s Academic Performance Index (API) is or above 800 points. For the purpose of this study a high performing school is a school that has an API score of 800 or above based on the California State Test (CST), and has maintained that score for three consecutive years. The three consecutive years that are included for the purpose of this research are 2010, 2011, 2012. The API is a metric used

by the state of California to demonstrate compliance with the No Child Left Behind requirements of the established standards, commonly referred to as Annual Yearly Progress (AYP). This study will not focus on student demographics or school location.

Shared leadership

Conger & Pearce (2003) define “shared leadership as a dynamic, interactive influence process among individuals in groups for which the objective is to lead one another to the achievement of group or organizational goals or both” (p. 1).

Overview of Methodology

This study examined the perceptions of teacher leaders on the characteristics of distributed leadership and its impact on student outcomes in five high performing elementary school settings. The settings for this study were selected based on the criterion of high performing schools located in the northern area within the Urban Unified School District. The sampling was purposive and came from the five elementary schools.

The research for this phenomenological study consisted of interviews with fifteen participants – five principals and ten teacher leaders who were willing to share their experiences, participants’ observations and review of document and artifacts.

Additionally, this study utilized quantitative analyses approach – e.g., surveys.

Delimitation

As a delimitation this study focused on only five high performing elementary schools located in the northern area within the Urban Unified School District. The five participating schools were selected because of their Academic Performance Index (API) were above 800 points for three consecutive years.

Limitations

This study attempted to provide empirical evidence documenting if there is impact on student outcomes when distributed leadership is practiced at the school sites participating in this study. However, even though distributed leadership has gained increasing prominence in discussions of school leadership during recent years, empirical data – especially data concerning its impact on school improvement – remain scarce.

Organization of Remaining Chapters

The introduction of this study was presented in chapter 1. A review of literature is outlined in chapter 2. The methodology to be utilized to conduct this study was presented in chapter 3. The findings from this study are introduced in chapter 4. In chapter 5, the researcher presented an argument for the perceptions of teacher leaders on the processes of distributed leadership and its impact on student outcome.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The purpose of this literature review was to better understand and document the perceptions of teachers that are associated with the historic paradigm shift of distributed leadership. This study also explored teacher leaders' roles and attitudes to examine if the role of teacher leadership has any impact on student outcomes in five high performing elementary schools in the Urban Unified School District.

The increasing demand for teacher leadership has been accelerated by educational policies that ask school administrators to come up with effective strategies to improve and increase student outcomes. For instance as a response to *A Nation at Risk*, a great wave of educational reform emerged with a strong focus on “expanding high school graduation requirements, establishing minimum competency tests, and issuing merit pay for teachers” (Vinovskis, 1999, p. 14). However, these changes that came about as a derivative of *A Nation at Risk*, were not successfully implemented, and “policymakers were [generally] disappointed by the lack of improvement in student scores” (Vinovskis, 1999, p. 14). As a response, a different perspective of educational reform followed, “focusing on fundamental changes in expectations for student learning, in the practice of teaching, and in the organization and management of public schools” (Elmore, 1990, p. 1).

According to Elmore (1990), “Behind the idea of restructured schools is a fragile consensus that public schools, as they are presently constituted, are not capable of meeting society's expectations for the education of young people” (p. 1). A significant section of education research, focused on describing and prescribing what this second

wave of educational reform should entail, aligned with Newmann and Whelage's (1995) key factors of successful school restructuring: (1) a vision and goals directed toward high levels of student learning, (2) instructional pedagogy that brings the vision to life, (3) building organizational capacity geared toward function as professional [learning] community, and (4) engaging external stakeholders (e.g., parents, policymakers, federal and state agencies) in support of increasing student learning and building organizational capacity.

A prominent voice in educational research is one that expresses the need for a complete restructuring of the education delivery system (Minckler, 2011). A study by Minckler (2011) noted "This approach results in a learning community, an education model that is radically different from that of the prevailing factory model. A learning community approach focuses more on the process than on the outcome." (p.5).

Additionally, proponents of this approach argue that, by implementing the right processes, educators can achieve the desired outcomes. As a component of many school reform plans, the concept of learning communities have a variety of definitions.

Kilpatrick, Barrett, and Jones (2003) unify several of these definitions to advance the following:

Learning communities are made up of people who share a common purpose. They collaborate to draw on individual strengths, respect a variety of perspectives, and actively promote learning opportunities. The outcomes are the creation of a vibrant, synergistic environment, enhanced potential for all members, and the possibility that new knowledge will be created (p. 11).

Black (2007), an advocate of this particular approach claim that learning communities help teachers teach better and students learn better. Based on the findings of effective schools research in 1970s and 1980s (Larrivee, 2000) have driven increasing interest in learning communities within schools. With the growing demands for educational reforms, many learning communities are witnessing the need for a dramatic shift in leadership roles that is designed to facilitate educational transformation.

The ultimate goal of school reform efforts is to strive for improving student teaching and learning. Leithwood, Louis, Anderson & Wahlstrom (2004) posit that “The chance for any reform improving student learning is remote unless district and school leaders agree with its purposes and appreciate what it is required to make it work” (p. 4). Based on that argument, leadership that is effective will make a difference, and especially when leadership is recognized as not a solo act. In his study on differentiating great organizations from their less effective counterparts, Collins (2001) found that unsuccessful organizations pursued a structure with one charismatic, visionary leader with lots of helpers, while great organizations, purposefully dispersed leadership throughout the organization.

The high-stakes testing drive associated with the No Child Left Behind Act of 2002 has contributed in intensifying this demand. The concept of teacher leadership as a path leading to school reform efforts has gained increased acceptance as scholars and administrators recognized that teachers possess the primary knowledge and expertise for improving instruction and student achievement (Datnow & Costellano, 2001; Elmore & Burney, 1997; Harris, 2005).

This research study explored the perceptions of teacher leaders on the characteristics of distributed leadership in relation to the structures of the organizations and student learning outcomes in five elementary school settings.

While the intent of the No Child Left Behind can be argued to be well intended in addressing all students to be able to read by the end of third grade, however, Minckler (2011) note that “the evidence indicates that the school climate resulting from the emphasis on high stakes testing is highly detrimental” (p. 6) in meeting the intended goals of NCLB. The proponents of NCLB would arguably state that the elements of teacher quality and parental involvement are significant for school reform. Most educators would agree, however, the overall bureaucratization of the legislation, only exacerbated the problems of the current school system. This study was grounded in the voices of school reform that advocated for restructuring of schools through implementation of collaborative and shared-decision making practices across selected learning communities. At the core of this type of school reform is shared leadership based on relationships. To effectively reform our schools, as educators, we need to refine our focus on sustainable re-culturing in order to develop processes that will enhance quality instruction and high student achievement. If the goal is to reform our schools, then it is very significant to understand a distributed leadership framework. A distributed perspective of school leadership urges to consider leadership practice as pivotal and address both teachers and administrators as leaders (Spillane, 2005).

In the current atmosphere of the No Child Left Behind legislation, there is an enormous need for shared-decision making, and “the collective actions that transforming leadership generates empowers those who participate in the process” (Roberts, 1985; p.9)

at school sites. In that light, many unanswered questions have emerged about how teacher leadership is defined, developed, and what role should it play at a school site. Wasley (1991) defines teacher leadership as “the ability to encourage colleagues to change, to do things they wouldn’t ordinarily consider without the influence of the leader” (p. 64). Similarly, Katzenmeyer & Moller (2001) define teacher leaders as “teachers who are leaders within and beyond the classroom, identify with and contribute to a community of teacher learners and leaders and influence others toward improved educational practice” (p. 5). Lieberman (1992) asserts that “teacher leadership roles are proliferating in greater variety than many thought possible” (p. 161). Teacher leadership roles may be informal or formal, and are as varied in nature as differing school contexts (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001). Furthermore this study looked at the role of the principal in facilitating distributive leadership by identifying and fostering teacher leadership.

There is a significant gap in the existing research between the normative definitions of distributed leadership in elementary schools and the empirical descriptions of relationships and its effect on student academic outcomes. In the midst of varied definitions of distributed leadership and ascribed characteristics, this study explored the *how* of school leadership, for example, ways in which leadership practices are shared, negotiated and constructed in schools and how it affects student outcomes. As Spillane et al. (2001) noted “While it is generally acknowledged that where there are good schools there are good leaders, it has been notoriously difficult to construct an account of school leadership, grounded in everyday practice. We know relatively little about the *how* of school leadership” (p.4). The challenge is to analyze leadership from a distributive perspective, to move beyond the actions of the single heroic leader and to look more

closely at the collaborative and shared practices that contribute to organizational knowledge and student improvement. This study attempted to close some of the gaps.

The researcher would like to find out in the current environment of profound popularity for school transformation and restructuring, if there is evidence of an emerging culture of inquiry into the role of distributed leadership in multiple elementary school settings. Utilizing a phenomenological research design, the researcher intended to study whether there is evidence of a relationship between the roles of teacher leaders in the processes of distributed leadership and student achievement. While the support of the concept of distributed leadership continues to grow, empirical evidence concerning the nature and effects in any organizational context remains extremely thin (Bryman, 1996). This is true of the Urban Unified School District. Therefore the critical issue is not whether leadership is distributed but what it looks like when it is distributed, and how it is practiced (Harris, 2006). Elmore & Gronn (2004) summarized, the concept of distributed leadership has more relevance today than it ever has in the past. The researcher intended to test empirically if this relevance exists in schools within the Urban Unified School District.

In order to better understand if distributed leadership is functional on selected elementary schools within the Urban Unified School District, the researcher asked the following research questions:

Research Questions

RQ: What are the perceptions of teacher leaders on the processes of distributed leadership in relation to student achievement in five high performing urban schools in the Urban Unified School District?

Sub-Questions:

- How does the principal identify and foster teacher leadership?
- What are the perceptions of teacher leaders regarding distributed leadership?
- How does teacher leadership get distributed throughout the school?
- How do teacher leaders perceive their role in impacting student achievement?

Principal Identifying and Fostering Teacher Leadership

A study by Northouse (2007) viewed leadership as “a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal” (p. 3). This view of leadership is absolutely relevant to the discussion of a principal’s role in identifying and fostering teacher leadership. This discussion will view principal leadership as a process of interaction between the principal and teachers that will lead to the shaping of the organizational culture and individual and group actions to produce the desired outcomes (Northouse, 2007). According to Hodson (2005) competent leadership is “an important precondition for creation of social capital and organizational trust based on mutual gains” (p. 44).

What leaders think, do, and say matters (Sparks, 2005). Research on leadership informs us that school leaders work indirectly through the following: (1) their influence on teachers and (2) their effect on the learning environment to improve both teacher quality and student achievement (Griffith, 2003; Leithwood, Harris, & Hopkins, 2008; Ross & Gray, 2006a). Consequently, one must ask, what role do principals play in identifying and fostering teacher leadership? The goal of the narrative in this section is to answer the question and better understand the principal’s role in developing teacher leadership.

An issue of *Ontario Principals Council* states that principals as leaders, matter in deep and profound ways. A new wave of research on educational leadership has confirmed that the quality of leadership practices in a school can make significant differences to the learning and achievement of students. According to Viviane Robinson in her book *Student-Centered Leadership*, “in the higher-performing schools it is much more focused on the business of improving learning and teaching” (p . 3). What is clear is that in order for school leaders to continue to implement strategies for student improvement, there is a need for principals to identify and foster teacher leaders.

The primary goal for teacher leadership is to improve the professional status of teachers, give greater decision making to those closest to the core of education, and ultimately, to improve student learning and academic achievement (Siskin, 2001). A study by Urbanski and Nickolaou (1997) found that historically, teacher leadership has not been widely accepted in American schools for the most part, teachers have been excluded from leadership roles. They assert that the educational system has rigidly defined and separated the roles of teachers and administrators. “To change that and to change the learned helplessness, requires a change in the very culture of school” (Urbanski & Nickolaou, 1997; p. 244). Bresdeson (1989) discussed the emerging roles of teacher leadership, and in reviewing research studies completed on the subject of teacher leadership, anticipated the emergence of teacher leadership as an increased participation in campus decision making, as such the leadership role of teachers and administrators will be impacted.

Blasé and Blasé (1994) discussed the change in the role of principals and teachers in school restructuring as related to student academic achievement. Efforts to restructure

our schools have led to the emergence of new concepts of school governance in which teachers are not only invited to participate in governance, but are integral to the decision making process. This construct of governance demands a new set of leadership skills and behaviors from the principal. Blasé and Blasé (1994) found that principals who are effective leaders and successful at shared governance and shared-decision making have shown the ability to build trust. They further noted trust is “built very slowly and in small increments, is established more by deeds than words, and is sustained by openness in interpersonal relations” (p.18). According to these authors, shared-decision making, and the role of leadership behaviors of principals will look very different from schools of today. They concluded that schools in which teachers have a voice and participate in school governance activities produce a greater degree of “productivity, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and student achievement... shared governance principals enable others to become leaders” (p. 9, 136).

The idea of leadership has been shown to be an important factor in securing school and system wide improvement (Harris, 2006). Evidence from research studies continues to show that organizational structures, leadership roles and cultural conditions contribute in creating and sustaining innovations in schools (Newman & Wehlage, 1995; Day et al., 2000). In these studies, the leadership of the principal is widely acknowledged to be significant in building the capacity for change (Sergiovanni, 2001). Principals can play a significant role in identifying and fostering teacher leadership because they occupy a space in the teacher leadership equation and center stage in the work redesign to bring distributed leadership to life in schools (Heller & Firestone, 1994; Smylie, 1996; Leithwood et al., 2007). According to Lambert and colleagues (2002) the practice of

principals taking on the instructional leadership role allows for the creation of a leadership model in which there is the leader(s) and followers. Stolp (1994) wrote that successful leaders have learned to view their organizations' environment in a holistic way because "this wide-angle view is what the concept of school cultures offer principals and other leaders. It gives them a broader framework for understanding difficult problems and complex relationships within the school" (p. 1). Research conducted by Leithwood et al. (2004) found that leadership was in fact a dominant factor influencing school climate and student academic success. They found that, "leadership is second only to classroom instruction among all school-related factors that contribute to what students learn in school" (p. 17). Leithwood and colleagues (2004) also identified successful leadership as a principal engaging in (a) setting the direction of the school, (b) developing people and (c) redesigning the culture and structure of the organization.

Leithwood et al. (2004) suggests that there is evidence that shows leadership practices included in setting directions account for the largest proportion of a leaders impact – in this case the school principal. They further state that "this set of practices is aimed at helping one's colleagues develop shared understandings about the organization and its activities and goals that can under gird a sense of purpose or vision" (p.8).

Similarly, Sykes (1990) ascribed to this viewpoint by stating "most initiatives that fly the restructuring banner advocate strategies for altering power relationships" (p.8).

According to Sykes (1990) these strategies include school-site management, increasing parents' and teachers' participation in decision making, and enhancing opportunities for the exercise of teacher leadership. Leithwood & Poplin (1992) added that when organizations rely on strong cultures to influence employees' directions and reduce

differences in the status of the organizational members, would lead to an increase in “participative decision making” (p. 9).

Leithwood and colleagues (2004) posit that developing people is another way a principal can account for identifying and developing teacher leadership. Additionally, they suggest that, “evidence collected in both school and nonschool organizations about the contribution of this set of practices to leaders’ effects is substantial” (p. 8). Kouzes and Pozner (2007) in *The Leadership Challenge* argue, “that grand dreams don’t become significant realities through the actions of a single person. Leadership is a team effort” (p.18). They further state that “exemplary leaders enable others to act. They foster collaboration and build trust” (p. 18). Creating a shared vision or direction alone is not enough in identifying and fostering teacher leadership in a school, but by building capacities and developing other members is very significant in nurturing teacher leadership. Leithwood and colleagues (2004) conclude that capacity building and motivations are “influenced by the direct experiences organizational members have with those in leadership roles, as well as the organizational context within which people work” (p. 8).

Furthermore, the principal can play a vital role in identifying and fostering teacher leadership at a school site by redesigning the culture and structure of the organization. The contribution of schools to student learning significantly depends on the motivations and capacities of teachers and administrators, working both individually and collectively (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson & Wahlstrom, 2004). Successful and effective principals create schools that will develop, support and sustain teachers and students. For this to happen, Roberts (1985) argues “in essence, transforming leadership is leadership that

facilitates the redefinition of a people's mission and vision, a renewal of their commitment, and the restructuring of their systems for goal accomplishment" (p. 9).

Therefore school administrators must focus their attention on creating school culture that is based on a "process that makes people feel that they have a voice in matters that affect them, they will have greater commitment to the enterprise and will take greater responsibility for what happens to the enterprise" (Sarason, 1990; p. 61).

Hallinger and Heck (1998) completed a meta-analysis of 40 empirical studies and found that the studies can be categorized into three common effects outcomes: (1) direct effects, (2) mediated effects, and (3) reciprocal effects. They concluded that mediated effects such as school climate seemed to have the most influential statistical significance between principal leadership and student achievement. They stated, "The fact that leadership effects on school achievement appear to be indirect is neither cause for alarm or dismay. Achieving results through others is the essence of leadership. A finding that principal effects are mediated by other school variables does nothing whatsoever to diminish the principal's importance" (p. 44).

Cotton (2003) found similar results with regard to indirect leadership. Cotton concluded:

In general, these researchers find that, while a small portion of the effect may be direct – that is, principals' direct interactions with students in or out of the classroom may be motivating, inspiring, intrusive, or otherwise influential – most of it is indirect, that is mediated through teachers and others. (p. 58).

The principal, by cultivating and facilitating a climate and educational environment, influences teachers, and teacher leadership, who in turn influence the

academic program for student success. As part of the school reform process, principals had to transform their ways of leadership both inside and outside the school building to maximize the resources and support necessary to make a positive and sustained, and equitable difference in their approach to the school environment and the academic success of all students (Marks & Louis, 1997).

Effective principals create an environment where they can tap into the collective intelligence of their staff (Johnson, 2005). This construct lends itself to the process of identifying teacher leaders. The principal can facilitate a community of educators dedicated to addressing student needs and improving student achievement through collaboration and communication (Blankstein & Noguera, 2004; Burnette, 2002; Garmston, 2006; Hudson, 2005). In addition to the principal creating an environment for teachers to participate in shared decision-making, Kahne (1994) has described current reform initiatives as embodying the Deweyan ideals of democratic community. Democracy is a process that facilitates interaction among citizens. Given that definition, the current ways in which principals and teachers interact reflect the degree to which the leadership style of the principal encourages or fosters the ideals of Dewey and the current push for shared leadership (Siskin, 2001).

The idea behind teacher leadership as an aspect of the school reform process, suggests that teachers play a leadership role. Weiss and Cambone (1994) found, however, that the principal is the key figure for school reform. “The rhetoric of shared decision making suggests that teachers should take leadership; however, in all of the schools studied here, principals were the leaders of reform” (p.297). This held true even when those teachers who were committed to reform and leadership worked hard to implement

change, they were successful only to the extent the principal adopted their ideas and provided the needed momentum to follow through (Siskin, 2001).

According to Hart (1994), school reform in the 80's and early 90's has changed the generally acknowledged and long held notion of what the work of teachers should encompass. She further notes that these changes also "challenge established authority patterns" (p.472). The role of the principal with reference to school governance is what Hart (1994) describes as critical to the success of teachers in new roles, "the principal's attention and contribution strongly affected the importance that teachers attached to the new leadership roles" (p. 495).

Collaboration with shared leadership promotes innovation and social-relational capacity with teachers thus lending itself to the conceptualization of the transformational leadership construct (Bass, 1990; Blasé & Blasé, 2000; Marks & Printy, 2003; Spillane et al., 2007). Transformational leaders improve organizational performance by working collaboratively with teachers, parents and the community. Leadership is not distributed from the principal to the teachers rather, it is shared as teachers accept leadership roles (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000; Louis & Marks, 1998; Ogawa & Bossert, 1995). In defining transformational leadership, Hallenger (2003) states that:

Transformational leadership focuses on developing the organization's capacity to innovate. Rather than focusing specifically on direct coordination, control and supervision of curriculum and instruction, transformational leadership seeks to build the organization's capacity to select its purposes and to support the development of changes to practices of teaching and learning. (p.330)

Jantzi and Leithwood (1996) identified categories that recognize behaviors elicited by transformational leaders. Their study created six dimensions of leadership practice that will help in identifying and fostering teacher leadership: identifying and articulating a vision, fostering the acceptance of group goals, providing individualized support, support intellectual stimulation, providing an appropriate model, and promote high performance expectations. Identifying and articulating a vision focused on identifying new educational opportunities and developing a vision that inspires others to accept and become involved in that vision (Siskin, 2001). Furthermore, Stolp (1994) noted that a coherent vision specifies the particular values and beliefs that guide policy and practice. It can be said that in most school districts, ideally the school board and superintendent developed and set an overarching vision for all schools within the district, however the school site principal coordinates the process of arriving at a specific vision for that particular school. According to Stolp (1994), “The creation of a vision is not a static event because the vision must change as culture changes” (p. 3). Additionally Peter Senge (1990) states, at any one point there will be a particular image of the future that is predominant, but that image will evolve. The principal who is able to adapt a vision to new challenges will be more successful in building strong school cultures (Stolp, 1994). Multiple research studies on creating a healthy school vision have acknowledged that it should be a collaborative activity among teachers, students, parents, staff, and the principal. Stolp (1994) contends that the most effective change in school culture happens when principals, teachers, and students model the values and beliefs important to the institution. However, besides modeling, Deal & Peterson (1990), suggest that principals should work to develop shared-vision – rooted in history, values, beliefs – of what the

school should be. Educational experts agree that positive school cultures have principals and staff members who have a unified sense of purpose that includes fundamental norms of collegiality, dedication, and conscientiousness (Barth, 2002). Therefore, it is very essential for principals to identify teacher leaders and foster teacher leadership by including teachers in the decision making process, work collegially with teachers to focus on teaching and learning, and communicate with teachers openly and decisively.

Teacher leader roles from a distributed perspective can be strongly influenced by principals who are strong instructional leaders (Vernon-Dotson & Floyd, 2012). Principal leadership is particularly crucial under school accountability policies (Elmore, 2001; Kelley, 1998; Sebring & Bryk, 2000), as principals can motivate, support and develop teacher leadership. When principals build capacity in teachers, it empowers their teachers to want to participate in teacher leader roles. This is consistent with Vernon-Dotson et al (2012), who wrote “Through the leadership team approach, school leaders can promote all teachers as leaders by empowering their participation in school reform efforts, inspiring them to become competent in their practice, encouraging collaboration, and creating partnership both within and beyond the walls of the school for the benefit of all students” (p. 39). Thus, I will also address the question of how teacher leaders view and interact with the principal as a leader.

Transformational Shift in School Leadership

There is an increased interest in how leadership is shared or distributed among administrators, teachers, and parents within the school environments (Gronn, 2002; Mascall & Strauss, 2009; Spillane, 2006). Additionally, scholars are now positing that distributed leadership could provide a more sustainable means of building the type of

learning -- focused environment that characterizes high-performing schools (Day, Gronn & Salas, 2008; Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Anderson & Wahlstrom, 2004; Spillane, 2006).

Leadership across the field of education is a very vital concept in today's nationwide push for educational reform and accountability. According to Valentine & Prater (2011), the role of the principal of a school is becoming increasingly complex as the nature of society, political expectations, and schools as organizations have changed.

Historically, the major role performed by principals as far back as the 1920s until the 1970s was one of administrative manager (Valentine & Prater, 2011). To a large extent, a nationwide trend toward school consolidation, the profession's desire to imitate corporate management, and the political nature of school led the majority of school principals to simply maintain the status quo (Hallinger, 1992). In this light Leithwood & Duke (1999), as cited by Valentine & Prater (2011), espoused that the managerial approach to leadership only focused on the functions, tasks, or behaviors of the principal and assumed that if these functions were carried out competently, the school would operate effectively.

Bossert et al.'s (1982) perception of leadership was the view that the effective principal continually attempts to improve the quality of the staff's performance. This includes demonstrating a high concern for instruction, supporting staff development, and having collaborative discussions about work with teachers. A critical point emphasized in their study was effective instructional leaders or principals increased teacher morale and performance, thus, increasing student achievement. The image of an effective instructional leader emerging from the study of Bossert et al., (1982), according to

Valentine & Prater (2011), is one of an individual who encourages and supports the teaching staff, rather than directs them.

In the 1980s, the effective school movement began to describe the principal of a school as the instructional leader. In their work, Blumberg and Greenfield (1980), noted that characteristics of instructional leaders include setting clear goals to serve as a source of motivation, possessing a high degree of self-confidence and openness to others, tolerating ambiguity, testing the limits of interpersonal and organizational systems, being sensitive to the dynamics of power, maintaining an analytic perspective, and remaining in charge of their jobs.

Educational leadership traditionally has been characteristic of promoting instruction as an essential factor in improving student achievement. Added to this, it is also the responsibility of operationally running of the school. In addressing traditional or instructional leadership, Valentine & Prater (2011), state that this type of leadership was seen “as a blend of several tasks, such as supervision of classroom instruction, staff development, and curriculum development” (p. 7). In the late 1980s and in the 1990s, there was an emerging consensus from researchers concerning the factors of principal instructional leadership (Valentine et al., 2011).

Leithwood (1992) stated that the term instructional leadership “focuses administrators’ attention on “first-order” changes – improving the technical instructional activities of the school through close monitoring of teachers’ and students’ classroom work. Yet instructional leaders often make such important “second-order” changes as, building a shared vision, improving communication and developing collaborative decision making process” (p. 8, in Valentine & Prater, 2011, p. 7). In their study,

Valentine & Prater (2011) concluded that when principals were studied in reference to the factors that contributed to improved student performance, the central factors that were identified were, a) instructional improvement, b) curricular improvement, c) developing and nurturing a shared vision, d) providing a model and fostering group goals, e) providing support and stimulation, f) high expectations and, g) interactive processes.

In their review of literature, Valentine et al (2011), mentioned Lashway (1995), stating that there is an emerging consensus among researchers that “high-achieving schools have principals who boldly lead the academic program, set goals, examine curriculum, evaluate teachers and assess results” (p.1). The traditional educational leadership focused on impacting classroom instruction. In this vein, the principal utilizing a traditional form of leadership could be seen as having a strong influence on student achievement and performance. However, according to Leithwood and Poplin (1992),

Instructional leadership is an idea that has served many schools well throughout the 1980s and the early 1990s. But in light of current restructuring initiatives designed to take schools into the 21st century, “instructional leadership” no longer appears to capture the heart of what school administration will have to become. “Transformational leadership” invokes a more appropriate range of practice; it ought to subsume instructional leadership as the dominant image of school administration, at least during the ‘90 (p. 8).

The leadership role of the principal has to transform and shift from earlier leadership theories in order to meet the growing demands of educational reform and increasing student achievement. The reality is we need to look at leadership from a multi-dimensional perspective because “leadership is a social influence process” (Balkundi &

Kilduff, 2006). For the concept of teacher leadership to be successful, the cultural and structural conditions of the organization have to be conducive and encouraging to this type of leadership. Jackson et al. (2010) contends that teacher leaders' skill sets are maximized when administrators actively support the contributions of teacher leaders, honor their contributions, and promote the development of these leaders. Litz (2011) speaks of leadership that sets directions, developing and building capacity in people, building collaborative cultures and staffing the program as transformational.

Litz (2011) points out that transformational leadership occurs when the role of a principal or leader involves "building a shared vision, fostering acceptance of group goals and high performance expectations, providing individual support and consideration, intellectual stimulation, providing an appropriate model, redesigning the organization and restructuring, building productive relationships with stakeholders and communities" (p. 56). According to Danielson (2006) when schools are organized in such a way that teachers are made aware of opportunities available and given the chance to engage in these leadership activities, will eventually foster and support the concept of teacher leadership.

Distributed Leadership

According to Diamond, distributed leadership is "not a type of leadership but a framework to understand all types of leadership and management" (Anderson, 2007; para. 3). This framework considers how "leadership practice is constituted in the interactions among school leaders, followers, and their situation" (Anderson, 2007, para. 4). The concept of distributed leadership acknowledges the central notion that multiple leaders both formal and informal interact with each other throughout the organization to

get things done. Spillane (2005) noted that other concepts such as team leadership, shared-leadership, and democratic leadership are not synonymous with distributed leadership. However, there are some similarities that are prevalent among these theories.

Highly successful leaders develop and count on leadership contributions from others in their organizations (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson & Wahlstrom, 2004). The principal will look for such leadership from key teachers, along with their local administrative colleagues (Hord, Steigelbauer, & Hall, 1984). The nature and impact of distributed leadership is front and center in educational research today, although inquiry about the concept dates back almost 70 years (Gronn, 2002). Leithwood et al., (2004) explain that at its core, the concept of distributed leadership is quite simple: initiatives or practices utilized to influence members of the organization are exercised by more than a single hero. They further argue that distributed leadership does not solely reside in people. However, according to Leithwood and colleagues, non-person sources of influence may include Jermier and Kerr's (1997) "substitutes for leadership", which is derived from a view of leadership as an organization-wide phenomenon (Pounder, Ogawa & Adams, 1995). Leadership influence is exercised through actions or tasks that are enacted to accomplish functions for the organization (Spillane, Halverson & Diamond, 2000). Based on current research in the area of distributed leadership, there is evidence to show that the concept of distributed leadership overlaps substantially with shared, collaborative, democratic and participative concepts (Leithwood et al., 2004). The concept of distributed leadership assumes a set of principles that "are enacted by people at all levels rather than a set of personal characteristics and attributes located in people at the top" (Fletcher & Kaufer, 2003, p. 22).

A study by Gronn (2002), distinguishes two basic forms of distributed leadership, additive and holistic.

Additive forms entail the dispersal of leadership tasks among members across the organization without explicit consideration of interaction by those members; this is the most meaning of the term and is the form which those advocating that “everyone is leader” (example, Manz and Sims, 1980) have in mind. On the other hand, holistic forms of distributed leadership include attention to the interdependence of those providing leadership. These holistic forms assume that the totality of leaders’ work adds up to more than the sum of the parts and that there are high levels of interdependence among those providing leadership (p. 679).

Additionally, holistic forms of distributed leadership produce leadership activities which emerge from dynamic, multidirectional, social processes which, at their best, lead to learning for the individuals involved, as well as for their organizations (Gronn, 2002).

Historically, the concept of distributed leadership continues to gain much attention since the late 1980s. This theory of leadership focuses on rather than seeing the principal as the sole leader, sees the role of the principal as part of “community of leaders” (Litz, 2011, p. 56). Litz (2011) describes distributed leadership as a process in which the principal is not holding on to all the power, and not just delegating power, but rather “letting go” and “extending the boundaries of leadership to all communities in the school and not just teachers, thereby creating a team of culture throughout the school” (p. 56)

Richard Elmore (2000) argues that the problem of scaling up school improvement, whether it is in a school or a school system, is one of capacity building and specialization. Building a broad base of capacity is not possible if control is limited to a few individuals. The solution he argues is the broader distribution of leadership. Distributed leadership can help educators become more aware of the connections between instructional practices and their own students' learning. Additionally, distributed leadership has been shown to positively influence student outcomes when effectively utilized and when teacher leaders understand their roles as instructional coaches and instructional leaders working collaboratively (Elmore, 2000). For example, when teacher leaders support other teachers with instructional expertise, it influences their instructional practices like delivery of instruction.

Elmore (2002) defines distributed leadership as multiple sources of guidance and direction, following the contours of expertise in an organization, made coherent through a common culture. Angelie (2010), in a qualitative study on distributed leadership stated that, "distributed leadership is when leadership develops skills to interact across the school and the activity creates collaboration, trust, support for professional learning and reciprocal accountability" (p. 21). Hargreaves (2007) added that distributed leadership is also central to system reconfiguration and organizational redesign, which necessitate lateral, flatter decision- making process. This is a process wherein schools have to change their thinking from equating leadership primarily with an individual leader to focusing leadership on a democratic model of teams rather than individuals, and places a greater emphasis upon teacher, support staff, and students as leaders (Harris, 2004).

A study completed by Valentine & Prater (2011) contends that, “the principal’s role has become increasingly complex as the nature of society, political expectations, and schools as organizations have changed” (p. 5). The major role performed by principals from the 1920s until 1970s was one of administrative manager (Valentine & Prater, 2011). Hallinger (1992) claimed that for the most part, a nationwide trend toward school consolidation, the profession’s desire to imitate corporate management, and the political nature of schools led a majority of principals to simply maintain the status quo.

The historic paradigm shift referenced is the emerging transformation from the traditional top down model of school governance, which is no longer adequate in successful learning environment (Sanders, Wright, & Horn, 1997), to alternative models of lateral or shared distributed leadership. The traditional model is what Fullan (2003), referred to as the individualistic fallacy. Regardless of the context in which teacher leadership is viewed, a common understanding is that leadership does not rest with one person in a hierarchically high-level position with formal power or authority. In schools, leadership is shared across roles and positions (Spillane, Halverson, & Donaldson, 2001). Additionally, Sanders et al., (1997) states, “[I]n communities of professionals, management and control decline as stewardship and empowerment increase. Leadership becomes the ability to bring out the best in others – to motivate others to take on leadership roles” (p. 2).

In order to secure and maintain school improvement the institution of effective distributed leadership must be in place (Tse, 2006). Distributed leadership is viewed as one of the forms of leadership that involves all the different forms of collaboration experienced by the principal, teachers, and members of the school’s improvement team

(Heck & Hallinger, 2009). Fullan (2001) states that the notion of sustainable change in schools is based on distributed leadership among the school staff. Therefore, distributed leadership must bring about changes that are embraced and possessed by the teachers who are in charge of implementing those changes in classrooms (Hall & Ford, 2001; Heck & Hallinger, 2009; Fullan, 2006). In the same light, Harris (2004), added that distributed leadership focuses on employing expertise wherever it exists within the organization rather than searching for expertise via formal position or role. Additionally, distributed leadership can be characterized as a leadership concept that advocates for collective leadership in which teachers can develop their expertise by working together, unlike traditional ideas of leadership that is usually based on an individual managing hierarchical systems and structures.

Goleman (2002) recommends that the distributed view of leadership offers a frame for studying leadership practices including every person at every level who in one way or another, acts as a leader. Spillane et al. (2001) suggests that distributed leadership is a form of collective agency integrating the individuals' activities at school to guide other teachers in the process of instructional change. Thus, researchers claim that sustainable school improvement ought to be empowered by leadership, which is distributed among all stakeholders (Barth, 2001; Fullan, 2006; Harris, 2003). There appears to be serious intensification for school leaders to be engaged in collaborative activities across the organization, however, selected approaches to leadership should not be exclusive to school principals, instead it must be sustainable for those who lead (Donaldson, 2001) since according to Hall & Hord (2001), principals cannot do it alone.

In their study, Hopkins & Jackson (2002) recommend that formal leaders of schools need to initiate, nurture, and support the concept of distributed leadership and for distributed leadership practices to occur and create the ‘shelter conditions’ for the leadership of collaborative learning. Glickman, Gordon & Ross-Gordon (2001), in their study of successful school improvement efforts, constructed a composite list of the characteristics of what they termed ‘improving school’ – a school that continues to improve student learning outcomes for all students over time. The practice of distributed leadership is on the top of that list as it relates to the different forms of leadership. Heck & Hallinger (2009) define school improvement leadership as

An influence process through which leaders identify a direction for the school, motivate staff, and coordinate an evolving set of strategies towards improvements in teaching and learning. This emphasizes our belief that the effects of school leadership are largely mediated by academic and social conditions present in the school and aimed towards learning outcomes (p. 662).

Although there has been some advancement in empirical evidence on shared forms of leadership, the majority of the evidence from research studies has been descriptive. Heck and Hallinger (2009) assert that relatively few published studies have investigated the impact of shared leadership on student improvement. Roughly over four decades and counting, researchers have tried to comprehend the contributions that leadership makes to effective schooling (Bossert, Dwyer, Rowan, & Lee, 1982; Firestone & Wilson, 1985; Gross & Herriot, 1965; Hallinger, Bickman, & Davis, 1996; Marks & Printy, 2003).

Recent studies in this area, suggest that substantial progress has been made in establishing the understanding of both the extent of how school leadership effects, as well as how leadership impacts school improvement (Hallinger & Heck, 1996, 1998; Witziers, Bosker, & Kruger, 2003). With the increase in scholarly work in the area of distributed leadership, it is obvious that distributed leadership contributes to school improvement and creates an organizational capacity for development (Harris, 2004). A very prominent contributor in the area of school leadership recently concluded: “It has become increasingly clear that leadership at all levels of the system is the key lever for reform, especially leaders who a) focus on capacity building and b) develop other leaders who can carry on” (Fullan, 2006, p. 33).

Contemporary educational reform places a great premium upon the relationship between leadership and school improvement. Effective leaders exercise an indirect but powerful influence on the effectiveness of the school in relation to achievement of students (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000). School improvement and student learning depend fundamentally on the development of teachers’ knowledge, abilities and commitments – their will and skill (Newman & Wehlage, 1995). In the center of school reform, there is an emergence of teacher leaders, whether in formal or informal roles.

Teacher Leaders

To better help understand the concept of teacher leadership, this question will be asked, “Who are teacher leaders?” Even though teachers typically do not aspire to become administrators, they do seek an active voice in the decisions affecting their classrooms and their working conditions. We must shift our leadership paradigm from a hierarchical model to a shared leadership model. With regards to involvement of teachers

in the school environment, Donaldson (2001) contends that teachers who are involved in the school environment often possess greater expertise than those individuals holding positions of authority. Teacher leaders are proactive and function best when the principal promotes teacher leadership (Moller, 2005).

Overall, the current literature on teacher leaders shows small or limited empirical evidence, however, the concept of teacher leaders is not a new concept, and most schools have individuals who are considered as teacher leaders formally or informally. In an issue of *The Progress of Education Reform*, the concept of teacher leaders is summarized as, teacher leaders see themselves as “teachers” first and do not want to become principals or administrators, but want to work collaboratively with their colleagues and school administrators to improve school and student performance. An issue of *The Progress of Education Reform*, defines teacher leaders as teachers who aspire to stretch beyond their classrooms to engage in leadership roles that take many shapes or forms, both “informal” and “formal”. These teachers view the school as whole, see the “big picture” and focus on how they can help improve aspects of the school to result in increases in student achievement.

Teacher Leaders and School Improvement

A study by Childs-Bowen, Moller, and Scrivner (2000) suggest teachers become leaders when they function efficiently in professional learning communities to impact student learning, contribute to school improvement, inspire excellence in practice, and empower stakeholders to participate in educational improvement. In that vein, Katzenmeyer and Moller (2001) present that teacher leaders lead within and outside of

the classroom. A teacher leader is a member and contributor to a community of teacher learners. They are influential in the continued improvement of educational practice.

In addressing the key roles teacher leaders play in facilitating school improvement and student achievement, Harrison and Killion (2007), state “The ways teachers can lead are as varied as teachers themselves” (p. 74). There is empirical evidence that teachers assume a wide range of roles to support schools and the learning outcomes for all students. A study by Jackson et al., (2010) identified two key roles for teacher leaders that has emerged, namely, coaching and learning team facilitators. Jackson et al., believe that “coaching has been found to enhance other forms of teacher professional development” (p. 6). To support this argument, Joyce & Showers (1995) found that demonstrations, presentations and practice had the greatest impact on teacher professional development when they were combined with coaching and other support. Furthermore, Killion and Harrison (2006) assert that coaches provide support and training to teachers in and out of the classroom, aid colleagues in expanding their skills, knowledge, and processes, and support and encourage colleagues to reflect, plan, and adapt their practices when necessary.

In retrospect, the roles pursued by teacher leaders can emerge informally and organically, instructional coaches are usually selected to perform the role of teacher leader. Coaches are selected based on factors such as the desired outcome of coaching, the work the coach will do, and the attributes needed to be an effective coach (Killion & Harrison, 2006). The roles of teacher leaders in a school environment can be multifaceted. Harrison and Killion (2007) highlighted ten specific roles that teacher

leaders may have within the school. They pointed out that teacher leaders can be the following:

Resource Provider: As a resource provider, teachers help their colleagues by sharing instructional resources such as Web sites, instructional materials, readings or other resources to use with students. Additionally as a resource provider it is very possible to share professional resources as articles, books, lesson or unit plans.

Curriculum Specialist: Having a group of individuals who demonstrate a knowledge of the content standards, how the different units of the school's curriculum are aligned, and how the curriculum is utilized in planning for instruction and assessment is very significant to ensure consistent curriculum implementation throughout the school. Additionally, curriculum specialists lead teachers to "agree on standards, follow the adopted curriculum, use common pacing charts, and develop shared assessments".

Data Coach: A teacher leader as a data coach is a unique role, wherein teachers can utilize data to guide and drive instruction, and lead conversations that engage their colleagues in analyzing data and using that information to better strengthen instructional practices.

Instructional Specialist: As instructional specialists, teacher leaders can help their peers implement effective teaching strategies. This help might include ideas for differentiating instruction or planning lessons in partnership with fellow teachers. In addition, instructional specialists might study research-based classroom strategies; explore which instructional strategies are effective for student learning, and share information with colleagues.

Classroom Supporter: Teacher leaders as classroom supporters work inside classrooms to help teachers implement new ideas by demonstrating a lesson, co-teaching, observing a colleague, and providing observational feedback. Blase & Blase (2006), as cited by Harrison & Killion (2007), found that consultation with peers,

Enhanced teachers' self-efficacy (teachers' belief in their own abilities and capacity to successfully solve teaching and learning problems) as they reflected on practice and grew together, and it also encouraged a bias for action (improvement through collaboration) on the part of teachers (p. 22).

Learning Facilitators: Teacher leaders will facilitate learning opportunities for other teachers. When teachers learn with and from one another, they can focus on what most directly improves student learning. Their professional learning becomes more relevant, focused on teachers' classroom work and aligned to fill gaps in student learning.

Mentors: When teacher leaders serve as mentors to new teachers, they are performing a common role. The roles of teacher leaders as mentors, they serve role models, acclimate new teachers to a new school, and advise new teachers about instruction, curriculum, procedure, practices and politics. As mentors, teacher leaders provide significant contributions in supporting the development of novice teachers.

School Leader: Being a school leader means, serving on a committee, such as school improvement team; acting as grade level chair; supporting school initiatives; or representing the school on community or district task forces or committees. A school leader shares the vision of the school, aligns his or her professional goals with those of the school and district, and shares responsibility for the success of the school as a whole.

Catalyst for Change: Teacher leaders can become catalysts for change, visionaries who are “never content with the status quo but rather always looking for a better way” (Larner, 2004, p. 32). Teachers who perform the catalyst role feel secure in their own work and have a strong commitment to continual improvement. They are constantly asking questions and generating answers to guide and facilitate student learning.

Lead Learners: The role of teacher leaders as lead learners is very significant in a school environment. Lead learners are professionals who focus on learning in three areas – themselves, their work, and the field of education. Jackson and colleagues (2010) suggest that another way teacher leaders can help to create a culture of collaboration is through the facilitation of learning teams. As the term implies, a learning team as cited in Jackson et al. (2010), “is a group of teachers working together to focus on important issues within the school, such as addressing the meeting of student needs” (Richardson, 2009, p. 7). Normally, there is the tendency for the principal to form learning teams when a school-wide need is identified, for example, when the reclassification rate of English learners is lower than expected, California Standardized Test scores indicate a school drop in mathematics, or implementation of a school-wide culture of discipline. The principal will typically make available to the learning team the necessary data, information about learning and collaborative practices, and guide teacher researchers on alternative teaching they can utilize in finding answers that will promote student learning. Jackson et al., (2010) proposes that,

The role of convening and facilitating learning teams, however, need not fall solely on the principal, a teacher leader can also convene or facilitate learning teams. This can provide crucial support for principals and facilitate buy-in from

teachers who may be more likely to support initiatives that are teacher-led, rather than principal-led (p. 7).

Teacher Leadership

In defining teacher leadership, many authors readily assert its importance and describe its various forms, but they usually fail to define it (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). This lack of definitional clarity is not unique to teacher leadership. When introducing their findings from a review of literature on school leadership, Leithwood and Duke (1999) stated: It is important to be clear from the outset that what has been learned about leadership in schools over the century has not depended on any clear, agreed-upon definition of the concept, as essential as this would seem at first glance (p. 45). The same is true of my findings from the literature on teacher leadership. Very few authors provide what would be considered a definition of teacher leadership. The lack of a clear definition may be due, in part, to the overarching term "teacher leadership."

Research study on teacher leadership by York-Barr and Duke (2004) contend that teacher leadership is practiced through a variety of formal and informal positions, roles, and channels of communication in the daily work of schools. Sometimes teachers serve in formal leadership positions such as, union representatives, department heads, grade-level chairs, curriculum experts, mentors, or members of the school site management team. At other times, continued York-Barr & Duke (2004), leadership is demonstrated in informal ways, such as coaching peers to resolve instructional problems, encouraging parent participations, working with colleagues in small groups and teams, modeling reflective practice, or articulating a vision for improvement.

According to a recent survey, “In a possible sign of evolving school organizational structures, more than half of teachers indicate that they hold leadership positions in their schools, such as “department chair, instructional resource, teacher mentor, or leadership member” (p.2). Additionally, the survey found that 51% of teachers are at least somewhat interested in taking on hybrid roles that combine classroom teaching and other responsibilities in their school or district (Heitin, 2013).

Conceptual Understandings of Teacher Leadership

The conceptual understandings of teacher leadership have evolved over time. Silva, Gimbert, & Nolan (2000) describe this evolution in three waves. In the first wave, teachers served in formal roles (e.g., department heads, union representatives), essentially as managers, whose main purpose was to further the efficiency of school operations. Wasley (1991), described this use of teachers as an extension of the administration “designed not to change practice but to ensure the efficiency and effectiveness of the existing system” (p. 4).

In the second wave, according to Silva et al., teacher leadership was intended to capitalize more fully on the instructional expertise of teachers by appointing teachers to roles such as curriculum leaders, staff developers, and mentors of new teachers. The third wave of teacher leadership, viewed as emerging currently, recognizes teachers as central to the process of “reculturing” schools such that the intentions of the second wave (i.e., maximizing teachers' instructional expertise) can be realized. This third wave reflects an increased understanding that promoting instructional improvement requires an organizational culture that supports collaboration and continuous learning and that recognizes teachers as primary creators and re-creators of school culture (Darling-

Hammond, 1988; Silva et al., 2000). This involves teachers as leaders both within and outside their classrooms (Ash & Persall, 2000).

It is apparent that some researchers have attempted to present a definition of teacher leadership, but the generally accepted view of teacher leadership is presented with clarity in a study by Barr, Summerness, & Hur (2008) who define teacher leadership as, “the process by which teachers, individually or collectively, influence their colleagues, principals, and other members of the school community to improve teaching and learning practices with the aim of increased student learning and achievement.” (p. 287).

In this light, a leading voice in the field of teacher leadership, Charlotte Danielson (2006), states, “teacher leadership is a set of skills demonstrated by teachers who continue to teach students but also have an influence that extends beyond their own classroom to others within their own schools and elsewhere” (p. 12).

The scholarly literature on teacher leadership examined the benefits of teacher leaders both in and out of the classroom. The benefit of teacher leadership has been studied and investigated, but most of the literature has not clearly focused on an established definition of teacher leadership (York-Barr and Duke 2004; Greenlee, 2007). According to York-Barr and Duke (2004), “Teacher leadership is the process by which teachers individually or collectively, influence their colleagues, principals, and other members of school communities to improve teaching and learning practices with the aim of increased student learning and achievement” (p. 256).

Teacher leadership means different things to different people. Team leaders, department chairs and respected teachers live it every day. They experience the pushes

and pulls of their complex roles, located somewhat between administrative leadership and almost invisible leadership of teachers. Yet many administrators, school board members, citizens, and even teachers don't recognize or understand teacher leadership (Ackerman & Mackenzie, 2006).

The Task Force on Teacher Leadership (2001), contends that teacher leadership is not about 'teacher power'. Rather, it is about mobilizing the still largely untapped attributes of teachers to strengthen student performance at ground level and working toward real collaboration, a locally tailored kind of shared leadership in the daily life of the school. When teacher leaders are part of a wider, systemic strategy, the potential for impact is greater (Harris, Sockwell, & Follet, 2009). Leadership as an organization quality (Ogawa & Bosset, 1995) includes teachers' participation in instructional, professional, and organizational development, whereby, leadership "must affect more than individual actions; it must influence the system in which actions occur" (p. 233).

Alma & Harris (2003) posit that when teachers are empowered and given opportunities to perform leadership roles, teacher leaders will become better at providing learning for students. Additionally, Louis & Marks (1998) found that in schools where the teachers work in ways that promoted professional community there was a positive relationship with the academic performance of students. A study by the Institute of Educational Leadership (2001) asserts that teacher leadership is a mobilization of the available attributes of teachers to strengthen student performance at the ground level. Teacher leaders work toward collaboration and shared leadership in the daily activities of the school.

Fullan (1994) argues that teacher leadership encompasses inter-related domains of commitment and knowledge. Thus, there is a commitment to moral purpose, continuous learning, knowledge of the learning processes, as well as an understanding of the educational context and change processes. Additionally, Crowther, Kaagen, Ferguson & Hann (2002) posit that teacher leadership facilitates principled action to foster whole-school success. Teacher leaders transform teaching and learning and tie the school and community together, and advance the community's social mission and quality of life.

For teacher leadership to be successful, teachers must practice through a variety of formal and informal positions, roles, and channels of communication in the daily work of schools (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Harris (2003) explains that teacher leaders are, in the first place, expert teachers, who spend the majority of their time in the classroom but take on different leadership roles. Lord and Miller, (2000) identify four categories as they relate to the teacher leader role; (i) working with individual teachers in the classroom settings – lesson planning, team teaching, (ii) working with groups of teachers in workshop or comparable professional development settings, (iii) working with teachers, administrators, community members, or students on committees, task forces, at conferences, or in meetings, and (iv) working with various constituents, on the task *du jour* – responding to crises, teacher evaluations, etc. Thus when teacher leaders are performing the aforementioned roles, it enhances teacher leadership, intermediary outcomes that improve teaching and learning, such as creating positive teaching and learning relationships between teachers and students (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Silns and Mulford (2002) similarly conclude that student outcomes are more likely to improve

where leadership sources are distributed throughout the school community and where teachers are empowered in areas of importance to them.

Potential Benefits of Teacher Leadership

A paper by Jackson, Burrus, Bassett, and Roberts (2010) suggest, “although little empirical research documenting the benefits of teacher leadership exists, the overall consensus is that teacher leadership has many potential benefits” (p.3). Jackson and colleagues (2010) cited a chart developed by York-Barr and Duke (2004) that summarized the proposed benefits into four main categories. The four main categories are charted in Table 1. (Adapted from a study by Jackson et al., 2010).

Table 1

The Potential Benefits of Teacher Leadership (York-Barr & Duke, 2004)

Benefits	Comments
Engagement and commitment	Teacher leaders inform management and engage decision-making. Participating at this level can increase the teacher’s ownership and commitment to the profession and school goals
Knowledge, skills, and learning transfer and growth	Teacher leaders advance teaching and learning by modeling effective practice to other teachers and sharing their knowledge and skills with others in the field. Teacher leaders, themselves continue to learn and grow as they lead and work with others.
Recognition and rewards lead to retention and achievement	Additionally, the recognition, rewards, and opportunities that accompany the title teacher leader are thought to retain, motivate, and recruit teachers.
Student benefits	Teacher leaders provide students with a positive example of leadership by modeling democratic leadership and collective responsibility in a community environment

The focus of the first benefit is that teacher leadership creates a platform for teachers to begin to actively engage in, contribute to, take responsibility for, and become

accountable for what is happening in their schools (Jackson et al., 2010). An example is when teachers are able to participate in the decision-making processes they are likely to become committed to these decisions and work diligently towards implementation, thus fostering teacher empowerment (Barth, 2001). Additionally, when the conversations among teachers that such leadership encourages will promote unity among teachers and create a professional work environment that is based on informed decision-making (York-Barr & Duke, 2004).

The second benefit highlights the classic pragmatism that teacher leaders serve as role models to other teachers, as they themselves continue to learn during the process (Barth, 2001; Ryan, 1999; Ovando, 1996; Darling-Hammond, 1998). Jackson et al., (2010) further argues “to date, perhaps the strongest effects of teacher leadership are on the teachers themselves”. This impact is often depicted by increases in the teachers’ leadership and organizational skills (Ryan, 1999). Furthermore, growth has been reported in additional areas, such as instruction, due to exposure to new information and opportunities (Ovando, 1999; Porter, 1986; Smylie, 1994).

Third, as a benefit of the concept of teacher leadership, acknowledging and rewarding teacher’s expertise and dedication, tends to increase teacher retention and create opportunities for achievement (Hart, 1995). Jackson et al., (2010) state the “important contributions that teachers make are more prominent and easily recognized by administrators and their peers when they take on teacher leadership roles” (p. 4). An example provided by Jackson et al., (2010), is a survey of 76 successful principals (defined as such because their schools made *adequate yearly progress*), stated that their

schools would be less successful if they did not have teacher leaders (Institute for Educational Leadership, 2008).

Finally, when this type of teacher leadership is encouraged and nurtured, eventually it will lead to student achievement. Jackson et al., (2010) posit that teacher leadership benefits, “ultimately will accrue to students, not only through improved instruction, but also by providing students with positive examples of leadership and models of collective responsibility in a community environment” (p. 4).

Current literature supports the assertion that sharing leadership with teachers fosters their sense of ownership of instructional practices. As Clark, Hong, & Schoeppach (1996) stated, “The concept of teacher leadership has become embedded in the language and practice of educational improvement” (p. 255). Leech & Fulton (2008), argue “Traditional roles of teachers have changed and improved organizational teamwork is fostered by all members of the learning community assuming decision making roles” (p. 630).

As the reform drum beat in education gets louder, concepts of leadership and leadership roles are rapidly moving away from the philosophy that leadership is inherent in one individual as a problem-solver, and morphing more into collective or shared-decision making (Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond. 2004). The lines of traditional leadership roles and followers are blurred. The complexity and size of school systems today are such that one leader cannot meet the demands of daily tasks and problems. Thus, a singular leader-centric school cannot operate as efficiently as one in which leadership roles are distributed (Angelie, 2009, p.3).

Distributed Leadership in Educational Organizations

Why is there a growing interest in distributed leadership, especially in educational organizations? A number of individual and organizational benefits have been associated distributed leadership (Leithwood et al., 2004). When compared to top-down forms of leadership, distributed leadership shows characteristics that reflects division of labor which is experienced in the organization on a daily basis and tends to reduce the chances of error emanating from decisions based on the limited information available to a single leader (Leithwood et al., 2004).

Distributed leadership can also promote and foster opportunities for a school as an organization to benefit from the varied capacities of the members, allows for members to take advantage of the range of the individual strengthens and develops, among organizational members, a fuller appreciation of interdependence and how one's behavior affects the organization as a whole (Leithwood et al., 2004). Elmore (2000) sees this as a comparative advantage, especially when individuals and groups in different positions within an organization contribute to leadership functions in areas of organizational activity over which they have the greatest influence. As cited by Leithwood and colleagues (2004), Resnick and Glennan (2002) emphasize the importance of mutual or two-way accountability between leaders and participants in different roles and levels of the organization (example, principals are accountable to superintendents for performance, but superintendents are also accountable to inputs and needs of principals).

In the context of teamwork, some researchers have postulated that distributed leadership provides greater opportunities for members to learn from one another. According to Leithwood et al., (2004) assert "through increased participation in decision

making, greater commitment to organizational goals and strategies will develop, and also distributed leadership has the potential to increase on-the-job leadership development experiences, and the increased self-determination arising from the processes of distributed leadership may improve members' experience of work" (p. 29). In essence, leadership of this form will allow for members to better anticipate and respond to the demands of the organization's culture. In considering the holistic forms of leadership (Gronn, 2002), solutions will emerge which would be impossible in the context of individual sources.

Marzano, Pickering & Pollock (2001) assert that an instructional specialist as a teacher leader, will help their colleagues implement effective teaching strategies. This help might include ideas for differentiated instruction or planning lessons in partnership with fellow teachers. As it relates to teacher leaders analyzing data, Harrison & Killion (2007) posit that although teachers have access to a great deal of data, they do not often use that data to drive classroom instruction. Teacher leaders can lead conversations that engage their peers in analyzing and using this information to strengthen instruction.

Planning collaboratively, as explained by Blase and Blase (2006), is the consultation with peers "enhanced teachers' self-efficacy (teachers' belief in their own abilities and capacity to successfully solve teaching and learning problems) as they reflected on practice and grew together, and it also encouraged a bias for action (improvement through collaboration) on the part of teachers." (p. 22). Thus, summarized by Donaldson Jr. (2007), leadership, is about how individuals together influence these three streams of school life to make learning better for all students.

The growing interest in distributed leadership reflects an effort to reconceptualize leadership in schools by exploring how leadership practices are influencing learning communities (Spillane, Halverson & Diamond, 2004). According to Maxwell, Scheurich, and Skrla (2009), “distributed leadership has emerged as an innovative concept for describing the deployment of leadership within schools” (p.1). This concept of leadership is different because the focus of distributed leadership is not based on an individual it examines the construct as an emergent property of interacting individuals (Bennett, Wise, Woods, & Harvey, 2003). Distributed leadership is “the sharing, the spreading, and the distributing of leadership work across individuals and roles across school organization” (Smylie, Mayrowetz, Murphy, & Seashore Louis, 2007, p. 470).

Understanding how teacher leaders view their roles within the construct of distributed leadership would be central to this study. How ready and prepared are teacher leaders and principals with skill sets needed to develop collaboration, trust, and professional learning communities? Donaldson Jr. (2007) suggests, “Teacher leaders do not necessarily fit the leader-as-hero stereotype. Instead, they offer unique assets that come from the power of relationships”(p.26). In other words teacher leaders assume a variety of roles to support school and student academic success. Harrison & Killion (2007) argued that, whether these roles are assigned formally or informally, they build the entire school’s capacity to improve.

Summary

In the Urban Unified School District which is the second largest school district in the United States, there is anecdotal evidence that suggests some administrators are practicing distributed leadership however there is no documented evidence to support that

assertion. This study will provide documented empirical evidence of how distributed leadership is practiced at the school sites included in this study, and will inform the school district of what form of distributed leadership is practiced and how teacher leadership is implemented and supported within the Urban Unified School District. The researcher intends to examine any contributing factors that facilitate teacher leadership in the decision making processes at five high performing urban schools that are the sites for the study. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to document the processes of distributed leadership, especially teacher leaders' roles and attitudes as part of this process, in five high performing urban elementary schools in the Urban Unified School District, in order to present empirical evidence of teacher leaders' involvement in distributed leadership, and its impact on student achievement.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this research study was to investigate the perspectives of teacher leaders on the processes of distributed leadership in relation to the structures of the organizations, and its impact on student learning outcomes. This study will attempt to close some of the gaps in the existing research between the normative definitions of distributed leadership in five high performing elementary schools and the empirical descriptions of relationships and its effect on student academic outcomes.

This research study utilized phenomenology as the methodological design because this method provides the primary researcher the tools needed to capture the essence of the perceptions of teacher leaders on the processes of distributed leadership. Phenomenology is described as the study of the shared meaning of experience of a phenomenon for several individuals (McCaslin & Scott, 2003). As a phenomenological study, this research attempted to understand meaningful concrete relations between several teacher leaders, roles, and perceptions of distributed leadership.

In the current environment of profound popularity for school transformation, there is a sense of urgency to examine if there is evidence of an emerging culture of inquiry into the role of distributed leadership in multiple elementary school settings. Per Elmore and Gronn (2004), the concept of distributed leadership has more relevance today than it ever has in the past. Empirically, the researcher analytically examined if the process of distributed leadership existed in the selected five elementary schools within the Urban Unified School District.

Following the introduction to this chapter and research questions, the researcher described and justified the rationale for choosing the research tradition that will guide the

study, the proposed research setting and context, proposed research sample and data sources, proposed instruments and procedures, proposed data collection, data analysis, role of the researcher, and a summary.

Research Questions

In order to examine and understand the perceptions of teacher leaders on the processes of distributed leadership in five elementary schools, this phenomenological study was guided by the following key questions:

RQ: What are the perceptions of teacher leaders on the processes of distributed leadership in relation to student achievement in high performing urban schools in Los Angeles Unified School District?

Sub-Questions:

- How does the principal identify and foster teacher leadership?
- What are the perceptions of teacher leaders regarding distributed leadership?
- How does teacher leadership get distributed throughout the school?
- How do teacher leaders perceive their role in impacting student achievement?

Finally, in this chapter the role of the researcher in designing and conducting this study is explained, while discussing any underlying assumptions and biases on the part of the researcher that may potentially impact and influence how this study was conducted. Additionally, this chapter concluded with an explanation of the Urban Unified School District and California State University Institutional Review Board processes, and a summary.

Research Design/Tradition

This research study was framed within an interpretivist research design. In this theoretical framework, the purpose of this research study was to contextualize, understand and interpret a particular phenomenon. The interpretivist paradigm states that reality is constructed socially and culturally through individual perceptions as people interact with the world. According to Glesne (2011), research framed around an interpretivist design will require the researcher to collect data on the perceptions of multiple participants within a social group about the particular phenomenon.

With the research goal of interpreting the social world, it is expected of the interpretivist researcher to interact with people in their social context and talking to them about their perceptions. As an interpretivist researcher, the study design focused on in-depth, long-term interactions with relevant participants in more than one site. Based on the level of interaction with the participants, the interpretivist researcher will become a participating individual in the study. As a participating individual of the research process, it is of significance for the interpretivist researcher to acknowledge bias or subjectivity and not let it have any viable credence during the research process.

Phenomenological Study as a Research Design

The use of phenomenology as a research design was based on the research questions asked in the introduction of this chapter. The research questions focused on the ‘essence’ of the experience. Moustakas (1994), state “The understanding of meaningful concrete relations implicit in the original description of experiences in the context of a particular situation is the primary target of phenomenological knowledge” (p. 14). In addition, there are special characteristics of the phenomenological study that will serve as

the basis for exploring the research questions. These special characteristics included an empirical inquiry to examine the phenomena of teacher leaders' experiences within its bounded system, and extensive data collection involving multiple sources (Cresswell, 2008; Merriam, 2009; Schram, 2006). This research was bounded by a specific group of participants, those teacher leaders working at schools identified as high performing schools. This is significant because the experiences of teacher leaders informed the research questions.

By investigating these research questions, the primary researcher was able to explain the significant aspects of inquiry and understanding rather than prescription or prediction. McCaslin and Wilson Scott (2003) suggest that during this process, the researcher reduces data gathered as lengthy interviews describing the shared experiences of several informants to a central meaning, or essence of the experience.

Research Tradition

The purpose of this research study was to investigate the perceptions of teacher leaders on the processes of distributed leadership and its effects on student outcomes. The researcher wish to formulate a theory about the perceptions of teacher leaders on the processes of distributed leadership as practiced in five high performing elementary schools that are located in the northern area, within the Urban Unified School District and whether there are impacts on student outcomes.

In analyzing the qualitative data the researcher collected, and utilized grounded theory as the most appropriate tradition because it “involves specific procedures for data collection and analysis that included continual data sampling, coding, categorizing, and comparing in order to generate theory about a social phenomenon” (Glesne 2011, p.21).

In grounded theory methodology, a researcher utilizes coded information to look for similarity and differences in data obtained through semi-structured interviews, observations, surveys and document review. The patterns that are identified are then used to test tentative theories and ultimately develop a theory that is tied to the data (Schwandt, 2007). In grounded theory, the researcher generates an abstract analytical schema of a phenomenon, a theory that explains some action, interaction, or process. This analysis occurs primarily through collecting interview data, making multiple visits to the field (theoretical sampling), attempting to develop and interrelate categories of information, via constant comparison, and writing a substantive or context-specific theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Simply stated, it allows for a rich, in depth and detailed comparison of data. Theories about teacher leadership; perceptions on the processes of distributed leadership and its effect on student outcomes - will be useful for teachers and administrators in the field of education

Research Setting and Research Context

The concept of leadership is clearly emerging as a major discourse in the arena of school reform, and only few studies have directly investigated the perceptions of teacher leaders on the processes of distributed leadership. The majority of school leadership research has made light of its distributed character (Wallace, 2001). A bulk of studies have acknowledged that educators are consistently dealing with complex challenges, and in order to deal with these issues requires teamwork, motivation, empowerment, and communication (Hoyle, 1992). It would be inaccurate to assume that the principal is the heroic leader providing leadership for school improvement, thus presenting a compelling argument for re-defining leadership away from role-based conceptions and towards

distributive views (Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Spillane, Halverson & Kaplan, 2001). The need for teacher leadership has grown due to educational policies that demand of school administrators that they pursue other effective ways to improve student outcomes. The notion of teacher leadership as a way to reform schools has gained increased acknowledgment as scholars and administrators recognized that teachers possess the primary knowledge and expertise for improving instruction of and student outcomes (Datnow & Costellano, 2001; Elmore & Barney, 1997; Harris, 2005).

The researcher is currently employed by the Urban Unified School District as an assistant principal. The position of elementary assistant principal affords the researcher the opportunity to have access to the 5 principals of the participating schools. These school sites were selected because they matched the researcher's definition of high performing elementary schools. As assistant principal with the Urban Unified School District, the researcher have to be mindful to maintain a positive rapport with the network of elementary school principals because these individuals are the gatekeepers and they will be the ones to provide me with permission to study the research sites and interact with identified participants.

Upon getting permission to conduct research at these school sites, the researcher explained the purpose of the study as well as the researcher's personal and professional goals for conducting this research to the gatekeepers and participants. Additionally, the researcher informed the gatekeepers and participants how this study will postulate recommendations and conclusions for both administrators and teachers interested in educational leadership. This study also informed the participants about specific shared leadership experiences of individuals working at schools identified as high performing.

Site Demographics

This research study examined the perceptions of teacher leaders on the processes of distributed leadership and its impact on student achievement in five elementary schools in the Urban Unified School District identified as high performing schools based on the state criteria established by the Academic Performance Index (API). From 1998 – 2012, a part of California’s extensive accountability program, public schools received an API score based on their state test scores. The research settings were five high performing urban elementary schools in the Urban Unified School District. These five elementary schools are located in urban communities in the northern area within the Urban Unified School District and have an enrollment span from transitional kindergarten (TK) through fifth grade.

School A Elementary is a TK-5th grade California Distinguished school that is part of the Urban Unified School District, and located in the northern area of the district. The current student enrollment is 598 students. The student demographic looks like this: American Indian – 0.5%, Asian – 16.7%, Native Hawaiian/Pacific – 1.2%, Hispanic or Latino – 46.1%, Black or African American – 10.6%, Whites – 24.5%. English Learners represent 18% of the student population. There are 61% of students enrolled in the Free/Reduced lunch program. The school’s current API score is 871. The school is on school wide Title 1 plan. The school is also Program Improvement Year 2 status. (Source: Educational Demographics Office).

School B Elementary is a TK-5th grade and an affiliated community charter school that is part of the Urban Unified School District, and located in the northern area of the school district. The current student enrollment is 900 students. The student

demographic looks like this: American Indian – 0%, Asian – 11.0%, Native Hawaiian/Pacific – 0.0%, Filipino – 1.0%, Hispanic or Latino – 6.1%, Black or African American – 4.0%, Whites – 78.0%. English Learners represent 4.0% of the student population. There are 7.0% of students enrolled in the Free/Reduced lunch program. The school’s current API score is 942. (Source: Educational Demographics Office).

School C Elementary School is a TK-5th grade. A California Distinguished school which is part of the Urban Unified School District and located in the northern area of the school district. The current student enrollment is 395 students. The student demographic looks like this: American Indian – 0.0%, Asian – 8.0%, Native Hawaiian/Pacific – 1.0%, Hispanic or Latino – 76.0%, Black or African American – 7.0%, Whites – 1.0%. English Learners represent 24.0% of the student population. There are 73.0% of students enrolled in the Free/Reduced lunch program. The school’s current API score is 894. The school is on school wide Title 1 plan. (Source: Educational Demographics Office).

School D Elementary is a TK-5th grade California Distinguished school and an affiliated charter that is part of the Urban Unified School District, and located in the northern area of the school district. The current student enrollment is 596 students. The student demographic looks like this: American Indian – 1.0%, Asian – 26.0%, Native Hawaiian/Pacific – 0.0%, Hispanic or Latino – 34.0%, Black or African American – 7.0%, Whites – 24.5%. English Learners represent 13.0% of the student population. There are 34.0% of students enrolled in the Free/Reduced lunch program. The school’s current API score is 916. (Source: Educational Demographics Office).

School E Elementary School is a TK-5th grade and is part of the Urban Unified School District and located in the northern area of the school district. The current student

enrollment is 395 students. The student demographic looks like this: American Indian – 0.0%, Asian – 9.0%, Native Hawaiian/Pacific – 0.0%, Hispanic or Latino – 68%, Black or African American – 4.0%, Whites – 18.0%. English Learners represent 18% of the student population. There are 72.0% of students enrolled in the Free/Reduced lunch program. The school’s current API score is 850. The school is on school wide Title 1 plan. The school is categorized as a High Progress School. (Source: Educational Demographics Office).

Using a phenomenological approach, the researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with 5 principals and 10 teacher leaders from participating school sites. The researcher chose two teacher leaders from each school site. The researcher conducted a teacher leader survey for 10 teacher leaders and completed 2 observations at each school site. In addition, prior to the interviews, and observations, the researcher contacted each of the school sites and informed and briefed the principals about the research study and the appropriate documentary review of evidence that can be provided by each participating principal.

Site and Participant Selection

In completing a review of the research questions and the statement of problem for this study, the researcher selected a phenomenological tradition to examine the perceptions of teacher leaders on the processes of distributed leadership at high performing elementary schools and answered the questions. A compelling reason for choosing these sites was, they provided the sampling of subjects the primary researcher would like to understand through contextualization, interviews, surveys, and direct observation of the participants in their everyday natural environment.

In a phenomenological research, participants are selected on the basis of their experiences on a common phenomenon. For the purpose of this study, the phenomenon of interest is the experience of being teacher leaders and their perceptions of the processes of distributed leadership. The primary researcher identified these sites using a purposeful sampling strategy. Selection of the participants was purposeful and nonrandom (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). Since the purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of teacher leaders on the processes of distributed leadership and its impact on student outcomes, the researcher wanted to select sites that already had some structures in place as the study. The rationale for selecting high performing schools in an urban area was because they already have structures in place similar to this study that would be beneficial to this research. The researcher selected five elementary high performing schools because they are described and identified as having a remarkably robust, academic instructional program, and also identified as a high performing school in an urban setting. These settings provided answers to these research questions in trying to understand distributed leadership and shared decision making in high performing urban schools. These schools have administrators and teachers – the core participants needed for my study. According to Patton (1990), criterion sampling selects participants that meet predetermined criteria that can be studied and analyzed. The core of purposive sampling is in the selection of information-rich participants for in-depth examination and analysis connected to the central phenomenon and research questions (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Patton, 1990).

As the principal researcher, and assistant principal, my dual role might raise some ethical concerns due to my knowledge of leadership and an administrator in elementary

schools. Backyard research can render advantages like having easy access to the participants, ease rapport and trustworthiness, but it can also pose some conflicts as the researcher attempt to acquire critical information for this research. Some participants might feel intimidated due to my role as an assistant principal in the school district, and will not offer accurate data that will inform my study. Additionally, there is a concern of uncovering what Glesne (2011) calls “dangerous knowledge” which is information that can be sensitive for someone in an insider role. In attempting to avoid ethical conflicts, the researcher took the time to explain to everyone who might be part of my sampling, that for the purpose of this research, the researcher is going to be a student researcher and not an Assistant Principal. The researcher ensured that the rights of every participant were not violated and very significantly ensured and maintained confidentiality.

Access and Researcher Roles

The researcher gained access to these sites through his multiple roles as an assistant principal, educator, and a doctoral candidate. The researcher’s access to the schools is through his role as a graduate student researcher and assistant principal. The researcher anticipated that there is the possibility to encounter minimal difficulty gaining and maintaining rapport with the participants. The researcher explained that the intention of this study was to examine the perceptions of teacher leaders on the processes of distributed leadership and its impact on student outcomes. The researcher ultimately intended to generate recommendations for the relevance of empowering and building capacity in teacher leadership through shared-decision making, as well. In this way, the researcher hoped that these dual roles as researcher and assistant principal will facilitate access to participants.

Research Samples and Data Sources

In studying the perceptions of teacher leaders on the processes of distributed leadership and its relationship to student outcomes in five high performing elementary schools, The researcher utilized three sources of data that informed the research questions and also has a direct link to the topic, principals, teacher leaders, student statewide test scores. The types of data that was collected included teacher leader and principal interviews, teacher leaders' anonymous surveys, observations of teacher leaders during grade level articulation meetings, and document review.

Sampling Design

After reviewing of the research questions and the research problem for this study, the researcher selected a phenomenological tradition to examine the perceptions of teacher leaders on the processes of distributed leadership in five high performing elementary schools. According to Hycner (1999), “the phenomenon dictates the method (not vice-versa) including even the type of participants” (p.156). A purposive sampling procedure was utilized to identify the participants. The researcher chose this sample based on the purpose of the study and looking for those who “have had experiences relating to the phenomenon to be researched” (Kruger, 1988 p. 150). The individuals selected, were chosen specifically because of their background knowledge, and provided answers that informed the study. The researcher utilized a criterion sampling strategy to identify and select teacher leaders because their responses provided context and carried referential meaning due to their knowledge and experiences in the field of education and helped the researcher better understand the perceptions of teacher leaders on the processes of distributed leadership in relation to student achievement in five high

performing urban elementary schools in a large school district. According to Patton (1990), criterion sampling selects cases that meet predetermined criteria that can be studied and analyzed.

Sampling Process

The researcher used one sampling strategy to identify and recruit participants. The researcher utilized a criterion-based strategy that denotes “individuals studied represent people who have experienced the same phenomenon” (Bloomberg & Volpe 2012, p. 104). To begin the data collection process at the study sites, the researcher first and foremost sought to get an IRB approval from California State University, Northridge and the Urban Unified School District for conducting research on human subjects. When an IRB approval, has been determined from both organizations, the researcher proceeded with the data collection process. The researcher wrote a letter to the site administrators introducing himself, the title of the research topic, and explaining the purpose of my study and the possible contributions it will make to the field of education. The researcher also asked for access to meet the staff during a faculty meeting. With access to the school and staff, the researcher relied on the knowledge of the site principals in identifying the teacher leaders at the sites of study. The researcher asked the principals of participating school sites to assist in the identification of who the teacher leaders are. Potential participants were given an invitation to meet with the researcher to discuss possible interview dates and time based on their availability. The researcher assured the confidentiality of all participants and their privacy.

Ethical Issues

Given the backyard nature of this study, there are some potential for ethical concerns that needed to be addressed when conducting the interviews, and observations. First, the researcher needed to assure all participants that any information provided will be in strict confidence and will be only applicable for the study, and there will be no repercussions for their honest responses.

The second ethical concern that the researcher needed to address during this study is, as the principal researcher, I am able to narrate the emerging story my participants intend to tell. There is the possibility for my own biases to surface, which might interfere with the perspectives of the participants. For example, some participants may hold back information due to my dual role as an assistant principal and the primary researcher. I may inadvertently establish an authority figure and participant relationship, which might lead to potentially inaccurate or incomplete responses from my participants (Few & Stephens, 2003). Another example will be, possible misinterpretation of accurate, complete responses as a result of my own personal assumptions or biases. Teachers may also feel interview questions are too personal to respond candidly to especially knowing fully well my other role – assistant principal and an insider.

Additionally, the primary researcher is a strong proponent of leadership that is dispersed democratically therefore the researcher must be mindful and careful not to project his own understanding of distributed leadership in this research.

In order to address these anticipated concerns, the researcher paid very close attention to designing an interview protocol that will clearly spell out how the data collected will be used and how confidentiality of all participants will be maintained as

well as indicated how long the data collected will be kept before it is destroyed. The researcher provided interview transcripts to the principals and teachers interviewed, in order to ensure accuracy and they have the right to discontinue participation in the study at any time. The researcher further preserved the credibility of this study with the use of triangulation of data that included: interviews, surveys, observations and document analysis.

Data Collection Instruments and Procedures

A phenomenological study design was utilized to understand the insider (emic) view of teacher leadership experiences when leadership is democratically shared in five high performing elementary schools. According to Rossman and Rallis (2003), “Phenomenological research focus in depth on the meaning of a particular aspect of experience, assuming that through dialogue and reflection, the quintessential meaning of the experience will be revealed.” (p. 97).

Research invitation and informed consent. A letter of invitation and an adult informed consent form were developed for this research as two separate documents. The researcher arranged a meeting with the principal of each participating school and explained the purpose of the study and officially requested the principals’ permission to conduct the research at their schools. After receipt of the permission letters from the principals, the researcher proceeded with Institutional Review Board applications with California State University, Northridge and the Urban Unified School District. Upon approval by the California State University, Northridge’s Office of Research and Sponsored Projects, and the Urban Unified School District Institutional Review Board. Then the researcher wrote a letter to the principals to grant him permission to meet with

the identified teacher leaders at each participating school site. The content of this letter provided a brief introduction of the researcher, succinctly explained the purpose of the research, outlined the expectations for participation, and explained the confidential nature of the data collection in this study. In the letter the researcher requested that the principals contact the researcher either by email or telephone to schedule a date and time to meet. If the researcher did not hear back from any of the principals the researcher contacted them within a week, the researcher followed up with an email reminder or a telephone call if necessary. After receiving signed approvals from the five schools, the primary investigator proceeded with another letter inviting the principals to participate in an interview and what the time commitment will be for participating principals.

The adult informed consent form is similar to the researcher's initial letters to the principals but provided further explanation of the purpose of the study, the specific procedures and time commitment for the semi-structured interviews and survey questionnaires, potential benefits for the participants and the field of education, the voluntary nature of being a participant, and informed the participant that there is no compensation for participation. In addition, the researcher made available the researcher's contact information for the participants in the event they have questions, comments, or concerns regarding the study or data collection process. The researcher requested emails and phone number of all participants during interviews in case of any necessary follow-up.

Interview protocol. The primary data collection instrument in this study was through semi-structured interviews. Phenomenological studies explore the meaning of individual lived experiences. In order to capture rich descriptions of the phenomena and

their setting, the researcher developed both open-ended questions and probing questions for the participant interviews based on the literature review, conceptual framework, research question and sub-research questions. Additionally, the interview protocol consisted of open-ended questions and probing questions that allowed opportunities for new information and perspectives to emerge during the interview process.

No interviews were conducted until all approvals from the school district and university were obtained. All interviews were confidential and nothing was shared with participating school site principals. All participants were assigned a pseudonym or code. This was made known during the recruitment process in the letters that were sent out. Creswell (2012) states that in order to be ethical, assurances of confidentiality should be included in the invitation to participate letter. Upon meeting with participants in person, the researcher restated that the researcher will not identify any individuals specifically in the report to insure that this was clearly understood. The one-on-one teacher leader interviews and principal interviews will be 45-60 minutes. The researcher also informed all participants that they have the right to refuse participating and/or discontinue the interview at any point. The researcher restated the purpose of the study in order to make the participants comfortable. Finally, the researcher stated to involve the dissertation chair in every step of the way to ensure that my biases are not surfacing. All interviews will be conducted outside of school hours.

Interviews. According to Seidman (1998), interviewing provides access to the context of people's behavior and thereby provides a way for researchers to understand the meaning of that behavior. A basic assumption in in-depth interviewing research is that the meaning people make of their experience affects the way they carry out that experience.

Interviewing allows us to put behavior in context and provides access to understanding their action. Since the schools are units of analysis, interviewing participants representing different aspects of the school organization will provide me with perspectives and insights into how the processes of distributed leadership impact the schools and student achievement. The researcher interviewed 5 principals and 10 teacher leaders. The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews in order to collect information on the perspectives of teacher leaders on the processes of distributed leadership in five elementary schools. The researcher made initial contact with the teacher participants during a faculty meeting, during which the researcher provided them with a letter of invitation to participate in this study, explained the purpose of the research study, and, review the adult consent form and confidentiality safeguards with all participants.

The researcher conducted 10 teacher leader one-to-one interviews. The interviews consisted of approximately 14 open-ended questions and probing questions. The researcher refrained from using ambiguous or complex wording, asking yes/no questions, or using leading or sensitive questions. All interview locations, outside of school, were selected by participants and conducted after school hours. A digital recorder was utilized during all interviews for this research. Interviews with teacher leaders were scheduled by the researcher via email or by telephone call if necessary.

After piloting the teacher leader interview questions, individual interviews lasted for approximately 45-60 minutes. Teacher leader interviews lasted for 45 - 60 minutes. The overall time commitment for a participant during interviews was approximately 60 minutes. All interview locations were selected by participants and took place outside of school hours. The researcher negotiated times that worked with the schedules of

participants. Before the start of each interview session, the researcher greeted and welcomed the participant. The researcher reviewed and explained to all participants that, all information shared during the interview was confidential, and the participants had a right to decline answering any questions or withdraw their participation at any time. The interviews were conducted with the use of a digital recorder. At the conclusion of each interview, the researcher asked the participant if he/she has any questions. If there were no questions the researcher thanked the participant for his/her time.

Additionally, as part of a member check, transcribed digital recordings of the interviews were emailed to all the participants for review and possible feedback. As soon as the researcher received all reviewed transcriptions, the researcher made all necessary changes and edits recommended by the participants. The Invitational Letter to Participate, Adult Consent Form and The Interview Protocol were included in the appendices located at the end of the study.

Survey instrument. Blending quantitative and qualitative approaches “generally allows greater depth of understanding and insight than what is possible using just one approach” (Roberts, 2004, p.110). With that argument, the purpose of this study was to examine teacher leadership and distributed leadership in schools identified as high performing. A mixed methods research design will allow the researcher to survey the prevalence of teacher leadership and then utilized naturalistic inquiry to validate or expand quantitative results with qualitative data (Creswell, & Plano Clark, 2007). The survey instrument was developed after reviewing the literature on teacher leadership, and distributed leadership and its impact on academic achievement. The questions were written to gain an insight into the perceptions of teacher leaders and their point of views

on shared leadership. In addition the questions were standardized open-ended questions. The survey instrument was a paper-pencil instrument and included approximately sixteen items for the participants to respond to. A Likert Scaling method was utilized for the survey instrument with items that can be rated on 1- to -5 or Never – Always response scale. For the purpose of this study, “1” represented “low”, and “5” represented “high”. Responses from the items on the survey instrument informed descriptively the frequency of each statement as it relates to individual participating school site.

Administering survey instrument. With the assistance of the principal in each participating school in identifying teacher leaders, the researcher personally dropped off an adult informed consent for participating in the survey, a survey instrument with directions for completing the survey instrument with a stamped, addressed return envelope. The surveys will hand delivered by the researcher. The surveys were delivered to the teacher leaders before each teacher leader or principal interview, not after the interviews. Each teacher leader received one survey and completed one survey. Completing the survey should only take about fifteen to twenty minutes. Although the written questions on the survey instrument generated knowledge, the researcher anticipated there was a need to ask follow-up questions. Asking a participant to expand on their responses shows that the researcher is interested in the person and their responses (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). Follow-up questions can lead to a better understanding and greater accuracy.

Field notes. Observation is fundamental to all qualitative inquiry (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). The researcher utilized field notes in qualitative research as a form of storage for everything observed in the field during participant observations. Field notes

are crucial in retaining data gathered (Lofland & Lofland). During the observations and interviews, the researcher used field notes as a way of systematically recording impressions, insights, and emerging conjectures (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). The researcher included as much descriptive information of the setting, actions, and interactions of people in the environment as possible, and annotated personal reflections, ideas, questions, and concerns based on interviews and observations (Glesne, 2011). The field notes were written immediately after the observations and interviews so that important details were not forgotten. These data were added in to the interview transcripts to provide additional context to the interviews and make the narratives of the observations complete.

The field notes method adapted for this study is based on a model developed by Leonard Schatzman and Anselm Strauss as described by Groenewald (2004). It will include the following:

- a) Observational Notes – this is also known as ‘what happened’ notes deemed important enough to researcher.
- b) Theoretical Notes - attempts to derive meaning.
- c) Methodological Notes – reminders, instruction or critique to oneself on the process.
- d) Analytical Memos - progress review or end of the field day summary.

The researcher conducted 2 teacher leader observations during grade level meetings that involved an identified teacher leader at a school site. The observations were approximately 50 minutes long. The researcher scheduled these observations by contacting the teacher leaders and scheduling time that was convenient for them.

Observations provided the opportunities for a researcher to listen and watch for signals the researcher can relate to his/her experiences, words, thoughts, body language and feelings. Direct observations can allow the researcher to perceive or be attuned to the experiences participants are having and the experiences of the people the researcher is trying to understand; teacher leaders.

Participant observations. A grade level articulation meeting is defined as a forum for teachers to plan for effective ongoing leadership, representation and collaboration (LAUSD, 2001). Observations of grade level articulation meetings provided opportunity for the researcher to observe teacher leaders interact. Observations were conducted in classrooms and involved teachers at a particular grade level. Observations during grade level articulation meetings informed the study because of established procedures for making team decisions, utilizing data for shared decision making, and the roles teacher leaders perform during collaborative activities and interactions in their natural environment. Additionally, observations provided valuable information on the type of functions performed by teacher leaders during grade level meetings in relation to the processes of distributed leadership. Observation is fundamental to all qualitative inquiry (Rossman & Rallis, 2003).

The researcher completed two observations during grade level articulation meetings. The researcher relied on the principal's permission and helped to work out the logistics for the fieldwork. The researcher emailed the principal requesting to complete two observations during a grade level articulation meetings. Based on dates and times provided by the principal, the researcher then made arrangements to do the observations. During the observations, the researcher took extensive field notes like observational

notes, theoretical notes, methodological notes and analytical memos that captured the natural interactions of teacher leaders in context. Field notes allowed for clear and vivid descriptions of the setting. The researcher utilized a running reflective log during the participant observations.

Upon identification of teacher leaders at a school site, the researcher emailed the teacher leaders and requested schedules of their grade level meetings that the teacher leaders will be participating in. For every observational visit, the school site principal was notified via email or telephone call. School site observations for this study did not include minor children.

Documents and artifacts. Documents and artifacts were very important during data collection for this study. In addition to participant observation and interviewing, Bogdan and Biklen (1992) have identified several other sources of information in educational settings that are commonly used in qualitative inquiry. There are usually a large number of documents written by participants that are available to an educator in the school setting. The main task for an educator turned inquirer is to identify, locate, and gain access to such materials because document review can provide the researcher a perspective missing from both interviews and observations. The researcher began the data collection process by reviewing grade level team meeting minutes. These are minutes included agenda and discussions during grade level meetings. Additionally the researcher reviewed California State Test scores, and DIBELS (Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills). In addition, the researcher asked teacher leaders if they have documents and artifacts they feel will enhance and support my understanding of the perceptions of teacher leaders on the processes of distributed leadership.

Document review guide. Documents and artifacts were very important during data collection for this study. In addition to participant observation and interviewing, The researcher began the data collection process by reviewing existing data at the school sites that included but were not limited to the following -: grade level team meeting minutes, faculty meeting agendas, school leadership meeting minutes, Single Plan for Student Achievement, California Standardized Test scores, and DIBELS (Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills) periodic scores. The researcher emailed each principal of the 5 participating sites requesting documents that were not in public domain. In order for confidentiality/or FERPA not violated, all documents were redacted and all identifiable information removed by the school before making the documents available to the researcher.

The researcher created an electronic document review guide or running record based on the questions on the interview protocol. The document review guide captured all relevant data that pertains to the research. For confidentiality issues, the data were recorded and stored on a password protected computer.

Schools identified for this study. The following schools were used in this study.

- School A Elementary
- School B Elementary
- School C Elementary
- School D Elementary
- School E Elementary

Even though the actual names of the five research sites were identified for the Urban Unified School District Internal Review Board application process, however for

the purpose of this research, the researcher assigned a pseudonym for each school, principal, and teacher leader. This was done in order to protect the rights and confidentiality of all participants and participating school sites.

For the purpose of this study, the researcher utilized an interview protocol and survey instrument. Even though items on both measures may appear to overlap, it was intended to capture any missing detail that could be relevant to this study. Both the teacher leader interview protocol and survey instrument were used on the same sample.

Time commitment. The total time commitment for this study was approximately 130 minutes for teacher leaders which included - Interview: 60minutes; Survey: 20minutes; Observation: 50minutes. The total time commitment for the participating principals was approximately 90 minutes which included - Initial visit: 30minutes; Interview: 60 minutes.

Data Analysis

Qualitative data analysis transforms data into findings, and no formula exists for that transformation (Patton, 2002). According to Bloomberg & Volpe (2008), qualitative data analysis is a process where large quantities of subjective, context embedded, and detailed data are collected, organized, examined, and categorized by the researcher in an effort to give meaning to the collected information by summarizing the information in a dependable and accurate manner. The data that collected for this phenomenological study was organized and analyzed by reducing information to significant statements or quotes, and combined these into thematic categories, identifying themes, and coding the data (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008; Rossman and Rallis, 2003).

As a phenomenological researcher analyzes specific statements, generates meaning units, and develops a description that captures the essence of the phenomenon (van Manen, 1990). In that tradition, the researcher utilized different analytical strategies in analyzing all data collected. A coding system was developed aligned with the study's conceptual framework to address the relevant literature in the literature review on perspectives of teacher leaders on the processes of distributed leadership and the research questions. The participant observations, semi-structured interviews and review of documents and artifacts were the primary source of data collection for this study was analyzed to see what themes emerged.

Preliminary Data Analysis

The analysis of qualitative research notes begin in the field at the time of observation, interviewing or both as the researcher identifies problems and concepts that appear likely to help in understanding the situation (Schutt, 2012). Transcripts were used not only for analysis but also as evidence of the analysis and the researcher's analytic claims, issues of transcription quality and trustworthiness were critical to this process of transcription within research (Davidson, 2009).

As a necessary first step, the researcher organized all data collected, reviewed all transcripts for accuracy, made sure that the researcher has all field notes, transcriptions, documents and artifacts correctly labeled, and reviewed all field notes and made any necessary corrections as needed. By simply reading through all data collected was a significant step during preliminary analysis. The researcher familiarized himself with the data collected by a first read, then rereading the transcriptions from the participant interviews, observer field notes, and documents and artifacts to obtain an overall sense of

the whole before deconstructing it into individual parts (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). Additionally, the researcher reviewed the conceptual framework of the research and began to determine the categories of the conceptual framework that became the basis for categorizing the data (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008).

Recordings from the semi-structured interviews were transcribed verbatim by the researcher. This allowed for the researcher to interact with the data at a deeper level. The researcher used random digit identifiers to de-identify transcripts and also personally redacted identifying information from transcripts. When transcribing the participant interviews, the researcher for sure considered how the intensity and feelings of the verbal responses are communicated on paper by using punctuation marks, highlighting, or underscoring of text. The researcher listened to the digitally recorded interviews, then checked and rechecked it for accuracy before starting the data analysis process. Furthermore, the transcripts were reviewed for accuracy and member check conducted as part of the preliminary data analysis.

Reflective logs or memos captured thoughts and ideas while engaging in the data collection process by noting personal reflections and feelings after each participant interview and observations prior to the data analysis. According to Glesne (2011), the importance of writing as an aide to engage the researcher to think about the data analysis process, and to think about any new questions, or corrections that might come to mind through personal reflection.

The preliminary analysis of data is very critical and should be done simultaneously with data collection (Glesne, 2011) to allow for the researcher to focus and shape the research as it unfolds. Reflecting formally about the data, asking analytical

questions, and writing analytic and descriptive notes and memos throughout the study makes final analysis easier and more manageable than beginning the process at the end of data collecting (Rossman & Rallis, 2003).

Thematic Analysis

The researcher abided by the data analysis process by reading the transcriptions of participant interviews, compute the scores of respondents on the surveys, observation field notes, and artifacts and documents to begin to get a deeper feel for the data and try to make sense of what people are saying (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). Creswell (2008) referenced how thematic analysis moves the researcher away from reporting factual details to making an interpretation of individuals, events, and context. This analytic process in making sense of information in phenomenology consist of the researcher “brackets” his or her own experiences to understand the participants’ experiences, describing what all participants have in common, and to reduce individual experiences with a phenomenon to a description of the universal essence (Van Maanen, 1990).

The initial step in the analytic process was to consider generating categories to provide direction for additional data gathering (Rossman & Rallis, 2003), to see patterns in social interactions, and to develop hunches and hypotheses (Glesne, 2011). The researcher then coded the data to see what themes and processes, and the coded chunks of information were aligned to the categories of the study’s conceptual framework. Coding as a system of classification (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008; Glesne, 2011), allows for the researcher to mark what information or data is of interest or significant, and labeling them to organize information contained in the data. Moreover, data coding was utilized to generate themes, descriptions, and create relational categories for the data (Glesne, 2011).

Creswell (2009) suggests the analysis of case study data through the use of codes in four different areas: a) codes linked to topics based on the literature review; b) codes the researcher did not anticipate; c) codes that are outliers; and d) codes addressing a theoretical construct in the research study.

The researcher utilized a computer assisted qualitative data analysis software program like NVivo to facilitate the process of sorting, analyzing, and storing collected data. NVivo allowed the researcher to search, retrieve, and browse all data entries and notes relevant to an idea and build connections to passages, memos, and codes in a concept map (Creswell, 2008).

Roles of the Researcher

According to Glesne (2011), as a researcher you need to clearly know your role as researcher. As the principal researcher, I am a doctoral student at California State University, Northridge, conducting a study on the perceptions of teacher leaders on the processes of distributed leadership and its impact on student outcomes.

The qualitative researcher's perspective is perhaps a paradoxical one: it is to be acutely tuned-in to the experiences and meaning systems of others - to indwell- and at the same time to be aware of how one's own biases and preconceptions may be influencing what one is trying to understand. (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994, p. 123). As a researcher and assistant principal currently assigned to two elementary schools, my primary role as an assistant principal is to provide support to the principal in areas of school operations, instructional leadership, school-wide discipline and teacher evaluations. The researcher had to assume multiple roles during the data collection process of the study. The researcher was a teacher first for ten years, and worked with teachers for many years, it is

very natural to bring to the study the researcher's own subjectivity even though the desired research sites were not the schools the researcher had worked at, or currently assigned to. The researcher has assumptions about the roles of teachers in general however, that knowledge would not affect this study.

As a qualitative researcher, I do not think having some inside knowledge of the teaching profession makes the researcher's subjectivity negative, it just makes the researcher a different researcher in the sense that, regardless of the researcher's knowledge, expertise and viewpoint in the field of study, the researcher should learn about the participants' experiences in context by interacting and refraining from formulating pre-determined judgments. The researcher has always engaged in much self-reflection exercises as an educator, and continues to so during this study.

The researcher informed all of the teachers that his role as a researcher is going to be one of a learner, because learning from their experiences in context informed the study. Scheurich (1994) argues that one's historical position, class, race, gender, and religion - all of these interact and influence, and limit and constrain production of knowledge. This is to say, who I am determines, to a large extent, what I want to study. As a school site administrator who studied teacher leaders, it is very possible to have some preconceptions or biases.

Researcher Bias

In order to protect this study from the researcher's own biases, the study participants' interviews were not shaped and guided by the core aspects of the researcher's experience but that of the participants. This effort assisted in minimizing researcher's perceptions being clouded by the researcher's own individual experience

fully. Additionally, to ensure that the researcher's analysis of the interviews was appropriate the researcher strongly refrained from inserting researcher's own opinions and judgments. In order to prevent this study from being a narrative of personal opinions, the researcher needed to realize that the researcher became prone to certain number of bias as the study was conducted, but at the same time, knew full well that these biases can be mitigated (Creswell, 2007; Glesne, 2011).

Rossmann and Rallis (2003) suggest the need for a qualitative researcher to constantly be aware of their influence as a researcher on the setting or participants while the study is conducted. As the researcher, during the process of data collection, categorizing and interpreting data, the researcher needed to keep the researcher's understanding of the roles of teacher leaders in a school setting.

As a naturalistic researcher, the researcher was keenly aware of his own innate personal biases, values and beliefs. Listening skill was a pertinent element implored during the data collection process in the field of study. The researcher utilized the following strategies in order for the researcher's preconceptions not to unduly influence the results of this study.

During this research - collecting and analyzing data, the researcher behaved as neutrally as possible and utilized triangulation to minimize subject effects by reviewing data collected from interviews, observations and document review. The researcher asked open - ended questions that did not steer participants in a way that might appear to endorse a particular response. The researcher believed his role as the primary interviewer will have a direct impact on the collection of interview data if the researcher did not self-regulate researcher's own emotions, facial expressions, language usage and body

language in response to questions from participants if they say something contrary to the researcher's own personal beliefs or values about the research topic of study.

In qualitative research, bias affects the validity, trustworthiness, and reliability of findings (Glesne, 2011, Rossman & Rallis, 2003). Based on that knowledge, the researcher was conscious and sensitive to how biased questions or probes could directly influence a participant's response. Asking biased questions or probes was an action the researcher mitigated by refraining asking questions or probes that could be perceived as bias.

Keeping a subjectivity journal helped the researcher to see the multiple perspectives and interpretations that could emerge. The researcher also explored keeping the two voices separate - emic (insiders' or participants' voice) and etic (outsider or researcher's voice) - as much as possible in the researcher's data and decided which voice was predominant in the text. Additionally, taking detailed field notes was also another strategy that mitigated the researcher's own subjectivity. Rossman & Rallis (2003), suggest that you need to turn what you see or hear into data because it is the written record of your perceptions in the field.

Strategies to Mitigate the Effects of the Study on Researcher. Triangulation refers to the multiple approach of data collection where evidence is purposely collected from a variety of different, independent data sources in order for researcher to be in a position to defend how valid the findings of the research study (Creswell, 2007; Glesne, 2011). The researcher triangulated data by conducting individual interviews with teacher leaders, grade level chairpersons, observing participants and reviewing of document and artifact.

During the process of collecting data such as field notes, transcriptions and digital recordings, survey scores, and documents to review, the researcher maintained careful records of all interview transcriptions and digital recordings, document and artifacts collected for review, survey instrument scores, and observation field notes in order to allow for a detailed analysis of the data. The researcher asked for feedback from a colleague by reviewing interview transcripts and notes. Additionally, by sharing interview transcripts and notes with participants ensured accuracy of the information provided during interviews.

To summarize my points, Denzin (1989), suggest that all research is really about the researcher: but in order for the research to be of value it must move beyond the researcher and researcher's situation. This notion will guide the researcher's own subjectivity throughout this study.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

Introduction

This chapter will address findings that emerged from semi-structured interviews, an analysis of survey responses, participants' observations, and document review as they relate to the research questions. The chapter begins with a brief description of the purpose of this study, the study's context, and a description of the participants in the study. The findings are presented with the main goal of providing information to answer the research questions that guided this study.

The over – arching research question that guided this dissertation is:

RQ: What are the perceptions of teacher leaders on the processes of distributed leadership in relation to student achievement in high performing urban elementary schools in the Urban Unified School District?

The following sub-questions are also addressed as an examination of more specific aspects of teacher leadership while addressing the more general theme of the study:

Sub-Questions:

- How does the principal identify and foster teacher leadership?
- What are the perceptions of teacher leaders regarding distributed leadership?
- How does teacher leadership get distributed throughout the school?
- How do teacher leaders perceive their role in impacting student achievement?

Study Context

The purpose of this research study was to investigate the perspectives of teacher leaders on the processes of distributed leadership in relation to the structures of the organization and its impact on student learning outcomes. This study will attempt to close

some of the gaps in the existing research between the normative definitions of distributed leadership in five high performing elementary schools and the empirical evidence describing the relationships and their effect on student academic outcomes. The researcher considered distributed leadership as a cyclical and continuous process with administrators, teacher leaders, teachers and school support staff each having different levels of involvement in leadership roles based on situations and organizational structures. Collectively, these participants shared similar leadership experiences.

This research study is anchored in the central premise of social capital – which is social networks have value (Bourdieu, 1986; Putnam, 1995) In this vein, social capital emphasizes not just warm and fuzzy feelings, but a wide variety of quite specific benefits that flow from the trust, reciprocity, systematic sharing of information and collaboration associated with social networks. Social capital creates value for members of an organization that are connected. From this framework, distributed leadership is presented as a horizontal continuum rather than a hierarchical process. An organizational culture that fosters distributed leadership appears to promote and incorporate different levels of accountability, social integration and conscious cooperation.

The research design of this study included both qualitative and quantitative methods. The quantitative method involved data collection through anonymous surveys. The qualitative method involved data collection through interviews, observations, and document review. In understanding the processes of distributed leadership in elementary schools the settings for this research included five high performing elementary schools in a large urban school district in southern California.

The criterion utilized by the researcher in selecting these five schools was high academic achievement for three consecutive years improves the odds that the elements that facilitate distributed leadership may be present at these school sites. The participants for this research included five principals and ten teacher leaders. The sample for this research study included five high performing elementary schools, which are located in the north area of the Urban Unified School District. The five schools demonstrated similar demographics and nearly matched socio-economic status. Student demographics were not considered as significant for the purpose of this study.

Table 2

Study Participants

Role of Participants	Number of Participants
Principals	5
Teacher Leaders	10
Total Participants	15

Data

The data analysis process for this study was ongoing, iterative and occurred concurrently with data collection. Each of the interviews with principals and teacher leaders was tape recorded. The first initial phase of analysis consisted of listening to the interviews at least a couple of times immediately upon completion of the interview and making field notes. All interviews were transcribed verbatim and read several times in order to make sense of the information and reflect on its overall meaning. The researcher used Google docs in analyzing and organizing teacher leader survey responses into charts. Additionally, NVivo, a software tool designed to aid in qualitative analysis was utilized to assist in the storage, management and organization of the data.

First, the study design utilized a paper-pencil survey instrument that was administered to 10 teacher leaders – 2 teacher leaders from each participating site. The survey instrument consisted of sixteen questions. A Likert Scaling method was utilized for the survey instrument with items that were rated on a 1 to 5 or Never-Always response scale. For the purpose of this study, “1” represented “low” and “5” will represent “high.” The responses from the items on the survey instrument informed descriptively the frequency of each statement as it related to the individual participating school site. The response rate was 100% from the 10 teacher leaders. All teacher leader responses were entered into Google docs to assist in performing a numerical analysis by categorizing all survey questions and responses in percentages and pie charts.

Second, the study design involved semi-structured interviews at five school sites. Three interviews were conducted at each school site, totaling fifteen interviews. The sample interviewed included five principals and ten teacher leaders. The time commitment for each interview was approximately 45 – 60 minutes. The interview protocol consisted of open-ended questions and probing questions in order to capture descriptive responses. The data from all interviews was loaded into NVivo, which allowed the researcher to both code and categorize the data. According to Marshall and Rossman (1999) “coding data is the formal representation of analytic thinking” (p. 155).

Third, the study design was to complete two teacher leader observations at each of the participating school sites. A total of ten observations were completed. The observations were completed during grade level articulation meetings at each of the participating sites. These observations provided the researcher with insight into the types

of interactions and relationships that existed between teachers and teacher leaders at each site. Field notes were recorded during every observation and analyzed.

The data from the interviews and field notes were analyzed manually to identify initial sets of coding categories based on emerging themes in the data. The coding process involved “constant comparison”– addressing the grouping of data from different settings or interview questions and a “cross case analysis”– addressing the grouping of data from different instances of the same observational setting or responses to the same questions

Additionally, a comprehensive document review was completed as part of this study. The California State Test and Academic Performance Index scores for three consecutive years from 2010 – 2012 were reviewed. Scores were reviewed from the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS), a formative assessment that is used to monitor yearly growth of students’ early literacy skills.

Lastly, the perceptions of teacher leaders were presented. These perceptions were intended to portray the essence of the lived experiences of those teacher leaders, their perceptions of the processes of distributed leadership and how it impacted student outcomes. Based on the data collected and analyzed by the researcher the following categories and themes emerged. Four major categories and themes emerged from the interview transcripts, surveys, observations and document review. Each category and their associated items were reviewed critically with a focus of keeping the number of categories limited to four or five. Table 3 presents the four major categories and themes based on both thematic and analytical analysis of the data collected. The categories and

themes presented in Table 3 will be discussed further in relationship to the research questions mentioned in an earlier section of this chapter.

Table 3

Emerging Categories and Themes

Categories	Themes
Empowering Others	Vision Trust Identify strengths
Teacher Leaders as Experts	Teacher leaders as instructional leaders Teacher leaders as support providers Recognizing and valuing teacher leadership
Collaborative Practices	Trusting relationship Shared-decision making
Student Outcomes	Student improvement Student-centered grade level planning time Teaching and learning best practices

Research Question 1: Findings and Analysis

The first research question asked, “How does the principal identify and foster teacher leadership?” The first research question sought to understand how principals at the participating sites identify and foster teacher leadership. In an effort to address this question, the research utilized data collected from anonymous surveys and teacher leader interviews to create a beginning point for the principal interviews. The data collected provided the foundation for the context of the discussions and the lens to further develop the ideas shared by respondents in the survey.

The principals’ responses during one-on-one semi-structured interviews shared their perceptions regarding identifying and fostering teacher leadership at their schools. This section will identify those systems and structures that were utilized by the participating site principals that helped in identifying and fostering teacher leadership at these five high performing elementary schools. Themes that emerged from the principal

interviews, teacher leader anonymous surveys and teacher leader semi-structured interviews addressing the first research question are presented. This will be followed by narrative comments that outline and further explain ways in which principal interviews, survey respondents and teacher leader interviews discussed the structural systems in addressing the first research question.

Those principals who responded to the open-ended questions during semi-structured interviews identified several key themes related to the principals' responsibilities to identify and foster teacher leadership. The following themes were identified: (1) empowering others through principal's vision; (2) trust; and, (3) identifying strengths. The principals' perceptions were that these practices created systems that facilitated the process of identifying and fostering teacher leadership.

Vision. In response to question 2 (Q2) on the principals' interview protocol, which addresses how principals have influenced teachers in following their strategic vision, the principal from School A summarized:

My vision for this school is to create and promote a climate of collaboration with mutual respect. Our school community of learners will do whatever it takes to prepare all students to become life-long learners and critical thinkers.

To further make the case for the importance of a school's vision, the principal of school C responded,

Well basically, we had to work on creating the vision for the school. I figured if they can help me create the vision they can have a buy-in. So it wasn't just me telling them what my vision was. I sat down with all stakeholders, which included the UTLA rep, the grade level chairs, parents, and the leadership team. We all sat

down together and brainstormed ideas on what do we want for our school? What direction are we taking the school? We ask for the voices of everyone school-wide to give input and then as a school we develop our vision, which becomes our guiding principle.

Also, the principal from school B added,

The vision of this affiliated charter is to have a school that has an institutionalized enrichment program; meaning that every child that comes to this school is guaranteed that they are going to have a full dance program, music program, PE program, media lab, and science lab. These are programs that every child will receive by enrolling at this school.

The principal of school A believed that,

In trying to get people to follow you having a shared vision as an organization usually will help the process. The way that I've done things since I've been here is to have the staff identify a need. Based on needs assessments the staff identifies what areas the school needs to improve on then as a team we will research various options to come up with solutions to address the areas of need.

Based on this data there appears to be a strong strand running through each school as it relates to vision. All the principals reported without exception that a school's vision should be the guide for effective schools, and particularly "when the school community promotes ongoing discussions surrounding our purpose", said the principal of school E. To build on what leadership with a vision does for a school the principal of school D responded in eloquent fashion during the interview to question 2 (Q2) by stating,

As we review our vision, it provides us opportunities to utilize it to give us direction with our mission. If we are here to ensure that all students learn at high levels it helps us plan what next steps will be as we move forward. When there are robust conversations around the school's vision and mission it will inevitably create a school climate that clearly understands why we have a school, our purpose for existing, and what we are doing to address our collective commitments.

Comments such as these demonstrate that principals at the school sites completely understand the essence of a clear vision.

At schools A, B, and D during participant observations teacher leaders were observed reviewing their schools' mission and vision statements before the start of their grade level articulation meetings. According to these teacher leaders this demonstrated their collective commitment to supporting the school's vision, which was developed by all of the stakeholders of each participating school site. It is important to report from the field notes that at both schools C and E the practice of the teacher leaders reviewing their school's vision and mission were not observed during the researcher's observations. This practice did not change the mind of the researcher about how distributed leadership is practiced at these two participating schools.

During the first teacher leader's (TL1) one-to-one interview at school C the essence of a school's vision as an important component in addressing research question 1 (Q1) was captured and TL1 shared,

The success of our school and even other schools depends on set goals and visions. I am happy that our school's mission, vision, values, and goals were

developed as a team. All team members had input that was valued. This thinking is very prominent at this school ... we are part of planning the [school's] vision.

Question 1 (Q1) from the teacher leader addressed the principal's role in providing direction for the school by asking "At your school, does the principal provide direction for the school and expect others to follow?" Four respondents stated the principal "often" provides direction for others to follow and three respondents stated that the principal "always" provides direction. It can be concluded from the survey responses addressing (Q1), that responses of "often" and "always" when combined were significant and demonstrated that a majority of the schools have principals who provided direction for others to follow. However, responses from the two teacher leaders of school E stated "sometimes" the school principal provided direction for the school. Setting direction for a school helps in mapping out the big picture and it usually requires a certain skills set. A study commissioned by The Wallace Foundation found that as a leader your ability to define and set clear direction makes a huge impact on the culture of your school, which in turn contributes significantly to student achievement.

Trust. Trust is an essential attribute in a leadership role such as the school principalship. As the leader of a school the school site principal can have a compelling vision, well refined strategies, great communication skills, innovative insight, and a skilled instructional team but if there is no trust the site principal, faculty, and students will not realize the results they are trying to achieve. Trust is an essential element in identifying and fostering teacher leadership. This was evident in the responses provided by the principals and teacher leaders through the anonymous surveys.

The principals' responses to question 3 (Q3) and question 4 (Q4) of the principal's interview protocol addressed how a principal's staff would describe his/her leadership style and those important values and ethics the principal demonstrates as a leader. In responding to Q3, the principal of school A stated,

I think most of my teachers will refer to me as trustworthy ... it has not always been like that. When I came to this school as a brand new principal I made a grave mistake in assuming that people will trust me because of my title ... oh no wrong assumption. I quickly learned a valuable lesson that trust is not a gift that comes to your door in a Fedex package it must be earned. As an instructional leader I have come to understand that you are trusted to the degree that people believe in your ability, consistency, integrity and commitment to deliver. I think I am in my staff's trust column.

Also the principal from School E shared with reference to Q3,

The style would be to collaborate with others, to discuss things, to look at some data, look at where the kids' needs are, focus on what works for the kids, what's effective with kids and then the areas that need clarification because we don't always agree. Let's say I think we need to have more rigor in the curriculum and the instructional strategies such as questions and discussions. The way questions are asked helps our students to think critically and problem solve. I have seen a big improvement in our second language learners when using language.

The responses of teacher leaders in the anonymous survey to question 3 (Q3), which sought to understand if the principals at the school sites create a culture of trust and positive relationships shows that responses of "often" and "always" when combined

were significant and demonstrated that a majority of the schools had principals who created a culture of trusting relationships. However, the two teacher leaders from school E stated that the principal at school E “sometimes” created a trusting culture. It is significant to note that even though school E is a high performing school the teacher leaders do not feel that the principal is consistent in establishing a school-wide culture of trust and positive relationships.

In addressing Q4 that relates to ethics and values the principal from school B responded,

Trust is a big one. I don't think that you can be successful as a school leader without the trust of your staff. Confidential conversations that I have with people remain confidential. I really do not play favorites on my staff or do certain things for some people that might be perceived as unethical.

The principal from school D added,

Integrity is very important to me. Integrity is my number one character trait and I always tell my students that. Integrity is doing the right thing when no one is watching. So, I try to demonstrate that on a daily basis and I talk about it all the time with my teachers. I look for it and reward students who show integrity.

The principal from school E sees his most important values and ethics as a leader to be,

I guess for me it would be personal excellence. I am always trying to move towards mastery. I am always trying to grow. I demonstrate this by being personally involved, doing a variety of things with the faculty and being very

hands-on. For example, being at every weekly faculty professional development, and knowing and understanding what the training is about.

To add to this discussion the principal of school C stated,

I try to demonstrate that I am someone who takes personal responsibility for my work. I model this work ethic with my faculty. I treat everyone kindly and with respect. My staff and I enjoy a team spirit. I feel that by doing this I am taking care of what I need to do as a school site principal.

The principals' comments were illustrative of the type of ethics and values they brought to the job. Ethical leadership was demonstrated by that principal who acted with integrity, fairness, and honesty in all duties and responsibilities associated with the principalship. Principals must value the worth and dignity of every person within the organization as they work for the success of all students.

In summary, during an observation at school D, TL2 posited,

At this school, the principal builds relationships that are critical to our school community. For example, the custodians play a very important role at our school and they are treated equally as part of our staff.

Identifying Strengths. Effective leadership is very important to the success of schools. Studies and practices confirm that there is a slim chance of creating and sustaining high-quality learning organizations without a leader to help shape teaching and learning. This is especially true when it relates to identifying strengths of teacher leaders. The principals' comments are supportive in their views on identifying strengths of teacher leaders. The principal of school C's comments are illustrative of others like him.

Everybody is different. It is apparent to me that people are in different phases of their careers and in different situations. For instance, if a teacher who is in the administrative program approached me for some guidance I would make myself available to provide support to the teacher by tapping into their strengths and potential. I would encourage that teacher to participate in school-wide leadership activities.

Another principal from school B responded during an interview by stating,

Well, I think you always recognize your staff for participating in school-wide activities. When a staff member contributes by participating in leadership activities I publicly recognize them. I recognize my staff for presenting during professional developments activities. I also recognize my parents for getting involved in school activities. I learned at a very young age the power of saying thank you. People never forget when they get that.

The principal of school D emphasized,

I recognize people who are the talkers and the ones that are leaders. I think some people are probably natural leaders. When I was first at this school as a new principal six years ago I kind of watched who were the natural leaders and who stood up and talked about best practices during grade level meetings. I encouraged these individuals to get more involved in school activities by taking on leadership roles. How I foster teacher leadership is really making sure that everybody does something and everybody is accountable for something. So, I think you have your natural leaders and the leaders I identify and encourage to participate in leading roles. It became apparent in the teacher leader surveys and

interviews that when principals identify strengths in teacher leaders and empower them to lead they view themselves in a different light.

During a grade level meeting observation at school E, TL2 noted, “When a principal empowers a teacher to be a leader the teacher sees his or her role in the school differently.” Data from survey responses addressing the question, “At your school is the principal supportive of all teachers by empowering them and building capacity?” 40% of the respondents stated “often” and 50% responded “always.” Additionally a comment from TL2 of school C noted, “It is always important for school leaders to let teachers know you see something unique in them that would promote leadership... my principal is really great in recognizing our strengths and leadership qualities.”

Also TL1 from school A noted during a one-on-one interview,

I think that it is terrific for principals to identify the potentials of teachers. When principals do that, I believe it empowers teachers and gives some kind of confidence to teachers who do not know that they were capable of accomplishing such tasks. I would have never guessed that I would be performing the role of a teacher leader when I started teaching five years ago. Not in a million years if the principal had not sought me out.

It is evident that when teacher leaders are approached by an administrator identifying and highlighting their strengths they are more willing to be involved in leadership roles. As TL1 of school C noted, “I would say that the administrator needs to listen very carefully to the pulse of the school community, understand the staff, and be able to identify those strengths and untapped talents of the staff.”

The above narrative supports that the nurturing of teacher leaders requires trust and positive working relationships. Establishing a vision and building trusting and constructive relationships are conditions necessary for fostering teacher leadership. Considerable power to shift practice and improve student achievement lies in the hands of principals identifying the strengths of teacher leaders and entrusting them with the responsibility of shaping and enacting school reforms. It is not about one leader it is about a team that is identified and fostered in order to lead and utilize their expertise to improve student outcomes. It is important to note that according to the findings it appears that the identification of teacher leaders at the participating school sites were not teacher initiated. The principals identified the teachers and encouraged them to become leaders.

Research Question 2 – Findings and Analysis

The second research question asked, “What are the perceptions of teacher leaders regarding distributed leadership? Research Question 2 sought to gather information about the perceptions of teacher leaders regarding the concept of distributed leadership. The results of the surveys, interviews, and observations of teacher leaders during grade level meetings will be discussed in this section. The themes that emerged based on responses to questions regarding the perceptions of teacher leaders on the processes of distributed leadership will be discussed in the following sections. The narrative will provide a greater depth of understanding teacher leaders’ perceptions of distributed leadership. The themes included:

1. Awareness: This refers to the teacher leader’s knowledge of the concept of distributed leadership practices at the school sites.

2. Leadership: This refers to the teacher leader's abilities in leading school improvement efforts utilizing strategies that will improve student achievement outcomes. This also relates to the teacher leader's ability to communicate the school's vision as well as listen to and develop an understanding of the ideas of other teachers relating to school improvement.
3. Collaboration: This refers to the teacher leaders' competencies and skills while working closely with other teachers. This involves collaborative practices and personal influences directed at other teachers as it relates to school improvement
4. Shared-decision making: This refers to a collaborative process that allows for stakeholders' input in making decisions together that will ultimately benefit the collective good of the school.

Awareness/Knowledge. Question four of the teacher leaders' interview protocol was designed to gain greater understanding of the teacher leaders' awareness and knowledge of the concept of distributed leadership. The responses of the teacher leaders indicated that the concept of distributed leadership was not commonly understood school-wide at the participating school sites even though the teacher leaders were practicing the processes of distributed leadership at these five schools. TL1 from school C responded to the question "What do we know about distributed leadership?" by stating,

This is the second year since the school established a leadership team... an organized leadership team at this school that is functional. As a member we meet approximately twice a month to discuss matters relating to school-wide improvements. All information from leadership team meetings is made available to the other teachers, in my case, special education teachers.

The above response was provided after the researcher provided the teacher leader a working definition for the term distributed leadership. Another TL2 from school A noted,

At our school people's voices are valued and treated equal. Decision making is a shared process. It's not just from top down to the bottom... well I think it kind of gives you more of a desire to participate when you feel like your opinions, research, experience, is being valued as part of the decision making process. So I am going to say particularly this year, leadership is shared... we just don't call it that fancy – distributed leadership... but I know we are doing it.

In response to question # 5 on distributed leadership during an interview, TL2 of school D added, “distributed leadership is on the up at our school and the principal provides opportunities for all staff members to be involved particularly when we have to make decisions on the budget, curriculum, and our professional developments.”

In support of previous teacher leaders' responses, TL1 of school E explained

I agreed with it wholeheartedly and distributed leadership is something that we practice school-wide at our school. We don't call it distributed leadership. Like I said the strength comes from hearing each other's ideas. Even though ... I look at myself as being more of a facilitator at times with reference to providing information and instructional support to other teachers. However, as a teacher leader I enjoy helping other teachers. We are all equals and our input on school-wide decisions is valued. I prefer the distributed leadership model rather than this is what you are told to do.

The teacher leaders shared that they decided to participate in leadership roles at their schools because the principals had created a variety of pathways for leadership involvement by approaching and supporting teacher leaders to take on leadership roles.

Leadership. According to the teacher leaders' responses during the interviews and observations the findings indicated that when the principals built capacity in their teachers and empowered them they are more receptive to participating in a variety of leadership roles. TL 1 from school A noted, "I think she just empowers us by letting us be able to find our own teaching ways and provide support for other teachers". The principal of school E responded to a question that addressed identifying and fostering leadership by stating,

The days of a heroic leader are far behind us... teachers have to become leaders and what I have done at the beginning of every school year is pull all my teachers into my office and have a one-to-one conversation about what they see themselves doing in five years. Based on their responses I start my leadership identification process through building capacity in my teachers. The more I empower them the better they feel about their own potential.

In the same light, TL 2 of school B made this comment during a grade level meeting.

My role as a teacher leader happened because the principal approached me one day and said that he wanted me to be more involved in leadership roles. He reached out to me on a personal level and it made a huge difference to me. His support has helped my confidence and I have learned so much that I will share my knowledge with other teachers across the school.

These types of comments are illustrative of the survey responses to questions that address questions of empowering teachers. Approximately 80% of the respondents felt that when the principal personally approached them and asked them to participate in leadership roles they were more likely to get involved because they felt a sense of empowerment and being wanted. A teacher leader from school C noted on a survey response, “My principal is really supportive of all of us becoming leaders... she promotes leadership ideas formally or informally and the feeling of personal touch by reaching out to all of us goes the distance.”

These comments provided evidence that the likelihood of teacher leader participation in school leadership is greater when there is a collective feeling of empowerment from the school principal.

Collaboration. The teacher leader responses that are related to their perceptions of distributed leadership appear to show that they understood the reality of their work in relation to collaborating with other teachers. Most responses show that collaborative practices were very important and essential to the concept of distributed leadership.

Table 4

Teacher Leaders' Perceptions of Collaborative Practices

Survey Questions Addressing Collaborative Practices	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
Q8. Do you see yourself as a central link in the process of leading learning not just in your own classroom but also among your colleagues?	0%	0%	30%	40%	30%
Q9. At your school do you see the principal as someone who articulates vision and values that encourage and empower teacher leaders to creative and work collaboratively with others?	0%	0%	20%	40%	40%
Q10. Do teacher leaders at your school, work in collegiality with colleagues in the interest of sharing, promoting, developing and supporting best professional practices?	0%	0%	20%	30%	50%
Q11. Teacher leaders work collaboratively with other teachers, students, administrators, parents in developing shared goals towards the achievement of high quality education for all?	0%	0%	10%	50%	40%

Table 4 indicates the responses of teacher leaders regarding their perceptions of collaborative practices as a process of distributed leadership. Their responses to four central questions in the anonymous questionnaire on collaborative practices are rated significant among the respondents. It appears that collaboration is rated as “often” or “always” happening at the participating school sites.

This was also evident in a response during an interview, TL2 from school A noted, “The school you know where we are ... we collaborate on everything, from the

principal to all stakeholders. For instance, people's voices are equal, the decisions are being shared. It's not just from top-down to the bottom.”

In addressing building rapport and trusting relationships with colleagues, TL2 of school D carefully explained,

I believe if our goal as teacher leaders is to work with other teachers to improve instruction then it is an imperative that we build rapport and trusting relationships with our peers in order to work with them collaboratively to achieve our collective goal.

Teacher leaders’ understanding of working collaboratively with peers should be built on trusting relationships. This is important because TL1 from school C stated,

When I look at the other faces that are in that group I look at them as leaders. From my other experiences in dealing and working with them with their students and in their classrooms, I think that the trust among the teachers is there ... it is a strong trust between all of us so when I provide instructional support my peers trust me because of our rapport.

The responses and comments were aligned with the observed interactive behaviors of the teacher leaders and their colleagues during grade level articulation meetings at the school sites. Collaborative practices were evident at the five school sites. For example during a grade level meeting at school B, it was observed that TL2 presented a lesson on Singapore Math. The teacher leader divided the other teachers into collaborative learning groups. The teacher leader explained the reason for the collaborative groups. “The collaborative groups will provide the foundation for team learning at our school... we are going to learn how to learn from each other.”

In essence the teacher leaders felt that for distributed leadership to work it is important to build rapport, trust and collaborative relationships with colleagues.

Shared-Decision making. The concept of shared-decision making refers to a collaborative process that allows for stakeholders' input in making decisions together that will ultimately benefit the collective good of the school. The process of shared-decision making was responded to by TL1 of school B who stated, "I think he's a very hands-on principal who wants to make sure that all the players are involved equally in decision making throughout the school, that everyone's voice is being heard. I think he has a really positive influence on the shared-decision making process." This comment demonstrated that the principal as the leader of the school needed to set the stage and foster shared-decision making. The principal of school E commented on the role of the principal as it related to the process of shared-decision making,

Shared-decision making is generally a consensus. During leadership, school site council, and faculty meetings the goal is to get to some sort of consensus. Also I like to do consensus building in smaller groups rather than larger groups because larger groups become very cumbersome and takes a long time... I prefer to work with very mature and small groups of teachers whether it is for the hiring committee or the different committees working on other school business.

Additionally, during a grade level meeting at school C the principal walked in and commented "Our team spirit is to practice shared-decision making at all levels across the school...teachers are currently working on our technology plan for next school year... enjoy their collaboration." These comments are indicative of the theme of shared-decision making experienced in the five participating schools.

In analyzing the responses of teacher leaders rating questions on the surveys addressing shared-decision making at their school sites, 80% responded “always” that the principal and teachers are actively involved in a school-wide shared-decision making process. Survey question 11(Q11) was designed to get a better understanding of the teacher leaders’ role in the process of shared-decision making. 90% of the responses indicate that teacher leaders always work collaboratively with other teachers, students, administrators and parents in developing shared goals of higher student achievement outcomes. The principal from school A responded to a question on shared-decision making by stating,

I think shared-decision making is very important. I think that teachers have to have a voice as well as the parent's in a school. I don't think any administration no matter how good the administrator is can do it by themselves... they need to have buy-in. You need to have teacher buy-in for whatever it is that the administrator is doing so that it can be done well. I think our parents are very important and should be involved in the school’s decision making.

To further emphasize the importance of the shared-decision making process. TL1 from school A noted, “Because the decision making is shared, that's not top down, so we're deciding this together then, willing to come to consensus, and not always win, right? ... sometimes you may have to compromise because it's shared.” The above comments and responses are illustrative of the type of leadership that Emerges from the process of shared-decision making which is a leadership that is democratic and not from the top of the organization.

Research Question 3 – Findings and Analysis

Responding to “How does teacher leadership get distributed throughout the school?” teacher leaders identified principal support in facilitating teacher leadership as important. From the perspectives of principals in order to provide support for teacher leadership across their schools is by simply listening, recognizing and valuing the input of teacher leaders. Those principals that incorporated the input of teacher leaders in their daily leadership practices benefitted from empowering teacher leaders who actively participated as part of the leadership team and the shared-decision making process. For teacher leadership to be successful within schools teacher leaders must be involved in the decision-making process school-wide and administrative support is critical.

Principal supporting teacher leadership. According to responses from the principals’ interviews the principals indicated that they were responsible for teacher leadership throughout the school. This point of view was reaffirmed by the principal from school B,

The model of outside people coming into the school and presenting with the hope that it will actually trickle down in the classrooms does not make sense to me. I’ve been around long enough to know that it does not work. I actually believe that it is much more beneficial to have professional development activities planned and presented by my staff. Teachers presenting to teachers, teachers working with teachers on their own staff where there is trusting relationships and that they already know where they can turn if they have a question, or if they want to see more information about it. Teachers can depend on the teacher leaders and experts within our school.

In providing support for distributing leadership among teachers throughout the school the principal from school D commented,

One of the things we do with the leadership team at our school the membership changes annually so that everybody gets to share in the leadership. I think that helps to distribute teacher leadership and gives everybody ownership. We also have our committee meetings and we have our standing committees and then we have some ad hoc committees that kind of come on board based on the needs of the school. We also experience teacher leadership at work during our governance council meetings. There is lots of shared-decision making across the board. Our parents are included because they are very involved in the school.

Another principal from school C expressed a similar explanation regarding how teacher leadership is distributed school-wide. He stated,

Teachers are leaders on the instructional leadership team and they are also on the professional development team. I think that's not throughout every school. In our district there is a professional development team. I have teachers who like to present during professional development and they help in leadership roles. I also have a resource teacher who participates as a teacher leader. She is respected and supportive in her leadership role.

When principals create a climate or culture where everyone feels empowered to be involved more teachers will voluntarily participate in the distributive leadership process. The researcher's findings demonstrate that participating principals believe in building capacity in teachers and teacher empowerment. In making the argument for distributing teacher leadership at his school the principal of school E posits, "My team of

teachers who are in leadership ... I believe everyone of them performs a role that is productive to our learning community... without my teacher leaders, I don't even know what the professional development activities would look like ... we are a true team of leaders.”

Teacher leaders as experts. The findings from the teacher leader interviews, observations and survey responses indicate teacher leaders viewed their role in the distribution of teacher leadership at their school sites through the prism of teacher leaders as experts. The three major emerging themes that were revealed regarding how teacher leadership is distributed school-wide were: (1) teacher leaders as instructional leaders; (2) teacher leaders as support providers; and, (3) recognizing and valuing teacher leaders. The teacher leaders who were interviewed shared that in order to improve their professional practice they needed to collaborate with their colleagues and share best practices. Additionally, the teacher leaders shared that they value being teacher leaders because of the collaborative practices that they engaged in with other teachers. In order to understand teachers as experts the above mentioned themes will be discussed in greater detail in the next section.

Teacher leaders as instructional leaders. The researcher's findings revealed that both principals and teacher leaders considered providing effective instruction to all students school-wide to be very important. Teachers in general do provide direct influence on students through effective instruction and both principals and teacher leaders also shared that they understand the significance of the role of teacher leaders as instructional leaders. This was a common thread that emerged from the teacher leader responses. The researcher concluded that instructional leadership was viewed by the

participants not only as a stand-alone process but as a larger part of the teacher leaders' function in an environment that teacher leadership is distributed.

The principal of school A stated,

I really think when we talk about leadership as it relates to teacher leadership, I believe it is very important to include all willing teachers in instructional leadership... they are the experts. We have our leadership group of teachers that oversee professional development activities. They oversee professional development activities and make sure when professional development activities happen during the year. In terms of shared leadership, as an example, my coordinator oversees all of our interventions. I do not get involved with all the minutiae of intervention.

Also from school B, the principal adds when examining the roles of teacher leaders we should look at "What is our purpose here in education? The number one reason is to provide quality education for all students." She also stated that when teacher leaders serve as instructional leaders the focus must be on making sure that effective instructional practices are in place that will improve student outcomes. It is evident that administrators at these five schools sites share a similar point of view on teacher leadership. The findings show that they felt that teacher leadership should be based on improving instructional practices and meeting the unique educational needs of all students, TL2 from school E expressed during a grade level meeting that leading other teachers should be a core function for teacher leadership. She strongly believes teacher leaders must set examples for other teachers, students and the community. In supporting her conviction, she stated,

At our school the role of the teacher leader is grade level leader. The teacher leader models for other teachers at that grade level. The teachers in turn model good behaviors for their students. The grade level leader should model for colleagues what good professional behavior looks like.

The emphasis on the teacher leader performing the function of grade level leader and how it relates to instruction were apparent at the five participating schools. When teacher leaders are observed working with other teachers on curriculum planning teams this collaboration ensures that the curriculum is aligned to the Common Core State Standards. It also creates pathways for instructional cohesion and continuity across grade levels. Additionally, the researcher has observed that the teachers at school E have developed and implemented culturally relevant pedagogy to meet the needs of diverse learners while looking at different strategies to close the achievement gap.

At School A the diversity of teacher leadership made accomplishing academically related assignments more of a collaborative process. One notable endeavor observed was the teacher leader at a particular grade level working collaboratively with colleagues in aligning the school district writing rubric to student writing samples. Not only did the teachers work together breaking away from the traditional approach – individual teacher working in isolation– they worked together aligning each student’s specific work sample to the rubric. This effort provided a grading scheme that was cohesive across the grade level.

Table 5 addresses all of the questions in the teacher leaders’ survey responses regarding how teacher leadership is distributed across each individual school site. The responses clearly rate each of the questions “often” or “always.” The numerous “often”

and “always” responses of the teacher leaders demonstrate a high level of significance for each item practiced at the school sites. These responses are aligned to the comments and statements made above by participants with reference to the role of teacher leaders as instructional leaders.

Table 5

Perceptions of Teacher Leaders on How Leadership is Distributed

Survey Questions addressing how teacher leadership is distributed	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
Q7. At your school leadership roles are shared between teachers and administrators and your input is valued	0%	0%	0%	40%	60%
Q8. Do you see yourself as a central link in the process learning not just in your classroom but also among your colleagues	0%	0%	30%	40%	30%
Q10. Do teacher leaders at your school work in collegiality with colleagues in the interest of shaping, promoting, developing, and supporting best professional practices	0%	0%	20%	30%	50%
Q12. At your school, teacher leadership is encouraged because it enables teachers to work together and become involved in whole school issues and take responsibilities beyond their classrooms?	0%	0%	30%	0%	70%
Q13. Does your school have a prevailing culture that supports the importance of sharing leadership throughout the school?	0%	0%	10%	50%	40%

Teacher leaders as support providers. As the distributed perspective to leadership continues to grow within the school environment the opportunity for teacher leadership to be distributed across the school cannot not just occur on special occasions but needs to be a visible element of the school culture. The participating schools worked on identifying areas where teacher leaders may have helped the cultural environment and practice of the school. Most of the teachers expressed the need to be part of the process of identifying those areas of need. In the process of identifying areas of need the teacher leaders were aware of the types of support needed and how they could provide the support within the school setting. Teachers who voluntarily participate in leadership roles will find ways to provide support or initiate growth opportunities to assist their peers or the entire school organization.

In acknowledging teacher leaders as support providers, the principal of school C shared,

After being at this school for seven years I have witnessed teacher leaders becoming more involved in developing instructional strategies and supporting their colleagues to be strong instructionally and successful in their practice. This entire process has been an eye opener even for me. Teacher leaders have come to me requesting that we need to put together an instructional team, a data team to review student data, or safety committee ... this is huge for my learning community. My role is to provide access and improve school-wide communication.

The principal of school C goes on to make a connection between distributed and shared leadership as the vehicle for teacher leaders to be problem solvers within the school rather than critics pointing out what is not working

I can clearly say that distributing teacher leadership across this school makes a big difference. I can see the attitudes of the teachers improving. There has been a huge shift from teachers and teacher leaders coming to me asking for answers, to “we figured out the problem and here are a couple of solutions”... we need your input. This is a major shift.

To add to this shift in thinking and the growth of instructional improvement as a result of shared leadership the principal of school D said that she is thankful for the shift in thinking and the change in the school’s culture. She stated,

My testing coordinator for example is a true teacher leader... when the schedule came out for training on how to administer the Smarter Balance Assessment Consortium (SBAC) testing no one on my staff had been trained. The testing coordinator approached me and requested that she needed to attend an upcoming district wide training for trainers. She made all the contacts and completed the training... to me that is a true leader, taking the bull by the horn. After completing the training she returned and trained all of the other teachers on how to administer the SBACH assessments. That’s one of my teacher leaders.

Most teacher leaders are self-motivated and value the responsibility they have in supporting their colleagues as they improve their professional practices. TL2 from school A talked about collaborating and working with one of her colleagues as being a very enriching experience. She stated,

When I share information on best practices with another teacher, for example a teacher at my grade level who is having a difficult time bringing a “text to life”, I enjoy doing that. I will meet one-to-one with the teacher and review the strategies

and I will present him or her with a few examples ... I feel excited when the teacher gets it. The teacher will take the information back to his or her classroom the next day to improve best practices.

At school E, TL1 who teaches first grade has observed a great number of grade level colleagues willing to take risks and being open to trying new instructional practices. This teacher leader shared that when she was the technology chairperson it was very difficult to get all teachers on board. She continues,

I have to say on the school's leadership team, minds are being changed. Twice every week I will volunteer my time after school and invite teachers to come to the school's computer lab where I will present lessons on incorporating technology in your classroom. The principal also will sweeten the deal by offering a stipend for staying after school. Doing this helps create opportunities for my colleagues and our students.

Another perspective came from TL2 of school B who reported that an increasing number of teachers at the school site are requesting support from the teacher leaders or other experts. This support is making a substantial difference in the classroom as teachers are using best practices effectively. She stated, "Teachers are motivated to learn from other teachers especially when they are the ones asking for help... the teacher leadership concept works for me and my school."

Teacher leaders from schools A, C, D, and E shared similar stories about other tasks they performed at their schools. TL2 from school C reported, "as a member of the hiring committee and having a part in shaping the curriculum committee, I feel very

honored about the contributions that I have made. I know that I am accepted and respected by my peers.”

In that same light TL1 from school D shared a similar sentiment, “I have been part of the School Site Council for three years now... I have been part of this committee and we have made great decisions that have benefited our learning community.” Finally TL2 of school E surmised, “my role as a teacher leader is to be available to provide support where ever there is a need as long as it benefits student outcomes.”

Recognizing and valuing teacher leaders’ efforts. The survey respondents shared ideas that focused on the belief that recognizing and valuing teacher leaders’ efforts will promote and motivate teacher leaders to perform significant roles within the school. In responding to a survey on valuing teacher leaders’ efforts, approximately 90% of the survey respondents stated their efforts as teacher leaders are “always” valued. Stanford University's Linda Darling-Hammond sums up the profound impact school leaders have on teaching quality in her report, *Preparing School Leaders for a Changing World: It is the work they do that enables teachers to be effective* “as it is not just the traits that teachers bring, but their ability to use what they know in a high-functioning organization, that produces student success. Indeed, the number one reason for teachers' decisions about whether to stay in a school is the quality of administrative support” and it is the leader who must develop this organization (Darling-Hammond et al., 2007, p.7).

Comments from teacher leaders during interviews focused on the significance of the administrator knowing and recognizing the strengths of the teacher leaders. TL2 of school A stated,

At my school I believe the principal knows the strengths of all teachers so when you get that call to step up as a teacher leader it demonstrates that the principal needs you and your knowledge is valued. That makes me feel valued and builds self-esteem and confidence in myself.

The principal of school C says,

I think if you motivate your teachers to take up leadership roles the least you can do as an administrator is to value their decisions and their efforts. By valuing their input you will create a leadership team of people who will make decisions that are beneficial for our students.

At school D the principal reaffirms the need to recognize and value the efforts of teacher leaders and motivates them since teacher leaders have direct impact on student learning and the culture of the school.

I know for sure that you have to be sincere with your teacher leaders when alluding to specific performance. For example, recognizing the great job our teacher leaders did on the technology committee by working with our booster club parents to successfully design our new computer lab. This is just an example of a job well done.

When teacher leaders make decisions their decisions should be valued because it creates an environment that is open to new ideas. This practice supports the distributed perspective of leadership within the school but can only happen when the administration truly recognizes and values the efforts of teacher leadership. TL2 of school E again shares his ideas about the importance of recognizing and valuing the input of teacher leaders as one of the ways to support teacher leadership.

It really comes down to trusting our judgment as teachers and teacher leaders in making school wide decisions. Our principal for the last three years has given our school staff complete instructional autonomy. We share with our principal the instructional directions we want to go as a team after grade level meetings – our principal does not come to grade level meetings.

The participant's comment is illustrative of other teacher leaders of the other four other participating school sites. The teacher leaders provided examples of ways in which they are personally affected when their performances are valued. The teacher leaders felt that when their work is valued it will lead to professional independence and more likely to support for their colleagues. In making a similar case TL1 from school B shared, "sometimes just letting me do my own thing ... especially doing it well, I should be trusted and left alone. That in itself is motivation for me to be a teacher leader." Another participant from school A, TL 2 shared,

Even with the absence of the site principal during grade level meetings this year we were able to teach other teachers based on our instructional strengths and talents. I am going to say that we were even more productive as a team of learners because we can come up with the area of need that we wanted to work on. We were learning things that we were interested in.

The concept of instructional autonomy refers to the professional independence of teachers in a school, especially to the extent to which these teachers can make autonomous decisions about what to teach to students and how they go about delivering instruction. In recent years instructional autonomy has become popular in public school debate largely as a result of educational policies that some have argued limit the

professionalism, authority, responsiveness, creativity, or effectiveness of teachers. During the interviews the concept of instructional autonomy was prevalent in the responses of teacher leaders and was viewed as very important to them as professional learners. TL2 of school A in a response stated, “As educators we have to be able to have a say on how we teach and what we teach. We are professionals. I take pride in teaching my students and I am successful at what I do. TL1 of school D added,

I appreciate some freedom with reference to making my own instructional choices. A prescribed curriculum is not only limiting to my creativity but it can be damaging to students’ learning. As a teacher I do really appreciate when my principal has trust in my practice and provides the freedom I need to be empowered to make reasonable decisions when it comes to teaching and learning.

Principals who recognize and value teacher leaders in formal and informal ways including publically recognizing teacher leaders during faculty meetings and other celebrations will motivate other teachers to want to participate in leadership roles within the schools. Small gestures like, leaving written notes in teacher leaders’ mailboxes and on their desks positively influences teacher leaders. These simple acts of recognition and valuing teacher leaders has a great influence on shared leadership. As TL2 from school A noted, “we are humans and we all do appreciate being recognized and valued... it makes me feel real good and want to perform.”

Research Question 4: Findings and Analysis

The fourth research question asked, “How do teacher leaders perceive their role in impacting student achievement?” Ten of the teacher leaders completed the survey questionnaire at each of the five participating school sites. There were five questions on

the survey instrument that specifically addressed “In the role of teacher leader what impact have you had on student achievement?” From the analysis of survey responses there is evidence to support that when teacher leaders responded to SQ6, that 30% of teacher leaders believed that they were supported in making judgments about what is instructionally best for their students. Students will always achieve but 60% of the respondents who addressed SQ6 shared that it will lead to high student achievement. This is important because entrusting teachers and teacher leaders to make adequate and appropriate decisions provides them with a greater sense of ownership and increases teacher confidence, which would work to increase student achievement. In a keynote address, University of Northern Kentucky Professor Doug Feldman said, “I submit that those going into the education field in contemporary times are no longer overly concerned with traditional discouragements such as low salaries, rather, what appears to be desired today by – both novice and veteran – is the freedom to make reasonable curricular and instructional choices, and the administrative support to enact such choices” (Feldman, 2011, p.2).

Table 6

How do Teacher Leaders Perceive their Role in Impacting Student Achievement?

Survey questions (SQs) that addresses RQ4	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
SQ6. In your role as teacher leader, are you free to make judgments about what is best for your students	0%	0%	10%	30%	60%
SQ11. Teacher leaders work collaboratively with other teachers, students, administrators, parents in developing shared goals towards the achievement of high quality education for all?	0%	0%	10%	50%	40%
SQ14. At your school student learning is enhanced when teacher leaders and other teachers work together?	0%	0%	0%	50%	40%
SQ15. Does teacher leadership practices have any possible effects on student achievement?	0%	0%	0%	50%	50%
SQ16. At your school shared leadership promotes student achievement?	0%	0%	10%	50%	40%

In looking at SQ11, which asked “Do teacher leaders work collaboratively with other teachers, students, administrators, and parents in developing shared goals towards the achievement of high quality education for all?” The responses to this question shows that 50% of respondents believed that when there are school-wide collaborative practices based on shared goals towards student achievement students will “often” achieve and 40% of the respondent believe students will “always” achieve when a school has structures in place that provide for collaboration and shared collective goals. Teacher leaders’ responses to SQ11 demonstrate their beliefs of the significance of the reality of working collaboratively with other teachers. While true collaboration is best achieved by

the sharing of information between teacher leaders and their peers it can also have a positive impact on students. Collaboration is cited in the literature as being strongly responsible for creating the pathways to learning habitus (Herzberg, 2006), bolstering school improvement (York-Barr & Duke, 2004), and underlying school improvement efforts (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001). It is important to note that researchers in this area believe that when teachers collaborate with a focus on responding to problems identified by data it will produce improved outcomes for teacher leaders, their colleagues and students.

For an in-depth understanding of how teacher leaders perceive their role as it relates to student achievement, SQ14 asked, “At your school is student learning enhanced when teacher leaders and other teachers work together?” Fifty percent of the respondents believed student learning was enhanced “often” when teacher leaders work with other teachers and forty percent of the respondents reported that student learning will be enhanced “always” when teacher leaders work with colleagues. Teacher leaders’ responses indicate that they understood their role guiding peers to improve their instructional practices as very important. It is worth noting that teacher leadership does provide vital support to colleagues in order to improve practice. For example, teacher leaders can share instructional resources, model best practices for peers, and can spread their expertise and leadership beyond their classroom. In summation when teachers provide effective teaching and learning strategies it will lead to increased student achievement.

Similarly SQ 15 asked. “Do teacher leadership practices have an impact on student achievement?” Most of the teacher leaders surveyed believed that teacher

leadership practices have an impact on student achievement. Fifty percent of the respondents indicated that teacher leadership practices has an impact “often “on student achievement and fifty percent rated that teacher leadership practices “always” show an impact on student achievement at the participating sites. Teacher leadership is a component of effective teaching and school improvement. Teacher leaders have the most intimate knowledge of both the content they teach and the context of the community they serve. Providing opportunities for teacher leaders to serve as instructional leaders within their schools allows them to bring their unique knowledge to bear in meeting student educational needs. And is particularly helpful in providing support needed to improve student outcomes.

Finally SQ 16 sought to understand if shared leadership practices had an impact on student achievement. Teacher leader responses to this item were very similar to SQ15. The responses indicate that 40% of teacher leaders felt that leadership is shared and that it “often” had an impact on student achievement while 50% believed that shared leadership “always” had a positive impact on student achievement when practiced and supported. It is important to acknowledge the importance of collective and shared efforts to improve instruction. When teacher leaders, teachers, parents, and principals worked together it created an engaging school climate that accelerated student learning. A principal of a school should not work in isolation. Schools that are successful require engagement of those who make it a learning community. Barth (1990) wrote, “Teachers have extraordinary leadership capabilities, and their leadership is a major untapped resource for improving our nation’s schools.” When teacher leaders are included throughout the decision-making process they are more likely to implement and sustain change with

fidelity to quality practice. Shared leadership from the perspective of teacher leaders is viewed as the collective responsibility of the learning community for the well being of all students.

The responses to the survey items that specifically sought to better understand how teacher leaders perceived their role and its impact on student achievement were illustrative of comments recorded during the semi-structured interviews. TL1 from school A responded when asked, “Is there a relationship between shared leadership and student achievement?” “The concept of sharing leadership at this school has been going on for the past seven years .. it is called that but when we work together in a team spirit, our students are achieving.” Similarly during a grade level meeting at school D, TL2 shared, “We collaborate with each other on a daily basis and transfer that shared knowledge to our classrooms for the benefit of our students... seeing a lot of school-wide improvements.”

Teacher leader sentiments relating to shared-decision making and its impact on student achievement was indicative in the pride of the teacher leaders. This is evidenced in a statement provided by TL2 of school E,

I think that goes back to what I had said at the very beginning that if people feel like their opinions matter or they feel like they are part of the process they can be leaders without being told what to do... If people feel like they can do all those things then they're happier in their job. Because they're happier in their job they're going to do a better job. If they do a better job then the kids will get more out of it. The kids will get better grades and will achieve more academically.

In that same vein, TL2 from school B stated,

It's not just his or hers, but everybody's ... It's not the principal's, it's all of us working together and so I think everybody benefits most importantly. What are we here for? Our students...whatever it takes. People may be here for a paycheck of course, but the bigger reason we are here is to make these kids succeed and so on. If this approach is shared leadership then it is the best way for those kids to succeed. We are already sharing and learning from all of us and I believe it is showing in student growth.

During the analysis of data collected and for the purpose of this study documents were reviewed to establish if the role of teacher leaders had an impact on student achievement. The two available documents reviewed for this study were the participating schools Academic Performance Index (API) scores based on the California State Tests for three consecutive years namely 2010, 2011, and 2012.

Additionally, the scores from the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) for 2015 school year were reviewed and will be described in this section to provide an in depth understanding of any academic impact when teacher leaders are involved in distributed leadership practices.

Table 7

Academic Performance Index (API) based on California State Tests (CST) Scores

Name of Schools	2010	2011	2012
School A	828	841	861
School B	912	930	942
School C	863	894	865
School D	895	899	916
School E	800	839	850

Table 7 presents API scores as recorded on the school district's *Performance Meter* - Data Summary Sheet. According to California State Accountability Report on

school performance, an API of 800 and above is indicative of a high performing school therefore the five schools selected for the purpose of this study meet that criteria.

Another document reviewed that addressed student progress in the school year of 2014-2015 was the Dynamic Indicator of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS). This assessment is utilized across the school district for progress monitoring students' academic performance in the area of reading. The assessment is administered and student scores recorded three times during the school year. DIBELS is administered at the beginning of the year (BOY), middle of the year (MOY) and the end of the year (EOY). Tables 8 – 12 will provide descriptive DIBELS scores highlighting students' academic achievement as reported by the five participating schools. This data is very significant to review because it measures the academic growth within a school year and provides the best overall estimate of the student's early literacy skills and/or reading proficiency. DIBELS scores show clear performance markers at the beginning, middle, and end of school year. These performance markers are indicative of growth in student achievement – whether the student is at benchmark or at risk. This data is illustrative of when leadership is effectively distributed across the school it can have an impact on student achievement.

Table 8

Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills Scores – 2014/2015 School Year

SCHOOL A			
Grades	Beginning of Year (BOY)	Middle of Year (MOY)	End of Year (EOY)
Kindergarten	66%	60%	86%
First Grade	74%	68%	83%
Second Grade	82%	75%	87%
Third Grade	82%	72%	89%
Fourth Grade	No score available	78%	No score available

Fifth Grade	10%	66%	82%
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Based on the available information reviewed for school A, 75% of all students assessed for the purpose of progress monitoring were at benchmark at the beginning of the year (BOY). Additionally, the school-wide overall average shows that 70% of all students were at benchmark in the middle of year (MOY) assessment, and the end of year (EOY) assessment indicate 86% of all students were at their benchmark goals.

Benchmark goals represent a level of performance for all students to reach in order to be considered on track for becoming a successful reader. Benchmark goals for each measure and time period were established using a minimum cut point at which the odds were in favor of a student achieving a future reading goal. So, for a student with a score at or above a benchmark goal at a given point according to the publishers of DIBELS the probability is high for achieving future goals and the probability for needing additional support in order to achieve future goals is low. The significance of the participating school site showing an overall end of year assessments of 86% of all students achieving their benchmark goals is indicative of when distributed leadership is practiced it has a positive impact on student outcomes.

Table 9

Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills Scores – 2014/2015 School Year

SCHOOL B

Grades	Beginning of Year (BOY)	Middle of Year (MOY)	End of Year (EOY)
Kindergarten	81%	67%	65%
First Grade	80%	85%	91%
Second Grade	92%	90%	92%
Third Grade	93%	88%	78%
Fourth Grade	50%	90%	No score available
Fifth Grade	No score available	89%	60%

The overall school-wide DIBELS scores for school B indicates that the beginning of the year (BOY) assessments had 85% of all students were at benchmark, 84% of all students were at benchmark during the middle of year (MOY), and the end of year (EOY) assessments had 80% of all students were achieving at benchmark. From Table 9 it can be noted that there is evidence of unavailable scores especially for the upper grades. The scores were unavailable because they were not scored and recorded for that assessment period. However, the scores that were recorded indicated that a significant percentage of the students were at their benchmark goals. The significance of the participating school site showing an overall end of year assessments of 80% of all students achieving their benchmark goals is indicative of when distributed leadership is practiced it has a positive impact on student outcomes.

Table 10

Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills Scores – 2014/2015 School Year

SCHOOL C			
Grades	Beginning of Year (BOY)	Middle of Year (MOY)	End of Year (EOY)
Kindergarten	72%	64%	74%
First Grade	68%	69%	74%
Second Grade	87%	86%	87%
Third Grade	70%	71%	75%
Fourth Grade	40%	59%	72%
Fifth Grade	No score available	66%	50%

The academic outcome at school C school-wide is illustrative of the other four schools. The beginning of year (BOY) assessments show 72% of all students were at benchmark. The scores for the middle of year (MOY) assessments also indicate 69% of all students were at benchmark, and the end of year (EOY) assessments, 76% of all students were at benchmark goals. This is important because benchmark goals represent

a level of performance for all students to reach in order to be considered on track for becoming a successful reader. Benchmark goals for each measure and time period were established using a minimum cut point at which the odds were in favor of a student achieving a future reading goal. So, for a student with a score at or above benchmark goal at a given point, according to the publishers of DIBELS the probability is high for achieving future goals, the probability for needing additional support in order to achieve future goals is low. The significance of the participating school site showing an overall end of year assessments of 76% of all students achieving their benchmark goals is indicative of when distributed leadership is practiced it has a positive impact on student outcomes.

Table 11

Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills Scores – 2014/2015 School Year

SCHOOL D			
Grades	Beginning of Year (BOY)	Middle of Year (MOY)	End of Year (EOY)
Kindergarten	77%	66%	63%
First Grade	82%	83%	74%
Second Grade	80%	82%	76%
Third Grade	86%	80%	80%
Fourth Grade	69%	77%	No score available
Fifth Grade	52%	64%	45%

The overall school-wide average DIBELS score for school D was 76% of all the students where at reading benchmark at the beginning of the year (BOY), 75% at benchmark at the middle of the year (MOY), and 69% of all students assessed utilizing DIBELS were at their benchmark at the end of year (EOY). This is significant because Benchmark goals represent a level of performance for all students to reach in order to be considered on track for becoming a successful reader. Benchmark goals for each measure

and time period were established using minimum cut point at which the odds were in favor of a student achieving a future reading goal. So, for a student with a score at or above benchmark goal at a given point, according to the publishers of DIBELS the probability is high for achieving future goals and the probability for needing additional support in order to achieve future goals is low. The significance of the participating school sites showing overall end of year assessments 69% of all students at their benchmark goals is indicative of when distributed leadership is practiced it has a positive impact on student outcomes.

Table 12

Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills Scores – 2014/2015 School Year

SCHOOL E			
Grades	Beginning of Year (BOY)	Middle of Year (MOY)	End of Year (EOY)
Kindergarten	35%	8%	20%
First Grade	53%	58%	69%
Second Grade	73%	78%	71%
Third Grade	73%	15%	85%
Fourth Grade	63%	64%	No score available
Fifth Grade	No score available	70%	No Score available

In reviewing School E DIBELS assessment data, it is clear that even though there were student scores below benchmark and some unavailable scores, the overall school-wide performance shows at the beginning of year (BOY) assessments, 58% of all students were at benchmark. The middle of school year (MOY) assessments shows 54% of the students assessed were at benchmark and the end of year (EOY) assessments indicate academic growth – 70% of all students were at benchmark goals. This is important because benchmark goals represent a level of performance for all students to reach in order to be considered on track for becoming a successful reader. Benchmark

goals for each measure and time period were established using a minimum cut point at which the odds were in favor of a student achieving a future reading goal. So, for a student with a score at or above benchmark goal at a given point according to the publishers of DIBELS the probability is high for achieving future goals, the probability for needing additional support in order to achieve future goals is low. The significance of the participating school site showing 70% of all students overall end of year assessments at benchmark goals is indicative of when distributed leadership is practiced it has a positive impact on student outcomes.

Summary of Findings

In summary, based on the review of documents and teacher leader comments on their perceptions of teacher leaders on the processes of distributed leadership and its impact on student outcomes researcher can draw the conclusion that there is a symbiotic relationship between teacher leadership and student performance. This conclusion is based on evidence from the findings of this study which will be summarized in this section.

The findings of this study indicate that it is very significant for principals and school sites to have a clear and shared vision and a school climate that identifies and encourages shared leadership and shared decision making. The findings also indicated that teacher leaders were more likely to participate in distributed leadership when they are asked by the principal to participate. Additionally, the teacher leaders felt empowered by leaders in the building.

This study's findings revealed that there is growing evidence that leadership makes a difference and leadership that is inherently built on trusting relationships

between teacher leaders and principals is very important when engaged in shared-decision making process. Teacher leaders felt that trusting the principal's leadership made them more like get involved in sharing leadership and leadership activities school-wide. Barth (2001) noted that relationships among principals and teachers have an impact on student learning that is equivalent to no other factor. Therefore, when principals and teacher leaders work together collectively and based on trusting relationships toward a common shared goal, student achievement will increase.

Even though the teacher leaders did not commonly use distributed leadership when describing leadership practices at the participating schools the findings of this study indicate that processes of distributed leadership were in place at the participating schools sites. Leadership was shared at all levels and teachers were purposefully invited by the principals to participate in shared-decision making and perform school-wide leadership activities. This type of leadership is described by King and Balch-Gonzalez (2009), as a "practice" not a "person", and the practice of leadership means organizing the roles, relationships, resources, and responsibilities of various groups of individuals with a stake in the outcome of producing well - educated, informed citizens and participants in the work force (p. 13).

The findings of this study show it was significant to teacher leaders to be valued and recognized for their efforts and involvement in leadership roles as indicated in their responses to a survey question inquiring about how significant it is to teacher leaders to feel that they are valued and recognized for their efforts and leadership roles. The respondents indicated they are highly motivated to participate in teacher leadership roles when they feel valued for their efforts. Survey data indicated that majority of the teacher

leaders who responded to the survey believed that it is important for a principal to support and foster teacher participation in distributed leadership and felt that distributed leadership improves their professional growth.

The findings also suggest that teacher leaders believed that their role as experts and support providers to their colleagues is the crux of student achievement. This cannot be far from the truth as the evidence shows on the DIBELS assessment scores and California State Test reports reviewed from the five participating school sites. Strong teacher leaders' skills and knowledge are essential in improving student outcomes (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). The findings of this study validated that when teachers collaborating with their peers provided access to each other's knowledge and expertise. Thus teachers gained new knowledge, which in turn altered their best practices.

Findings of this study indicated when the teacher leaders were asked to in respond to questions during interviews and surveys regarding collaborative practices as it relates to distributed leadership, overwhelmingly the responses of the teacher leaders indicated that they strongly believed that collaboration is a significant component for distributed leadership. Sharing how important collaboration was TL1 from school C, "Without the process of collaboration there would not be any shared leadership or distributed leadership. When we work together as teachers and teacher leaders we can make school-wide decisions." This comment is illustrative of how the teacher leaders felt about collaboration. Analyses of the data, surveys and interviews indicated that a strong presence of collaborative practices are desired by teacher leaders. Those schools that demonstrated a greater commitment to collaboration saw improved student achievement gains.

The findings of this study demonstrated strong emphasis on instructional autonomy. Teacher leader responses during interviews and field observations stressed the importance of instructional autonomy if they were considered as professionals. Teacher leaders believed that having instructional autonomy empowers them and their practices. Professionally the majority of the teacher leaders felt that they are the professionals and know what is best for their students and they will teach based on the needs of their students. In essence the teacher leaders believed that the more instructional autonomy that is afforded them, the greater their sense of professionalism. Therefore, if teacher leaders are to be regarded as professionals, they must be granted the freedom to educate all students in the best way they see fit, which gives way to an increase in the perceived value of instructional autonomy (Pearson & Moomaw, 2006).

The inclusion of teachers in leadership roles has the potential for positive effects on school improvement (Huber, 2004; Leithwood & Beatty, 2007; Riley & McBeath, 2003). The findings of this research indicated that when teacher leaders are involved in making decisions about curriculum and instruction there will be a positive impact on student achievement. In a report on Professional Capital, Hargreaves & Fullan (2012) noted, “People are motivated by good ideas tied to action; they are energized even more by pursuing with others; they are spurred on still further by learning from their mistakes; and they are ultimately propelled by actions that make an impact – what we call moral imperative realized” (p. 7). This is indicative of the findings regarding collective responsibility and commitment to the shared decision making process demonstrated by the participants of this study.

An article in *New Leaders for New Schools* state, schools making breakthrough gains are led by principals who have carved out a radically new role for themselves, including responsibility for school-wide practices to drive both student achievement and teacher effectiveness. The findings of this study demonstrated that this was the focus of the principals of the participating school sites. The principals' commitment was to put systems in place to support the teachers and teacher leaders and not erode their teachers' commitment to the welfare and high achievement of all students.

The DIBELS assessment scores reviewed for this study from the five participating school sites indicated that in schools where the leadership has created a shared vision and has processes in place that allowed for teacher empowerment, collaborative practices, collective responsibility, shared-decision making, and instructional autonomy, it will have a positive impact on student achievement. Aligned with the findings of this study, a research conducted by Leithwood et al. (2004) found that leadership was in fact a dominant factor influencing school climate and student academic success. They found that, "leadership is second only to classroom instruction among all school-related factors that contribute to what students learn in school" (p. 17). Leithwood and colleagues (2004) also identified successful leadership as a principal engaging in (a) setting the direction of the school, (b) developing people and (c) redesigning the culture and structure of the organization.

The findings of this study demonstrate that the DIBELS assessments scores reviewed from the five participating school sites show evidence of school-wide improvement in student achievement. The scores further demonstrate that when teacher leaders work together with other teachers and the principal leads with a shared vision, it

is more likely to lead to increased student growth reported for the end of year (EOY) assessments. Such growth is indicative of a school climate where leadership is shared, collaboration and networking is linked to respect, and shared leadership makes for a strong and cohesive team that can work well together to accomplish a collective goal – increased student achievement.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

The researcher will present a summary of the study in this final chapter. The summary will include the research questions, the problem of practice, statement of research significance, the methodology utilized for the purpose of this study, the findings of the research, and an examination of the findings in relations to the theoretical framework, the review of literature, potential limitations and delimitations, implications for leadership practice and recommendations. The primary goal of this study included developing an in depth understanding of the perceptions of teacher leaders on the processes of distributed leadership and what, if any, impact on student outcomes. This chapter will incorporate a brief description of the rationale, methodology and summary of key research findings. These key findings will be discussed through the prism of social capital and relevant scholarly work relating to this study. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the practical components of the study, including its limitations and its implications for policy and practice in the field of educational leadership, summary, and concludes with recommendations for future study.

Summary of the Problem

There is a significant demand for schools across the United States to respond with a sense of urgency to accountability pressures associated with preparing all of our students for a 21st century education in a standard-based school reform environment (Elmore, 2004). In order for schools and local school districts to meet these accountability demands and improve student outcomes, principals, teachers, teacher leaders, paraprofessionals have to work together to ensure that local, state and federal

mandates are met. In conceptualizing leadership, Harris & Spillane (2008), concluded, “in the complex world of education the work of leadership will require diverse expertise and forms of leadership flexible enough to meet changing challenges and new demands” (p. 31). Similarly, Spillane et al., (2001), surmised that a distributed view of leadership “incorporates the activities of multiple groups of individuals in a school who work at guiding and mobilizing in the instructional change process” (p. 20). This implies a social distribution of leadership where the leadership function is stretched over the work of a number of individuals where the leadership task is accomplished through the interaction of multiple leaders. (Spillane et al., 2001). The problem of practice investigated in this study is the gap between the anecdotal reference of the concept of distributed leadership in an urban school district and the existence of empirical evidence of distributed leadership from the perceptions of teacher leaders. This research investigated the experiences and insights of teacher leaders to determine some of the processes utilized relating to the concept of distributed leadership and its impact on student achievement.

The design of the research instrumentation and protocols used in this study signaled an attempt to gain a better understanding of how teacher leaders perceive the processes of distributed leadership. The questions that guided this research were:

RQ: What are the perceptions of teacher leaders on the processes of distributed leadership in relation to student achievement in five high performing schools in an Urban Unified School District?

Sub-Questions:

- How does the principal identify and foster teacher leadership?

- What are the perceptions of teacher leaders regarding distributed leadership?
- How does teacher leadership get distributed throughout the school?
- How do teacher leaders perceive their role in impacting student achievement?

The practice of distributed leadership is nonexclusive and can be exercised through the social interactions between school leaders and followers (Spillane, 2005). Spillane, Halverson, and Diamond (2001) argued, “In our distributed view, leadership practice is constituted in the interaction of leaders and their social and material situations” (p. 27). These types of interactions and situations can create a pathway to leadership that is democratic and void of the one and heroic leader.

The concept of distributed leadership as a model is explained by previous researchers as an idea that no one person can successfully lead a school as an organization, but rather schools should be led utilizing a collaborative model that involves the participation of school personnel through the process of shared decision-making (Gronn, 2008). Shared decision-making as a process is very significant because it contributes to the collective efforts of all stakeholders. In the current atmosphere of school reform, schools are increasingly expected to make school-wide improvements that will lead to strong student achievements. In order for students to achieve academically school leadership must create learning communities that provide for and support student achievement. Dufour and Eaker (1998) noted, “The most promising strategy in sustained and substantive school improvement is developing the ability of school personnel to function as professional learning communities (p. xi).” Professional learning

communities create pathways for communities of learners where teacher leaders are involved in different aspects of school-wide improvement and professional growth within the learning communities leads to increased student success.

For the purpose of this investigation, student achievement was assessed in two ways. One of the assessments was school-based (Dynamic Indicators of Early Literacy Skills) scores, and by reviewing the California State Tests for three consecutive years – 2010, 2011, and 2012. In this Urban School District, school principals and teachers are required to review these academic data by working together collaboratively as a team to ensure that the student's academic growth is aligned with state and local districts' benchmarks. The process of reviewing student assessment data requires a collective team effort shared by many individuals within the organization. This distribution of leadership is just one way in which sharing responsibilities can lead to improved teaching and learning as teacher leaders share best practices while working collaboratively to achieve both individual and team goals.

Review of the Methodology

Qualitative methodology with phenomenological elements, which produces rich and in depth personal data (Willis, 2007) was utilized for this study. The qualitative design allowed for investigation of teacher leaders' perceptions of the processes of distributed leadership and its impact on student achievement. The phenomenological elements of this study created a prism through which the researcher gained a greater understanding of the perceptions of teacher leaders.

In providing a foundation to understand individual experiences this research study was framed within an interpretivist research design. In this theoretical Framework this

research study contextualized, understood and interpreted a particular phenomenon. The interpretivist paradigm states that reality is constructed socially and culturally through individual perceptions as people interact with the world. According to Glesne (2011), research framed around an interpretivist required the researcher to collect data on the perceptions of multiple participants within a social group about the particular phenomenon.

The study's participants were 10 teacher leaders and 5 principals from 5 high performing elementary schools in the Urban Unified School District. These schools were identified by the California Department of Education as high performing because their API scores were 800 points and above for three consecutive years. Ten teacher leaders participated in an anonymous paper – pencil survey, semi-structured interviews that were electronically recorded, and lastly, they were observed during grade level articulation meetings. The five principals only participated in semi – structured interviews that were electronically recorded.

The qualitative analysis included the utilization of anonymous surveys, semi – structured interviews and observations that were designed to collect teacher leader input on distributed leadership. Data from the surveys were analyzed. Data from semi – structured interviews was electronically recorded and transcribed by the researcher and reviewed by all participants for the purpose of member checking. Additionally, field notes from grade level articulation meeting observations were recorded and analyzed. The themes that emerged from the data were coded and aligned in relation to each of the research questions.

Triangulation of data sources (anonymous paper – pencil surveys, semi – structured interviews and field notes) ensured validity and reliability as it cross – checked the data, which allowed for the researcher to present the findings with confidence because of the extent that each data source corroborated the other. The process of triangulation also highlighted common themes in different sources (Creswell, 2007) and strengthened dependability and credibility (Merriam, 1998). Findings from each data source were analyzed with icy precision in order to better establish how the participants’ responses correlated across the different data sources.

Summary of the Findings

The first research question of this study asks the principal identifies and fosters teacher leadership? The responses of the principals and teacher leaders to the open-ended and probing questions of the interviews as well as the teacher leaders’ responses to the anonymous surveys and field notes identified several key themes related to the principal identifying and fostering teacher leadership. Among the themes identified were: - (1) principal’s vision, (2) trust, (3) empowering others and identifying strengths, (4) collaboration and, (5) instructional autonomy.

Principals and teacher leaders recognized that these practices created systems that helped facilitate the process of identifying and fostering teacher leadership, which made a significant difference in distributed leadership. As part of the discussion in Chapter II, the relevant literature regarding teacher leadership indicated that once teacher leadership is identified and cultivated by the principal, teacher leaders become more involved in school activities that lead to school-wide improvement.

Principal's Vision

Although researchers in educational leadership have said it in different ways they all agree that for a principal to be effective he or she must be responsible for establishing a school-wide vision that is committed to high standards, cultivating school-wide leadership and success for all students. The vision of the school is a powerful and necessary tool for successful schools. The principals' comments from the interviews and confirmed via the survey responses of the teacher leaders demonstrated the importance of the school principal having a vision for the school. The principal from school D commented,

As we review our vision it provides us opportunities to utilize it to give us direction with our mission. We are here to ensure that all students learn at high levels and what steps are necessary to move forward. When conversations around the school's vision and mission are robust they will inevitably create a school climate that clearly understands why we have a school, what our purpose is, and what are we doing to address our collective commitments.

The principal of school B eloquently shared,

The vision of this affiliated charter is to have a school that has an institutionalized enrichment program; meaning that every child that attends this school is guaranteed a full dance program, music program, PE program, media lab, and science lab. It is our commitment that every student will have access to these programs for attending the school.

The essence of a school's vision as an important component in addressing research question #1 was captured during a TL1 one-to-one interview at school C who shared,

The success of our school and even other schools depends on set goals and visions. I am happy that our school's mission, vision, values, and goals were developed as a team. Each member gave input that was valued by the entire team. This thinking is very prominent at this school ... we are part of planning the [school's] vision.

Comments such as these are indicative of both principals' and teacher leaders' understanding of importance of a school's vision. Vision provides directionality for the organization. Successful and effective principals create schools that will develop, support and sustain teachers and students. For this to happen, Roberts (1985) argues "in essence, transforming leadership is leadership that facilitates the redefinition of a people's mission and vision, a renewal of their commitment, and the restructuring of their systems for goal accomplishment" (p. 9). A great deal of success can be attributed to organizations with a clear and purposeful vision. When the principal's vision is clear with collective commitments, Sanders, et al., (1997) argued, "[I]n communities of professionals, management and control decline as stewardship and empowerment increase. Leadership becomes the ability to bring out the best in others – to motivate others to take on leadership roles" (p. 2).

Additionally when the principal's school-wide vision is collaboratively developed and shared it facilitates an environment in which the principal can solicit input through collaboration with the staff and community to implement strategies for change and improvement that result in greater achievement and developmental outcomes for student. According to Heck & Hallinger (2009), school improvement leadership as

An influence process through which leaders identify a direction for the school, motivate staff, and coordinate an evolving set of strategies towards improvements in teaching and learning. This emphasizes our belief that the effects of school leadership are largely mediated by academic and social conditions present in the school and aimed towards learning outcomes (p. 662).

In making a case for this type of environment TL2 of school E stated, “The principal is always involving all teacher leaders in shared-decision making and our input is valued and validated.” An effective principal makes sure that each teacher leader is identified and sustained with a focus on the school’s vision. TL2 of school C described what adopting a school-wide vision meant for her, “My attitude towards providing support for my peers has increased every year. This is all because of our shared dedication to our vision – building a community of learners that are committed to the success of all students.” A survey respondent (TL1) from school B shared an example of a leadership activity that she recently accomplished,

In order for distributed leadership to happen administrators should involve the teachers and teacher leaders as part of the school’s vision. When you are part of the school-wide goal you are able to lead others in achieving that goal. For example in a meeting of improving and utilizing technology during instruction a group of us discussed the desired outcome and how it can be implemented. The teachers who were part of the team determined what leadership role they would take to implement the necessary changes.

Overall, teacher leaders were forthcoming in their responses to what they believe were necessary resources to participate in the processes of distributed leadership.

Additionally, teacher leaders were forthcoming regarding the importance of a school's vision in supporting a distributed leadership model. This study suggests that nothing is more than involving all stakeholders of a school organization in the process of creating the vision of the school. A genuine understanding of the direction in which the school is going can only be attained if the school's vision is clear and precise.

Trust

Building trust is a very significant component for successful leadership practices in schools. Principals need to be intentional and strategic when it comes to utilizing trust in identifying and fostering teacher leadership. Tschannen-Moran (2014) in her book *Trust Matters: Leadership for Successful Schools* defines trust as “the lubricant” that makes school improvement goes smoothly and quickly.

The teacher leaders' comments revealed through the surveys and confirmed by comments made in the interviews the significance of trusting relationships established by the principal. When there is a trusting relationship between the principal and teacher leader they are more likely to be motivated and actively participate as teacher leaders. TL 2 from school A described her experience, “This principal is open and honest. She is very transparent when it comes to shared-decision making. My best description of her is when it comes to trust she is an open book. “In a similar vein, TL1 of school E added, “I was only motivated to become a teacher leader because of my principal. He trusts us as teacher leaders and we completely trust him.”

Understandably, building relationships based upon trust served as resounding theme among the principals of the five participating school sites. As principal of school D put it, “If you ever try to push for school improvement without trust it is like pulling teeth

without Novocain.” Another principal from school A described his experiences building trust in order to facilitate distributed leadership,

I did not consider the importance of trust between the faculty and myself. For the first two years everything I did towards school improvement was met with resistance and it was impacting the students. I decided to reflect on my own practices and started building a web of relationships and building bridges – my ideas began to make sense instead of getting nowhere with the staff. I made great efforts to focus on building a trusting environment and gradually it started to show positive results in student improvement. Our school is in a better place and the teacher leaders trust me and I depend on their judgments for us to distribute leadership successfully.

The principal from school C noted, “Teacher leaders at our school assume teacher leadership roles because of the trust I have in them and the trust they have in my administration.”

Comments such as these are illustrative of principals utilizing trusting relationships to identify teacher leadership and teacher leaders willing and motivated to participate leadership activities. One can arguably say that when teachers trust a teacher leader those teachers are willing to be vulnerable enough to ask for help with a problem. In addition, it is very significant for the principal to foster communication with the faculty because clearly communication is a strong component of building a trusting environment. Effective principals recognize their actions communicate their values – sending a clear message about their caring and trustworthiness.

Study participants were very clear that open and honest communication was important and necessary to their participation in leadership activities. When teacher leaders were asked to respond to the survey question, “Does your school have a prevailing culture that supports the importance of sharing leadership throughout the school?” Among the teacher leaders, TL2 of school A noted, “The culture has always been good, open, and honest communication between the principal and teachers. This is really important to me because it has been the resource for me to participate in distributed leadership activities”. Another TL1 from school E responded carefully, “As a teacher leader I strongly believe in communicating my point of view on an issue and to get feedback. This type of reciprocal communication helps me develop and makes me more enthusiastic to do all the things I do as a teacher leader”. At the end of the day, communication needs to be very clear. The school’s leadership needs to communicate school-wide expectations in a decisive manner. An overarching finding of this study is that the participants felt that trust and meaningful communication among principals, teacher leaders, and teachers is the bases of true distributed leadership. The findings of this study also suggest that for teacher leadership initiatives to be effective there must be a school-wide climate of trust and open and honest communication.

Empowering Others and Identifying Strengths

A broad and longstanding consensus in leadership theory holds that leaders in all walks of life and all kinds of organizations, public or private need to depend on others to accomplish the group’s purpose and need to encourage the development of distributed leadership across the organization (Gardner, 1993; Kouzes & Posner, 2008; Yukl, 2009). A principal from school B who believes that empowering others is a powerful tool

concluded, “When I became the principal of this school five years ago I had the idea that to be successful and effective I needed to build a team and distribute leadership to various stakeholders.” The idea of team building and working as a group in making decisions for the collective good of the organization is not different for schools. The principals from the five participating school sites undoubtedly shared during interviews that principals empowering others by identifying their strengths was a significant process in improving their schools’ best practices. In addition, these principals believe to have a monumental impact on capacity building and empowering others to become teacher leaders. The principal of school C commented on building capacity by empowering others,

I started seeing significant student improvement the past three years. I can truly attribute this to my role of encouraging teacher to become leaders and play leadership roles across the school. In order to distribute leadership I have to identify those who are willing to participate. I always approach teachers and tap into their strengths. In my experience I can truthfully state that most the teachers I approached and encouraged to become teacher leaders stepped up to the challenge with great expertise relating to school-wide leadership activities.

Even though teachers typically do not aspire to become administrators they do seek an active voice in the decisions affecting their classrooms and their working conditions. We must shift our leadership paradigm from a hierarchical model to a shared leadership model. Leithwood and colleagues (2004) posit that developing people is another way a principal can account for identifying and developing teacher leadership. Additionally, they suggest that, “evidence collected in both school and nonschool organizations about the contribution of this set of practices to leaders’ effects is

substantial” (p. 8). This is effectively done when principals approached teachers personally and asked them to become teacher leaders. TL 2 of school E described that experience during a grade level meeting observation,

When I came to this school things were very different... teachers did not really feel that they were respected and their expertise valued by the previous administrator. Our current principal is very open-minded and as a teacher leader I was very excited and energized when the principal approached me and requested that she wanted me to become a teacher leader and share leadership. I really valued and treasured her asking me.

Another TL1 from school A shared similar sentiments,

I feel empowered by my administrator daily because of the support she provides me to succeed as a teacher first and in a leadership role. She is always there for the school and the success of all of our students. She is also invested in our expertise to improve best practices school-wide.

Comments such as these indicated that the leaderships at the participating school sites are more willing to spread and distribute leadership roles around. By so doing it motivates teachers to want to participate in leadership roles. For many principals who are transformational leaders they cultivate teacher leadership and demonstrate the quest to nurture and foster teachers as leaders. The research in teacher leadership continues to show that when principals utilize strategies to increase teacher empowerment teacher morale also increases. Terry (2000 – add to references) noted “in schools where teachers are empowered to be leaders, the focus of control changes from the principal to the teachers” (p.2). In line with this thinking, TL2 from school A

shared his experience, “Being part of the shared-decision making process makes me accountable to the school’s community. As a teacher leader who is empowered by the administration it gives me the drive to do more for the improvement of our school.”

Embracing this more open style of leadership as described by Terry (2000), were the principals at the five participating schools. The principal of school D posits, “For any of us to be effective principals or leaders we will have to share leadership across our schools... I have done so for many years and we are seeing positive results”. In another instance, principal of school E noted, “My biggest focus second to instruction is to be a scout on my campus constantly on the lookout for those strong teachers I can identify and encourage to become leaders.”

In reviewing the interview responses of the teacher leaders and the principals there was evidence to support the importance of teacher leaders being identified by their respective school sites. Additionally, recognizing and tapping into the strengths of the teacher leaders was considered to be important. This study highlights the significance of identifying teacher leaders based on the notion that when identification of the teacher leader is done at a personal level it is effective in supporting emerging teacher leaders develop. Also this study suggests that administrators should encourage teachers to learn from one another. TL1 of school C recalled,

The day the principal walked into my classroom and asked me to present at a faculty meeting on the strategies to utilize during “closed reading” activities, I was motivated. My principal knows how to build on teachers’ potentials and strengths to share with other teachers – this is how you create teacher leaders and sharing leadership.

Teacher leaders' responses to the surveys also indicated that teacher leaders felt appreciated, valued and validated for their expertise when engaged in distributed leadership activities. Furthermore, the teacher leaders expressed a sense of pride when identified by their principals to share their expertise with other teachers. The principals felt that it was significant to create a culture of trust and confidence in the leadership of others. It was important to promote school-wide ownership of the vision and goals. And, it was important to identify potential leaders and encourage them to get involved in the process of distributed leadership. TL2 of school B suggested "principals can empower others to become involved in a distributed leadership process by setting the stage for leadership to be shared by all."

Though the term "distributed leadership" was not commonly used by teacher leaders and principals of the participating school sites, remarks regarding this type of leadership including shared leadership, shared decision making team, leadership team were referred to throughout the interviews and during the observations of grade level articulation meetings.

Collaboration

Participants' responses during interviews, on the surveys, and during the field observations addressed the third research questions in order to understand the perceptions of teacher leaders regarding distributed leadership and how it is integrated throughout the school sites. Undoubtedly, responses from the participants of the participating school sites indicate that collaboration was essential for the process of shared leadership to occur throughout the school. Furthermore, the participants'

responses indicated that collaborative practices are core to the process of distributed leadership. This section will further discuss the second and third research questions.

Creating an educational environment that supports collaboration can develop and create a community of caring individuals who are working towards a collective goal thus increasing student outcomes. Planning collaboratively as explained by Blase and Blase (2006), is the consultation with peers “enhanced teachers' self-efficacy (teachers' belief in their own abilities and capacity to successfully solve teaching and learning problems) as they reflected on practice and grew together, and it also encouraged as a basis for action (improvement through collaboration) on the part of teachers.” (p. 22). Thus, summarized by Donaldson Jr. (2007), leadership is about how individuals together influence these three streams of school life to make learning better for all students.

Collaboration is not an outcome or a goal. Collaboration is a process that when successful, aligns peoples' actions to accomplish a collective goal or solve a problem. The findings of this study suggest that when school-wide leadership is collaborative it is intentional and skillfully manages relationships that enable others to succeed individually while accomplishing a common goal. Leana (2001) posited that the missing link in school reform is the process of collaboration. She went on to state, “In trying to improve American public schools, educators, policy makers, and philanthropists are overselling the role of the highly qualified individual teacher and undervaluing the benefits that come from teacher collaborations that strengthen skills, competence, and a school's overall social capital” (p. 1). The responses from both principals and teacher leaders overwhelmingly expressed the importance and benefits of collaborative practices at the five participating school sites. The principal of school E eloquently shared an experience,

“At our school we collaborate on all decisions we make. The teachers and teacher leaders are directly involved in our shared leadership and I can truly say that we have moved from isolation and towards collaboration school-wide”. Another principal from school A noted,

Teachers at my school are so willing to collaborate with teacher leaders and do take pride in accomplishing projects as a team. Collaboration for me requires a significant commitment on the part of all involved participants several of whom I have personally observed assuming leadership roles in order to move the projects forward.

TL 2 from school C described how collaboration looks like at her school,

Effective principals promote collaboration across their schools. My principal is a collaborative king. He provides opportunities for all of us to collaborate in shared-decision making through the development of learning communities and by encouraging the faculty to participate and be involved all decision making across our school.

Even though a 2012 Met Life Teacher Survey painted a grim picture on teacher collaboration with more than six in ten teachers saying that time to collaborate with other teachers has decreased compared to 2011. This assertion does not hold true for the findings of this study. Overwhelmingly the participants at the five participating school sites expressed similar sentiments on the importance of collaboration at their schools and the positive impact on school improvement. In making the argument for collaborative practices at their school is TL1 of school D,

At our school the principal provides time for us to meet at grade level meetings and collaborate. Through collaboration leadership is shared across our school. What we do during our weekly grade level articulation meetings is to get information from teachers and teacher leaders that will not only inform best practices but we learn from each other.

Another TL1 from school A stated,

Collaboration is a process of sharing leadership because it builds an effective school like ours. When we collaborate during grade level meetings we develop a coherent instructional guiding system in which the curriculum, pedagogical strategies, and assessments are coordinated within our grade level with meaningful teacher input.

Based on the findings of this study it is important to note high degrees of collaborative practices focused on responding to problems identified by data produces improved outcomes such as teacher leaders providing support for other teachers and building trusting relationships. This kind of climate helps to increase student achievement. Additionally, when teacher leaders and administrators are working collaboratively there are observable advantages as described by principal of school A,

I strongly believe that collaborating in the educational environment must not be limited to the teacher level. When administrators and teachers collaborate the advantages include creating shared educational goals, developing a sense of ownership, leadership distributed at all levels, and increasing student outcomes.”

A large body of research shows that when teachers collaborate they get results. In concurring with this assertion, principal of school C said, “Every year, the teachers say

the single most important thing that's made a difference in student achievement is by collaborating and when we collaborate we share and any other school like our school can do the same thing." The researcher's analysis of interviews, surveys, and observations data provides additional evidence to support what the existing literature has shown is true of all teachers that collaboration creates a pathway for effective teaching practices and improved outcomes from teacher leaders and principals from the five participating school sites provides additional evidence on what existing literature has shown is true of all teachers: that collaboration among teachers creates the pathway for the spread of effective teaching practices, and improved outcomes for the students they teach in learning communities. Learning communities are viewed by Kilpatrick, Barrett, and Jones (2003) as entities that,

Are made up of people who share a common purpose. They collaborate to draw on individual strengths, respect a variety of perspectives, and actively promote learning opportunities. The outcomes are the creation of a vibrant, synergistic environment, enhanced potential for all members, and the possibility that new knowledge will be created (p. 11).

Black (2007), an advocate of this particular approach claims that learning communities help teachers teach better and students learn better. Based on the findings of effective schools research in the 1970s and 1980s (Larrivee, 2000) have driven increasing interest in learning communities within schools. With the growing demands for educational reforms many learning communities are witnessing the need for a dramatic shift in leadership roles, which are designed to facilitate educational transformation.

Instructional Autonomy

The concept of instructional autonomy refers to the professional independence of teachers in schools. Specifically, the degree to which they can make autonomous instructional decisions about what they teach to students and how they teach it. As part of the school reform process in recent years instructional autonomy has become a major point of discussion in American public education largely as a result of educational policies that some argue limit the professionalism of teachers, authority, responsiveness, creativity, or effectiveness of teachers.

Contrary to the abovementioned argument, according to Melenyzer and Wilkinson (1994), "Instructional autonomy also emerges as a key variable when education reform initiatives are examined. Some researchers argued that granting instructional autonomy and empowering teachers is an appropriate starting point for education experts to solve current school problems." Aligned with the analysis of the teacher leaders' and principals' responses this study found that the participating teacher leaders and principals from the school sites expressed concern that by not promoting instructional autonomy the professional status and expertise of teacher leaders and all other classroom teachers would be undermined. Williams and Burden (1997) noted, "The only man who is educated is the man who has learned how to adapt and change; the man who has realized that no knowledge is secure; that only the process of seeking knowledge gives a basis for security" (p. 35). In representing this viewpoint, principal of school A said,

Teachers need to be treated as professionals and given the latitude to be creative. I clearly understand we have state standards and a curriculum to ascribe to.

However, the teacher leaders at our school have come up with creative ways of teaching a standard and get the same intended learning results for all our students

While the discussions related to instructional autonomy vary from one school to the other the professionalism of teachers is typically the central issue and the professionalism of teachers should not be infringed upon. In this light, it was apparent that the participants from the school sites in this study felt infringing on instructional autonomy not only undermines the professionalism and independence of teacher but will undermine teacher job satisfaction or the perception that teachers are skilled at their craft. In making the case for teacher instructional autonomy not to be infringed upon, TL2 from school A stated,

Every teacher I know has in some shape or fashion earned a college degree(s) and credentials. We deserve to be treated as professionals and be awarded the deference to be creative with our students because we know them best. Thanks for having the principal we have – she promotes and encourages us to shine professionally and be accountable for our students’ learning.

Another TL1 of school D stressed the importance of instructional autonomy in promoting distributive leadership throughout the school,

As a teacher leader when I am treated as a professional, the more likely I want to be involved in sharing leadership at my school. Our principal supports teacher autonomy and I believe it is very important because it gives me so much confidence. I am willing to be involved in shared leadership. This is a strategy the principal uses to distribute leadership.

The promotion of instructional autonomy seeks to empower all teachers with opportunities to improve student learning and in turn increase student outcomes. The significance of having instructional autonomy is explained by TL1 from school C. “The principal of our school does have trust in our professional expertise. He really lets us design our lessons based on the needs of our students and not just follow a prescribed curriculum – that really makes all teachers creative and innovative.” The principal of school D with a similar point of view noted, “Teachers should be given instructional autonomy because teachers and teacher leaders are in the best position to make informed and effective decisions about the education of all our students.”

These comments are indicative of a similar paradigm shift in relation to instructional autonomy at the five participating school sites. When teacher leaders are autonomous it means that they are continuous learners who reflect on their own job performance and preparation. They are in a position to plan, implement, monitor, evaluate instructional best practices and demonstrate their willingness to be involved in distributed leadership. Instructional autonomy enhances our metacognitive capacity and provides us with tools for a strategic engagement with learning (Breen & Mann, in Benson & Voller, 1997; 134-136). In alignment with this statement, teacher leaders shared that instructional autonomy will lead to the development of a sense of security as professionals and strong sense of self. This reinforces the notion of when teacher leaders are trusted to be creative and appreciated it will lead to a robust job satisfaction and high levels of involvement in distributive practices across the school. The findings of this study indicated that when teacher leaders are satisfied with their jobs this may lead to increase in student outcomes. Naturally, with an increase in instructional autonomy,

teacher leaders' begin to feel a sense of increasing value. Therefore, if teacher leaders are to be regarded as professionals in the field of education they must be granted the freedom to educate their students in the best way they see fit, which gives way to an increase in the perceived value of instructional autonomy (Pearson & Moomaw, 2005).

Many factors have accounted for student academic achievement including, students' individual characteristics, family support, and neighborhood experiences. However, research suggests among school-related factors teachers have direct impact on student achievement. According to Elmore (1990), "Behind the idea of restructured schools is a fragile consensus that public schools, as they are presently constituted, are not capable of meeting society's expectations for the education of young people" (p. 1). A significant portion of educational research focused on describing and prescribing what this second wave of educational reform should entail and aligned with Newmann and Whelage's (1995) key factors of successful school restructuring: (1) a vision and goals directed toward high levels of student learning, (2) instructional pedagogy that brings the vision to life, (3) building organizational capacity geared toward function as professional [learning] community, and (4) engaging external stakeholders (e.g., parents, policymakers, federal and state agencies) in support of increasing student learning and building organizational capacity.

The researcher utilized data from participants' interviews, field observations, survey responses, and document reviews in seeking to understand if the teacher leaders of the participating sites perceived their roles having any impact on student achievement. The findings of this study revealed evidence that when the principal identifies and foster teacher leadership that is grounded in a shared vision, trust, collaboration, and

instructional autonomy it will impact student achievement positively. In expanding on this, TL2 of school E explained,

The practices that have been promoted at our school have really helped the academic performance of all our students. As a teacher leader I am constantly collaborating with other teachers and finding solutions in making our students grow and make progress – I am seeing this transformation happen.

The principal from school C also added, “Sharing leadership with teachers is making a significant difference in our school’s culture and thus translating positively in student outcomes.”

While I have focused thus far on principal behaviors, teacher – teacher relationships are even more important for paving the way teachers work to improve instruction (Louis, 2006). This study will further emphasize the significance of professional learning communities largely because of the evidence that professional learning communities are related both to improved instruction and to student achievement (Louis & Marks, 1996; Smylie & Wenzel, 2003; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). A professional learning community can be viewed as a vehicle for the exercise of teacher leadership (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). To this point supportive interactions among teacher leaders and other teachers in school-wide professional learning communities will enable the teacher leaders to assume different roles including support provider, mentor, coach, facilitator, specialist, and data coach. These types of supportive interactions according to TL1 of school B,

Are the backbone of our success in teaching and learning at our school B. We have seen increases in student outcomes every school year as we continue supporting

and learning from each other. We have an effective role in school-wide decision making.

Along these same lines, TL1 from school A shared an experience,

What we have done at this school that has truly made a difference in our positive students' academic growth, is having teachers and teacher leaders have a significant input into plans for professional development and growth.

Additionally, the school principal ensures school-wide participation in decisions about school improvement.

However, it is worth mentioning that professional learning community goes beyond providing just support and includes shared values, collective shared goal on student learning and achievement, collaboration in the development of the curriculum and instruction, and the purposeful sharing of best practices – all of which may be considered as distributed leadership (Hord & Sommers, 2008; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2001). Previous research in this area suggests that when the primary focus of a professional learning community is on improving the quality of student learning teachers and teacher leaders adopt instructional practices that will improve teaching and students' learning opportunities.

Data utilized to measure student achievement across the participating school sites was collected in two ways. The first set of data originated from a state mandated assessment - the California State Test reports at several grade levels over 3 years (2010 - 2012). For the purpose of this study the Academic Performance Index (API), and the English Language Arts scores for 2014-2015 school year derived from the Dynamic Instruction in Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) represented a school's student

achievement. The DIBELS reports were made available to me via email by the participating school sites. DIBELS is an assessment utilized to monitor students' progress throughout the school year. The review of records from the participating schools indicates evidence of increases in student achievement, which can be directly related to many factors discussed earlier but particularly to influence of teacher leadership.

Discussion of the Findings in Relationship to the Theoretical Framework of Social Capital

Social capital theory provided the theoretical lens through which this research study was conducted. This study aimed to further understand teacher leaders' perceptions on the processes of distributed leadership and its impact on student outcomes. Social capital theory is expressed in the interactions and the relationships among principals, teacher leaders, and teachers that work together to support a collective goal.

Undoubtedly, there is no question that a leadership group that is influenced by social capital is able to accomplish more than a leadership without influences of social capital will accomplish less. Bourdieu (1985) defined social capital as "the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance or recognition" (p. 248).

Social capital theory advises that interpersonal trust and individual expertise works hand in hand with a collective commitment towards the common goal of the school, which will lead to improved results. The teacher leaders and principals involved in this study informed the research questions by providing a personal and in depth insight into the ways they have personally experienced leadership opportunities by utilizing the network of resources and relationships built on trust within the participating school sites. The

participants were forthcoming with their insights. To further elaborate on using social capital to promote distributed leadership practices at her school the principal of school D shared,

The benefit of leadership will not come from a top-down model. I have to build a web of relationships across the school. The networks I encouraged had the collective resources for school improvement. These relationships within the school made it possible for leadership to be distributed with staff willing to be involved in leadership activities.

The TL1 from school A shared similar experiences,

The principal at our school reaches out to build trusting relationships and provides us leadership opportunities, which I can say has promoted more collegial interactions through our collaborative practices for example, every week we do get together as a team and collaborate on instructional best practices this collaboration helps to improve my instruction and also helped other teachers.

In addressing the principal's role in building the professional capital of teacher leaders getting involved in distributed leadership activities, TL 2 of school A noted,

From my experience I think it is the climate created and sustained by the principal. The principal is always there for all staff members providing undying support for our instructional program. I also feel that the culture of trust across the school has added to our positive environment.

Positive school cultures and climate are indicative of the fundamentals that encourage school staff in getting involved in leadership that is distributed. The social

capital framework increases your knowledge because it gives you access to the resources and expertise of others within the organization thus promoting distributed leadership practices within the organization. The key to understanding distributed leadership is in recognizing that meaningful relationships have value and that this value can be considered as a form of capital. To answer the question “under what conditions are the perceptions of teacher leaders on the processes of distributed leadership as a form of capital valuable to schools?” helps in identifying the components of a conceptual model of social capital. Minckler (2011) suggested “relationships have value for the individual when his/her associations accomplish two major goals; (1) help the individual accomplish things he or she cannot do alone (task or instrumental outcomes), and (2) and satisfy the individual’s needs (expressive outcome)” (p. 8). To be successful at a task or instrumental outcome members working collaboratively in a learning community share or exchange both tangible (e.g., instructional materials) and intangible resources (e.g., shared information).

Due to increasing demands of state and federal educational mandates, policies and initiatives that call for continuous improvement in school reform, it is incumbent upon all faculty members of learning communities to work together collaboratively to meet those demands. Copland (2006) suggested that this model eases the burden on the principal by distributing leadership throughout the organization and therefore does not promote the principal as a “superhead,”but rather the facilitator of distributed leadership opportunities. (p. 6). One participant, TL1 of school C noted, “Our school has been sharing leadership across the school and it is really helping all teachers. As a teacher

leader, I provide instructional and content support to other teachers, especially new teachers.”

This may appear to be an understatement that one single leader cannot perform the work of a school alone. It appears that this type of distributed leadership benefits the entire school community as reported by another TL1 from school E,

The benefits I have realized are that leadership is not top-down, rather it is shared across the school. All faculty members are given the opportunities to participate in leadership activities within the school. In my opinion this type of shared leadership empowers all of us, us and it is equal at all grade levels

When schools embrace a collective leadership approach it can create a pathway for everyone within the organization to participate in leadership activities.

In order for this type of leadership to work effectively individuals within the learning community are called upon to work together to improve best practices. Coleman (1988) notes,

Social capital is defined by its function. It is not a single entity but a variety of different entities having two characteristics in common: They all consist of some aspect of social structure [obligations, expectations, and trustworthiness, information channels; and norms and effective sanctions] and they facilitate certain actions of individuals who are within the structure.” (p. 302).

Coleman’s ideas rang true with the principal of school B who shared,

It is not just one individual, we share leadership with a common vision and similar expectations. This is the only way we can collectively attain our common goals. Everyone within our learning community knows what is expected of them.

We trust each other. We are all connected through our relationships. We believe that everyone will do their best by our students. This shared leadership is definitely translating into an increase in student outcomes.

This comment was illustrative of other comments from teacher leaders including a shared experience of TL2 at school A during a grade level articulation meeting, “We are all committed individuals to a common cause – student achievement. Our interactions provide for knowledge to be shared amongst us – what a great benefit. I gain from others because of my access to their expertise and they have access to my expertise too”.

The framework that is inherent within social capital theory is one in which specific attention is given to personalized learning, diagnosis of learning needs, instruction that suits the purpose and teachers learning from each other what works best. This concept is inherent in the distributed leadership theory – wherein there is a stream of interactions and activities in which learning community members are intertwined. Study participants expressed ways in which these interpersonal interactions based on trusting relationships have contributed to their own personal and professional growth while benefiting the entire learning community. When asked how is leadership distributed across the school, one TL2 from school C responded during an interview,

The principal at my school is very big on sharing leadership. He has created a framework and articulated clearly for all to understand what shared leadership is or what you called distributed leadership and what our roles are in the process of distributed leadership.

Another TL1 of school A drew up on personal experience and advised,

The professional growth as a teacher leader I experienced is impressive. The climate and culture was nurtured for this type of leadership at our school. Our ideas in this environment are valued and not questioned in a negative way. I did a professional development on Making Books Alive. The principal supported my presentation and teachers were given the opportunity to learn from each other.

The types of successes described by the participants of this study can be attributed to the positive relationships and interactions among the staff at the participating school sites. Through these positive interactions the teacher leaders felt confident enough to provide support and instructional expertise to other teachers in turn strengthens their learning communities.

Paxton (1999) taking into consideration earlier studies by Bourdieu (1985) – resources and social networks, and Coleman (1988) – social structures and activation, furthered the conversation on social capital by offering that “Social capital involves two components: 1. Objective associations between individuals – there must be an objective network structure linking individuals ... individuals are tied to each other in social space. 2. A subjective type of tie – the ties between individuals must be of a particular type – reciprocal, trusting, and involving positive emotions.” (p. 93). Paxton promoted the idea that teachers who are in a similar space should team together because they are embedded in an interactive network of interdependent activities that constitute leadership.

In their conceptualization of social capital, Brehm and Rahn (1997), state “the web of cooperative relationships between citizens that facilitate resolution of collective action problems” (p. 999). Social capital is viewed here as a concept that incorporates lateral and shared relationships that will lead to solving problems through a shared-decision making

process across the organization. Their idea is aligned with the process of collaboration, which can be utilized as a vehicle to solve problems by the collective influence of the group. It is apparent that the interactions between principals, teachers and teacher leaders are of significant importance and must remain the focus where leadership is shared or distributed. Teacher leader participants indicated that for the requisite social interactions of distributed leadership to work that social capital influences teacher leaders to get involved in leadership activities. When responding to an interview question, “Why did you become a teacher leader?” TL 2 from school E shared,

The principal who I trust very much approached me. He let me know that my expertise in math content is very strong. He also told me that my colleagues trust my decision-making. I never gave leadership a thought but I guessed he was very impressed.

Another TL1 of school B simply noted, “My principal’s confidence in my expertise and by just acknowledging my positive interactions with colleagues made me proud and empowered to participate as a teacher leader.”

Though social capital was not presented to survey respondents or semi-structured interview participants as a lens through which to gain information about distributed leadership it did provide a prism through which the researcher conducted this study. Social capital allowed for the exploration of interactions believed by teacher leaders at the five participating school sites to be instrumental in their roles as teacher leaders throughout their learning communities. The findings of the study indicated that perceptions of teacher leaders on the processes of distributed leadership had a significant impact on their participation in leadership that is distributive. The teacher leaders

believed that this type of leadership when practiced school-wide could have an impact on student outcomes. Social capital was utilized as the prism that guided the researcher in gaining a better understanding of the perceptions of teacher leaders on the processes of distributed leadership and its impact on student achievement in five high performing elementary schools.

The findings of this study are in alignment with the social capital theory, which is the fundamental principle of forming networks through interactions and relationships among the staff of any school that collectively support a common goal. These interactions and relationships based on trust can form the bases of leadership to be distributed school-wide involving individuals gaining access to each other's talents and expertise. This study explored teacher leader perceptions on the processes of distributed leadership and what they perceived their roles to be when leadership is distributed. Additionally, the study investigated the impact on student outcomes when leadership is distributed. Social capital theory contends that as time progresses networks of individuals form to increase the quantity and quality of resources available for exchange within the group. It is crucial to build social capital because when schools work on developing social capital they are more likely to create exceptional leadership that will create network links with organizations both inside and outside the community, and built relational trust among community members, while pursuing a program of improvement (Bryk et al., 2009).

Analysis of the Findings in Relation to the Literature Review:

In reviewing the relevant literature on leadership there is evidence of growing demands by state and federal mandates and the ever-changing directives of the

educational reform movement. Due to this there is an emergence of a huge body of scholarly proposals outlining suggestions in which these ever evolving reforms are managed. Transitioning from the instructional leadership movement of the 1980s to the transformational leadership movement that emerged in the late 1980s, and continued into the early 1990s was followed by initiatives that addressed teacher leadership that were becoming prevalent in the 1990s and continued to be refined even today. These scholarly areas of focus were followed by a bulk of the research on educational leadership relating to distributed leadership in schools in which teachers were afforded varying opportunities for meaningful collaborative practices through shared-decision making and shared leadership. To this effort in improving school leadership, which continues to the present day has been additional research relating to organizational learning and support for professional learning communities. Even though there is evidence in the research that this leadership framework varies there is one core similarity of each study – shared collaborative leadership: a leadership that is distributive in nature and demonstrate the potential to positively influence the process of teaching and learning in schools. The main goal of this study was rooted in understanding the concept of distributed leadership as perceived by teacher leaders. The distributed leadership approach is one that may require further investigation particularly as it relates to teacher leaders’ perception of distributed leadership in charter school community.

The review of research studies on distributed leadership indicated that most recent research on distributed leadership developed over decades and the scholarly thinking on this subject emerged in the early 1980s. Most of the findings included a range of topics, from a focus on organizational and institutional characteristics as they relate to teacher

training and teacher quality to the idea that school's goals should be built upon a community of learners by working together to become professional learning community of teacher leaders (Barth, 2001). The studies on teacher leadership set forth the foundation upon which subsequent studies related to distributed leadership, which promoted the idea that, if the goal is to reform our schools, then it is very significant to understand a distributed leadership framework. A distributed perspective of school leadership urges us to consider leadership practice as pivotal and addresses both teachers and administrators as leaders (Spillane, 2005). This research study explored teacher leaders' perceptions on the processes of distributed leadership and if it has an impact on student outcomes,

Research on school leadership, transformational leadership, shared leadership, teacher leadership, and distributed leadership was reviewed for this study and was organized by themes that have emerged in a chronological order. These themes, which have provided another prism through which to better understand the results of this research will be discussed in the following paragraph as they relate to this study's findings.

The work of researchers including York-Barr and Duke (2004), Spillane (2005), Roberts (1985), Senge (1990), Cotton (2003), Leithwood and Jantzi (1990), and Kouzes and Pozner (2007), significantly contributed to the body of literature on school leadership. Kouzes & Pozner (2007) in *The Leadership Challenge* argues, "that grand dreams don't become significant realities through the actions of a single person. Leadership is a team effort" (p. 18). They further stated that, "exemplary leaders enable others to act. They foster collaboration and build trust" (p. 18).

Cotton (2003) found similar results with regard to indirect leadership and concluded:

In general, these researchers find that, while a small portion of the effect may be direct – that is, principals’ direct interactions with students in or out of the classroom may be motivating, inspiring, intrusive, or otherwise influential – most of it is indirect, that is mediated through teachers and others. (p. 58).

In analyzing responses on surveys and from interviews, the findings indicated that the principal by cultivating and facilitating a climate and educational environment, influences teachers and teacher leadership who in turn can influence the academic program for student success. Additionally, the principal’s actions significantly contributed to their sense of empowerment, confidence and motivation to participate in distributed leadership opportunities by sharing their instructional best practices and areas of content expertise with other colleagues. In responding to an interview question asking what does your principal do in distributing leadership at your school, TL2 of school E shared,

I think the principal should check the lay of the land, and the school climate, listen to all stakeholders in our community of learners, reach out and recruit help and talent from within, and communicate the relevance for school improvement with clarity and simplicity.

The school principal knowing how to listen, reaching out personally to identify strengths, tapping into the potentials and expertise of teachers, and maintaining and communicating the goals of the school with clarity served as a common thread of participants’ discussion throughout the research.

Senge's (1990) research influenced schools of thought regarding the building of *learning organizations*. The focus of his study was primarily on decentralizing the role of leadership in organizations in order to strengthen the capacity of all people to work productively toward a collective goal. In Senge's book, *The Fifth Discipline*, he posits that the ideas presented "are for destroying the illusion that the world is created of separate, unrelated forces" (p. 3). Furthermore, he shared the idea that when we shift from this illusion, learning organizations can be built "where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning how to learn better" (p. 3). In other words, when people are connected through networks, resources, and relationships can create a pathway for access to each others' knowledge and talent. In practice, such an access will promote a school-wide culture that continues to improve in order to accomplish their collective goals. Throughout this study, teacher leaders and principals stress the need and desire to collaborate with other colleagues while working towards attaining common goals. When asked during an interview to share their perceived benefit of sharing leadership, TL1 from school B noted,

I have been at this school for twenty-five years and I have worked with many principals whose leadership styles were clearly different from our current principal. To promote distributed leadership she made all stakeholders part of the school's vision and our voices were heard. We were empowered. As a teacher leader, the experience of sharing leadership has an amazing positive effect on our morale and thus we are experiencing increase in student outcomes.

Another TL 1 from school A shared, “distributed leadership is working at my school because the leadership team speaks with one vision and goal. We listen to each other. We were given opportunities to be creative and we have instructional autonomy school-wide.”

Senge’s idea of decentralizing the role of leadership particularly when building capacity of those in the organization came to fruition for TL 1 of school A in that though their school has a prescribed curriculum that is mandated by the state and school district she still has opportunities for instructional creativity and autonomy. This theme is illustrative of what emerged throughout the discussion whereby teacher leaders seek to be part of the decision- making processes with their voices being valued and appreciated.

Leithwood and Jantzi (1990), by continuing the leadership conversation made enormous contributions relating to transformational leadership and the professional learning communities within schools. They contend that the leadership role of the principal has to transform and shift from earlier leadership theories in order to meet the growing demands of educational reform and increasing student achievement. They believed that a change in the school’s culture is the most critical component of the school reform process. As part of that transformation in the school’s culture is the promotion of collegial relationships in which the principals can play an important role, if not the most central in shaping the culture of the school. During a grade level meeting observation, TL 2 of school C shared that this type of collaborative practice included “clear and honest communication focused on the collective commitment of the learning community and school-wide participation with a precise and clear vision”. However, in order to provide clarity for all members of the learning community, Leithwood and Jantzi cautioned, that

the leaders need to identify and extinguish all elements in the school's culture that may create roadblocks for the process of collaboration to be effective and productive.

Interview responses from participants highlighted the school cultures that really promoted collaborative practices at their schools. The principal of school A pointed out the following, "We are a professional community of learners. We learn together and whereby we all gain knowledge from each other". Additionally, a TL 1 from school E commented,

We used to have problems at this school relating to collaboration. We used to be isolated and did our own thing. It did not matter whether it worked or not.

However with our new open door policy to share knowledge has really made a huge difference in our teaching and learning. Our students are doing better.

These feelings were prevalent among participants during observations, survey responses and interview responses.

The research on transformational leadership evolved into discussions regarding school reform including research by Fullan (1994, 2001), and Hargreaves (1991) each of which presented eloquent arguments for the importance of collaborative cultures in schools. As they advocate for effective collaboration within a larger context of school reform by empowering teachers to participate in leadership activities because they assert that teacher involvement in leadership roles is significant to school reform and improvement. The findings of this study are aligned to the works of Fullan and Hargreaves as it relate to the processes of collaboration and shared leadership as evident in this response during an interview with TL 2 of school B, "We have to come together and work as teams to improve our own practice and student achievement. The days of isolationism are far gone... collaboration is one of the things we have to do in order to be

successful”. This comment was representative of many of the participants when they discussed the significance of collectively working together with a common commitment to accomplish shared goals. The bulk of the literature on distributed leadership contends that teachers who collaborate with a clear vision and shared goals are more likely to succeed in attaining those goals and be fulfilled than those who lack a clear vision and shared goals. In the current atmosphere of the No Child Left Behind legislation, there is an enormous need for shared-decision making, and “the collective actions that transforming leadership generates empowers those who participate in the process” (Roberts, 1985; p.9) at school sites. In that light, many unanswered questions have emerged about how teacher leadership is defined, developed, and what role it should play at a school site.

York-Barr and Duke (2004) joined the conversation and research with a focus on teacher leadership in which the teacher is seen as one leader in a professional learning community of leaders. This conversation on teacher leadership continues even today with the basic components, which includes transforming from community of teachers to community of leaders. York-Barr and Duke contend that teacher leaders advance teaching and learning by modeling effective practices to other teachers and sharing their knowledge and skills with others in the field. Teacher leaders themselves continue to learn and grow as they lead and work with others. The sharing of leadership as a contributing factor to a positive school climate, was highlighted by the study’s participants, as TL 2 of school D reflected upon factors that support distributed leadership in a school:

When the school's climate is conducive for sharing leadership all stakeholders will trust all discussions and their point of views are valued. Teacher leaders will inform administration and engage in decision-making. I believe participating at this level can increase the teacher's ownership and commitment to the profession and school goals

The participant's comment is illustrative of a more general theme. It demonstrates the power and influence of school climate on the process of shared leadership. Shared leadership recognizes all individuals who contribute to leadership practice no matter whether they participate in an informal or formal leadership roles. This concept of leadership aligns with distributed leadership that promotes an "increased participation in decision making, greater commitment to organizational goals and strategies will develop, and also distributed leadership has the potential to increase on-the-job leadership development experiences, and the increased self-determination arising from the processes of distributed leadership may improve members' experience of work" (Leithwood, et., al. 2004, p. 29). In essence, leadership of this form will allow for members to better anticipate and respond to the demands of the organization's culture.

Central to the concept of distributed leadership is the collective mind set to work together as a group in order to facilitate leadership practices utilizing the processes of collaboration. This study demonstrated that teacher leaders are appreciative particularly of when principals approached them and invited them to participate in leadership activities and also the principal creating opportunities for teacher leaders to collaborate with their colleagues. Additionally, teacher leaders felt it was beneficial for school improvement when they provided support for other teachers while setting, maintaining,

and assessing shared goals that are inherent in a common shared vision. Both survey responses and interviews revealed that teacher leaders perceive their role of support providers and experts is critical to school improvement and student achievement. Study findings also demonstrate that teacher leaders' level of involvement in leadership roles at the participating school sites is a direct result of the school's, culture and climate – a culture and climate that fosters and nurtures positive relationships based on trust paved the pathway for teacher leadership, teacher creativity, instructional autonomy, and increased student achievement.

According to Diamond, distributed leadership is “not a type of leadership but a framework to understand all types of leadership and management” (Anderson, 2007; para. 3). This framework considers how “leadership practice is constituted in the interactions among school leaders, followers, and their situation” (Anderson, 2007, para. 4). The concept of distributed leadership acknowledges the central notion that multiple leaders both formal and informal interact with each other throughout the organization to get things done. Highly successful leaders develop and count on leadership contributions from others in their organizations (Leitwood, Louis, Anderson & Wahlstrom, 2004). The principal will look for such leadership from key teachers, along with their local administrative colleagues (Hord, Steigelbauer and Hall, 1984). Findings from the current study are in line with evidence from the literature reviewed for this study. Research participants communicated similar sentiments regarding the role of the principal to promote processes of distributed leadership in a school and discussed common themes associated with the benefits of sharing leadership democratically at all levels within a professional learning community. Spillane (2005) explained that distributed leadership

practice is viewed as a product of the interactions of school leaders, followers, and their situation. These interactions, inform, construct, and shape leadership practices. It is through these interactions that leaders can have the strongest influence of those they lead.

Validity and Limitations

The research study was limited to five high performing schools in the Urban Unified School District in Southern California. The five participating school sites were located in an urban area with similar student demographics. A total of 15 participants were involved in this study. There were 5 principals and 10 teacher leaders. Restricting the semi-structured interviews to two teacher leaders at each of the participating school sites, limits the database used to create the rich narrative and limits the ability to capture the whole picture of this phenomenon because it intertwines with so many other issues in the complexity of the school setting. In the process of identifying teacher leaders, the principals assisted the primary researcher in identifying 2 teacher leaders from each participating school sites. During the identification process, in order to minimize the appearance of subjectivity - principals hand picking teacher leaders who were there favorites, the primary researcher provided the principals a protocol as a guide in identifying teacher leaders. The protocol was adapted from Killion and Harrison (2006) describing teacher leader characteristics. The anonymous surveys were developed to capture information that might not have been shared by the respondents during the semi-structured interviews and field observations. As a result, specific descriptions of how teacher leaders perceive the processes of distributed leadership, and to further understand when these processes are structural elements within schools does it impact student achievement.

The researcher was specifically interested in exploring the perceptions of teacher leaders on the processes of distributed leadership and when leadership is shared what influences teacher leaders to participate in leadership activities. Even though the data was extremely useful in capturing teacher leaders' perceptions, the findings of this study did not precipitate any particular way in which this could be done. In discussing what the limitations of the study on teacher leadership, shared leadership and distributed leadership, Fullan (2009) posits "The research does not tell educators how to change their own situation to produce greater collaboration. They can get ideas, directions, insights, but they can never know exactly how to go about it because such a path is exceedingly complex" (p. 582). When time-tested approaches are lacking, what emerges is a lingering uncertainty for administrators and teacher leaders who seek to participate in distributed leadership.

The researcher is neutral – not biased. The researcher also serves as an assistant principal of the school district where the study occurred. Due to this, possibility for observer effect is significant. Observer effect or response bias is considered to be when a participant is offering responses that they think you want to hear especially if they perceived you as a supervisor. This also shows that observer bias must be taken into consideration as the researcher's personal beliefs regarding the possibilities of distributed leadership may have altered the data and therefore produced findings that differ from those obtained by a neutral researcher (Gay & Airasian, 2003).

The researcher of this qualitative study utilized strategies to decrease the possibility of these limitations by triangulating semi-structured interviews, anonymous surveys, field observations and review of documents, and encouraging the participants to

conduct member check on all transcripts for accuracy. The researcher also used verbal and written communication to study participants in order to share the researcher's efforts to capture clear, honest, and accurate feedback from participants during interviews, survey responses, and during field observations. These efforts were undertaken to maintain as much focus on the research topic, while not being affected or influenced by the role of an assistant principal as the researcher in this study.

Conclusion

The purpose of this leadership study was in two folds. First was to examine teacher leaders' perceptions of distributed leadership practices. Second was to investigate if the practice of distributed leadership has an impact on student achievement. Based on the research the following conclusions are presented. Specifically, the study utilized social capital (Paxton, 1999) taking into consideration earlier studies by Bourdieu (1985) – resources and social networks, and Coleman (1988) – social structures and activation as the conceptual framework - Paxton (1999) taking into consideration earlier studies by Bourdieu (1985) –resources and social networks, and Coleman (1988) – social structures and activation, by offering that “Social capital involves two components: 1. Objective associations between individuals – there must be an objective network structure linking individuals ... individuals are tied to each other in social space. 2. A subjective type of tie – the ties between individuals must be of a particular type – reciprocal, trusting, and involving positive emotions.” (p. 93). Paxton promoted the idea that teachers who are in a similar space should team together because they are embedded in an interactive network of interdependent activities that constitute leadership. Instead of replicating previous research in the area of leadership, this study will present new and different

results leading to better understanding of teacher leaders' perceptions of the processes of distributed leadership and their impact on student achievement.

According to Bush and Jackson (2002), excellent leadership is invariably one of the main factors in high performing schools. The relevant literature on school improvement shows a link between principal leadership, teacher leader's willingness to participate in leadership activities, and the quality of teaching and learning (Day, et., al., 2000; Fullan, 1992; Hopkins, 1994). Recent studies in leadership have begun to closely examine the concept of distributed leadership (Gronn, 2003; Harris, 2003; Spillane, 2006), a paradigm shift in leadership practice – no one single leader can provide leadership to handle the complex activities in schools. In this section, conclusions of the study will be presented based on the review of literature, data of this study and findings of previous empirical studies.

The findings indicated four components of distributed leadership were strongly related to each other. The study's findings provide a relatively comprehensive empirical evidence of the notion that when a principal builds trusting relationships, promotes teacher leadership by building capacity and empowering teachers, sharing leadership through collaborative practices and encouraging professional learning communities utilizing instructional autonomy, when considered all together, are positively related to student learning.

First, setting direction in developing a school's vision requires fostering acceptance of a shared set of group goals (Leithwood et al., 2006) and encouraging all stakeholders to participate in the process. The findings indicated that the principals of the participating school sites developed shared vision based on common and shared goals.

The distributive leadership function of setting a direction by shared goals was analyzed and aligned with Leithwood and colleagues (2006), the core leadership functions in schools that often get ‘distributed’ by principals utilizing distributed leadership include setting the school mission and vision, professional development programs, and managing instruction. Sergiovanni (1984) describes this work as a participative approach to leadership. He wrote “The burdens of leadership will be less if leadership functions and roles are shared and if the concept of leadership density were to emerge as a viable replacement for principal leadership” (p. 13). This approach will facilitate all members of the organization coming together and reduces the burden on the school principal. This line of thinking is aligned to the findings revealing that the principal has a pivotal role to play in influencing distributed leadership. A significant number of teacher leaders believed that a principal that supports a shared vision that is based on trusting relationships more likely to have a positive influence on developing, maintaining, and sustaining school-wide distributed leadership practices.

Additionally, the findings revealed that teacher leaders were more inclined to participate in distributed leadership when they were encouraged by the principal and invited to perform leadership roles. Collectively the teacher leaders indicated that principal practices including empowering teachers, building capacity in the staff, recognizing individual expertise, and trusting teacher leaders to make school-wide decisions positively influences the participation of teacher leaders in leadership that is distributed.

Second, the findings of the study suggests that shared leadership is one significant process of establishing a learning environment in which collective efforts are geared

towards building increased instructional capacity is more likely to influence student learning and achievement. The school improvement research shows the significance of capacity building as a means of sustaining school-wide improvement (Harris, 2004). Hopkins and Jackson (2003) assert that the core of capacity building is “distributed leadership along with social cohesion and trust” (p. 95). The findings indicated that the principals of the participating school sites were transformational leaders. The data overwhelmingly indicated that the principals were engaged in encouraging others like teacher leaders to become active and committed members in leadership activities. This is mirrored by Leithwood and Jantzi (1997) who suggested that transformational leadership is centered on principals bringing other members of the organization to be involved and become committed participants in evaluating and improving their school culture through shared-decision making and developing school-based solutions to challenges, including accepting ownership for student success.

Third, the findings of this study revealed that a significant number of teacher leaders perceived distributed leadership practices as a means of building collegial relationships. In discussing the benefits pertaining to collegiality Little (1990) states,

The reason to pursue the study and practice of collegiality is that, presumably, something is gained when teachers work together and something is lost when they do not; in effect, the perceived benefits must be great enough that the time teachers spend together can compete with time spent in other ways, on other priorities that are equally compelling or more immediate. (p. 166).

It is compelling to note that central to distributed leadership is the opportunity and capacity to collaborate with other members of the organization and share leadership

responsibilities among all members of the school community. The findings of this study indicated that most of the participants' responses including responses from both principals and teacher leaders demonstrated that the process of collaboration was rated significantly for shared leadership to work at a school. This practice is different from delegating responsibilities, as described by Diamond (2007), "... distributed leadership moves beyond trying to understand leadership through the actions and beliefs of single leaders... It is constituted through the interactions of leaders, teachers, and the situation as they influence instructional practice" (p. 156). The findings also indicated that through collaborative practices, teacher leaders and principals were successful providing leadership at the participating school sites that led to positive impact on student outcomes.

Lastly the findings indicated that teacher leaders overwhelmingly shared they wanted to be considered as professionals by allowing them the freedom to practice instructional autonomy. The findings also suggested that when teacher leaders' input are valued and validated they are more willing to contribute to collaborative opportunities in purposeful and meaningful ways. In addition, this study's findings also indicated that collectively teacher leaders perceived that when distributed leadership is practiced across all levels within the organization, it has many benefits including the ones mentioned earlier.

Summary

The current school reform process has demanded for inquiry into the value and significance of distributed leadership. While the support for the concept of distributed leadership continues to grow, empirical evidence relating to the processes and effects on

learning organizations is still limited (Bryman, 1996). Additionally, recruiting and developing teacher leadership in ways that will enhance student achievement is paramount to those who advocate for distributed leadership (Timperley, 2005)

The findings of this study provide empirical evidence that distributed leadership is practiced at five high performing elementary schools within the Urban Unified School District. The findings also indicate that at these participating sites there were structures within the organizations that harnessed teacher leadership – the ability to encourage colleagues to change, to do things they wouldn't ordinarily consider without the influence of the leader (Wasley, 1991).

Even though the findings of this study did not focus on the drawbacks of teacher leaders and teacher leadership, it is worth noting that it was significant studying the perceptions of teacher leaders and their viewpoints on distributive leadership practices. The findings revealed that teachers who are leaders within and beyond the classroom, identify with and contribute to a community of teacher learners and leaders and influence others toward improved educational practice.

Implications for Policy and Practice

The researcher believes that there is still a need for additional study to investigate the specific leadership practices that are most effective in supporting student learning. However, even without additional studies there are three clear implications

First, teacher leaders and administrators need to acknowledge and provide support for the increased significance of collective and shared commitment around quality instruction for all students. The concept of professional learning community is often considered as a process initiated by administrators to encourage teacher leaders to

analyze student outcome data to inform instruction and eventually lead to increased student achievement. As complex as the reality appears to be it is apparent that teachers, teacher leaders and administrators need to work collectively to improve instruction.

Second, teacher leader participation in the process of shared decision making and distributed leadership practices requires that a school be purposefully and systematically designed to support effective collaboration. In order to create a pathway to make effective collaboration successful, additional research is required to better understand the characteristics of teacher leaders and the strategies needed by principals to keep teacher leaders engaged in distributed leadership opportunities. Elmore (2004) expressed,

The problem, then is how to construct relatively orderly ways for people to engage in activities that have as their consequence the learning of new ways to think about and do their jobs, and how to put these activities in context of reward structures that stimulate them to do more of what leads to large-scale improvement and less of what reinforces the pathologies of the existing structure (p. 87).

Third, while there is increased emphasis on the responsibility of school administrators for student achievement it is a moral imperative to remember that their fundamental focus within the school must be empowering others and shared leadership. Increasingly teacher leaders' participation in leadership activities must be the core of school leadership. Any other way around this is inexcusable in the field of educational leadership.

Recommendations for Future Studies

This study shows the importance of distributed leadership in five elementary schools within a large urban school district, so further studies is needed to explore the interactions of principals and teacher leaders in another large urban school district within California – San Francisco, San Diego, or San Jose as student demographics will be similar to this study.

Additional studies should replicate this study in charter schools in an urban area within California in order to have similar demographics. Moreover, future study should replicate this study in an urban district such as Philadelphia, New York, Chicago, Miami. An opportunity to explore if distributed leadership is practiced nationally.

Finally, this study shows the importance of collaboration as a process of distributed leadership in the five elementary school settings, so further studies are needed to explore how distributed leadership is practiced in middle and high schools in an urban district.

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Appendix A

Invitation to Participate in Research Study

**Perceptions of Teacher Leaders on the Processes of Distributed Leadership in
Relation to Student Achievement in High Performing Elementary Schools in the
Urban Unified School District.**

INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH STUDY

Dear Teacher Leader,

I am writing to inform you about a dissertation study that is being conducted at California State University, Northridge (CSUN) regarding the perceptions of teacher leaders on the processes of distributed leadership and its impact on student outcome in four high performing urban schools. Alusine Conteh, a doctoral candidate, is conducting the study as part of the Ed. D. degree requirements.

The purpose of Alusine Conteh's dissertation is to investigate the perspectives of teacher leaders on the processes of distributed leadership in relation to the structures of the organizations, and student learning outcomes. This study will add new knowledge to existing information regarding the roles of teacher leaders on the processes of distributed leadership. Your participation in this study would be to participate in one 45-minute one-

on-one interview and one 60 minute observation of a grade level articulation meeting of teachers.

Any personally identifiable characteristics, such as your name or school, will not appear in the study. Participating in this study is completely voluntary and you may withdraw at any time.

Your time investment in this study is greatly appreciated. If you would like to participate, please contact Alusine Conteh at alusine.conteh.24@my.csun or (818) 517-2028. Thank you in advance for considering participation in this study.

Best Wishes.

Appendix B

Interview Protocol

California State University, Northridge

**Perceptions of Teacher Leaders on the Processes of Distributed Leadership in
Relation to Student Achievement in High Performing Elementary Schools in the
Urban Unified School District.**

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

RQ: What are the perceptions of teacher leaders on the processes of distributed leadership in relation to student achievement in a high performing urban schools in the Urban Unified School District?

Sub-Questions:

- How does the principal identify and foster teacher leadership?
- What are the perceptions of teacher leaders regarding distributed leadership?
- How does teacher leadership get distributed throughout the school?
- How do teacher leaders perceive their role in impacting student achievement?

Pre- Interview Session: Introduction

Good morning. Thank you for taking the time out from your busy schedule to talk to me today about you work as a teacher leader. Before we begin the interview, I would like to review the Consent to Participate in Research form and answer any questions you might have prior to signing the form.

Interview Questions

1. What made you choose the teaching profession? (**Warm-up**)
2. What is your experience as a teacher leader and why did you decide to become a teacher leader?
3. What are some of your accomplishments as a teacher leader?
4. What challenges have you experienced being a teacher leader?
5. Are you familiar with the concept of distributed leadership or shared leadership, and what do you think of it? **PROBE:** Can you give me more detailed description of what you think shared-decision making at this school site looks like? **PROBE :** From your experience, have you ever seen this model of shared decision-making before? What makes it unique at this school?
6. What do you think the role of the principal is in getting teachers to be teacher leaders?
7. What are your perceptions about the role of a teacher leader? **PROBE:** Do you think every teacher should be a teacher leader?
8. What were your expectations of the teacher leaders' roles and the process of shared-decision making?
9. As the teacher leader at your grade level, what do you think your primary role has been? **PROBE:** How do you interact with the teachers at grade level articulation

meetings? **PROBE:** What processes do you utilize to arrive at a collective common agreement?

10. Some people say the principal's role is to lead the process of shared-decision-making, as opposed to a top-down approach. Why is that important?
11. What do you think of the principal's involvement in the process of shared-decision making at this school? **PROBE:** How dedicated in your view is the principal to the process of shared-decision making?
12. How well do you think shared leadership is working at your school? What do you think the reason is for that? **PROBE:** What do you think this process would look like if it were a different principal?
13. Do you think there is a correlation between the improvement of student outcomes and shared leadership?
14. Do you have anything else you want to add to our conversation?

Post Interview Session: Debriefing and Closing

Thank you for participating in today's interview session. I appreciate your taking the time and sharing your ideas with me. I also want to restate that what you have shared with me is confidential. No part of our discussion including names or other identifying information will be used in any report or document. Finally, I want to provide you with a chance to ask any questions that you might have about this interview. Do you have any questions at this time? Thank you again for your participation.

Appendix C

Study Survey for Teacher Leaders

California State University, Northridge

**Perceptions of Teacher Leaders on the Processes of Distributed Leadership in
Relation to Student Achievement in High Performing Elementary Schools in the
Urban Unified School District.**

STUDY SURVEY FOR TEACHER LEADERS

Directions for Administering Surveys

Surveys will be hand delivered by the principal investigator to the identified teacher leaders at the school sites participating this survey. Each teacher leader will complete one survey. Completing the survey should take only about fifteen to twenty minutes.

The following statement will be provided to each participant completing the survey.

The surveys you are about to complete are part of a study of the perceptions of teacher leaders on the processes of distributed leadership in high performing elementary schools. This study concerns the prevalence of teacher leadership in high performing schools, principals' and teachers' understanding of the roles and function of teacher leaders in high performing school, examines the ways principals can identify and nurture teacher leadership and if the practice of distributed leadership has an impact on student outcome. This study intends to investigate teacher leadership in high performing school as a possible means of contributing to the culture of school reform efforts and continuous improvement. Teacher leaders from several schools in the Northern Los Angeles area are

being asked to complete this survey. The results will inform this research on teacher leadership in high performing schools. Additionally, most school reform efforts demand school wide change through professional learning communities, therefore it is very significant to understand how school cultures support these communities of learning through shared and teacher leaderships.

Alusine Conteh, an assistant principal in Los Angeles Unified School District is conducting this research. All teachers' responses are anonymous. Data will be compiled at the school level and will be used for analysis of the dimensions of characteristic of schools where teacher leadership is supported. The principal investigator is not interested in ranking or rating of individual schools. You will be asked to complete a survey. The estimated time to complete the survey is about fifteen to twenty minutes,

Your participation is voluntary. You may decline to complete the survey or may skip any item that you feel uncomfortable responding to. The purpose of this study is to gather information regarding the perceptions of teacher leaders about their school and how distributed leadership is practiced. There are no correct or incorrect answers. The researcher is interested only in your frank opinion.

Your time, knowledge, insights and perceptions are valuable resources. Thank you for sharing them with the principal investigator.

If you have any questions regarding your rights as a research participant, the details of this study, or any other concerns please contact Alusine Conteh at his mailing address: 28082 Catherine Drive, Santa Clarita Ca 91351. Alternatively, you may contact Alusine Conteh at (818) 517-2018 or via email at alc6064@lausd.net

Appendix D

Study Survey Protocol for Teacher Leaders

California State University, Northridge

**Perceptions of Teacher Leaders on the Processes of Distributed Leadership in
Relation to Student Achievement in High Performing Elementary Schools in the
Urban Unified School District.**

STUDY SURVEY PROTOCOL FOR TEACHER LEADERS

RQ: What are the perceptions of teacher leaders on the processes of distributed leadership in relation to student achievement in a high performing urban school in the Urban Unified School District?

Sub-Questions:

- How does the principal identify and foster teacher leadership?
- What are the perceptions of teacher leaders regarding distributed leadership?
- How does teacher leadership get distributed throughout the school?
- How do teacher leaders perceive their role in impacting student achievement?

Instructions: Please respond to the following statements in terms of how frequently each statement is descriptive of your school's culture.

	1	2	3	4	5
Survey Statements	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
1. At your school, does the principal provide direction for the school and expects others to follow?					
2. At your school the principal is supportive of all teachers by empowering them and building capacity.					
3. At your school the principal creates a culture of trust and positive relationships					
4. The principal and teachers are actively involved in a school-wide shared-decision making process					
5. At your school the principal actively identifies and fosters teacher leaders					
6. In my role as a teacher leader, I am free to make judgments about what is best for my students					
7. At your school leadership roles are shared between teachers and administrators and your input is valued					
8. Do you see yourself as a central link in the process of leading learning not just in your own classroom but also among your colleagues					
9. At your school do see the principal as someone who articulates vision and values that encourage and empower teacher leaders to be innovative and creative and work collaboratively with other teachers, parents, and other members of the school community					
10. Do teacher leaders at your school, work in collegiality with colleagues in the interest of sharing, promoting, developing and supporting best professional practices.					
11. Teacher leaders work collaboratively with other teachers, students, administrators, parents in developing shared goals towards the					

achievement of high quality education for all					
12. At your school teacher leadership is encouraged because it enables teachers to work together and become involve in whole-school issues and take responsibilities beyond their classrooms					
13. Does your school have a prevailing culture that supports the importance of sharing leadership throughout the school					
14. At your school student learning is enhanced when teacher leaders and other teachers work together.					
15. Does teacher leadership practices have any possible effects on student achievement					
16. At your school shared leadership promotes increased student achievement					

Appendix E

Principal Interview Protocol

California State University, Northridge

**Perceptions of Teacher Leaders on the Processes of Distributed Leadership in
Relation to Student Achievement in High Performing Elementary Schools in the
Urban Unified School District.**

PRINCIPAL INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

1. Would you please introduce your school in brief? (Location, size, history) What are the characteristics of your school?
2. Would you please introduce yourself in brief? (Career development, experience as a school principal) What are your main responsibilities as a school principal?
3. As a school principal, would you please use 2 to 3 phrases to describe your leadership style?
4. How do you practice your leadership style in your daily work? Can you give me a few examples?
5. As principal how do you provide direction for the school and expect others to follow your lead?
6. What types of structures do you have in place to empower and build capacity in your teachers?
7. How is the principal and teachers actively involved in a school-wide shared-decision making processes.

8. Building trusting relationships is very important in leadership, what systems do you have in place that facilitates trust between the principal and teachers?
9. How do you identify and foster teacher leadership at your school?
10. How are the teacher leaders identified in your school? What are the key qualities for the teacher leaders?
11. How do you motivate the teachers? From your point of view, what are the effective school empowerment strategies? How do you use these strategies to improve student outcomes? Can you give me a few examples?
12. Have you noticed any informal leaders among the teachers? How do you perceive the roles of these informal leaders? Are there any conflicts? Do you empower them when their expertise is needed? Can you give me some concrete examples?
13. How do you communicate with your teacher leaders and what kind of information do you deliver to your teacher leaders and leadership team?

Thank you very much for your responses and participating in this interview.