The Principal’s Role in Supporting Teacher Leadership and Building Capacity: Teacher and Administrator Perspectives

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by

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my two daughters, Jenny and Megan, who selflessly gave up time with Mom so that I could pursue this dream. May the hours I spent working on this project serve as an example of persistence and perseverance to each of you as you carve your paths in this world.

To my husband, Art, who never had the good fortune of the free and appropriate education we sometimes take for granted in the United States. Thank you for supporting me through my undergraduate work, my Master’s program, and now my Doctorate. Words cannot express the gratitude I feel towards you for embracing my education and taking on the additional “honey-do’s” while I was off studying.

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I love you all.
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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

The Principal’s Role in Supporting Teacher Leadership and Building Capacity: Teacher and Administrator Perspectives

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Professor Margaret Basom, Chair

This study examined the role of the high school principal in building teacher leadership capacity as a potential tool for use in meeting school improvement goals. High schools were chosen as the focus of this study for two reasons. First, high school students generally do not perform as well as their elementary and middle school peers on standardized tests. Additionally, the pressure to produce 21st century learners is most intense at the high school level. If high school principals are to achieve reform expectations, they will be most successful if they can tap into the expertise of the teachers already working on their campuses.

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Existing literature on teacher leadership and principal leadership as it relates to developing and supporting teacher leadership, building leadership capacity, and distributing leadership was reviewed. Interviews and focus groups conducted with 15 teacher leaders and three principals in one high performing Southern California school district provided the data that informed the study. Both teacher and administrator perspectives were captured and analyzed. The analysis revealed ten themes: empowerment, culture of continuous improvement, collaboration, relationships, clear expectations, professional development, support for teachers, vision, organizational structures, and challenges. The study reinforced the notion that principals set the tone for creating a culture of teacher leadership and have several tools for building leadership capacity at their disposal.
CHAPTER 1

Background to the Study

The new millennium brought with it new challenges for public schools – a sense of urgency about preparing students for success in the 21st century, and intolerance for discrepant results in student performance (McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006). Reform initiatives compel schools to develop strategies for improving instruction. As districts survey their organizational landscapes, they are rethinking the roles and relationships of all school personnel. Historically, principals served as managers, but now it is incumbent upon them to become instructional leaders (Berube, Gaston & Stepans, 2004). Yet, it is impossible for them to be experts in all areas. Consequently, we are reexamining the role of the teacher as leader. Teachers and principals are collaborating more to provide instructional leadership. This collaboration makes sense after all, since teachers possess content area expertise. The need to partner is especially important at the high school level where the stakes are highest.

Across the country, high schools are having difficulty meeting federal performance expectations for English language arts and mathematics. In a recent Los Angeles Times article Blume & Welsh (2008) sadly indicate fewer than half of California high schools meet the bar. This failure to meet performance objectives occurs despite the fact that the assessment used to measure proficiency is far less stringent than that used for elementary and middle schools. And the future looks bleak as schools are expected to increase student proficiency by roughly ten percent each
year through 2014 when *all* students are expected by federal guidelines to be proficient.

Many practitioners believe the solution to this problem lies in school leadership. Yet, literature (Camburn, Rowan & Taylor, 2003; DuFour & Eaker, 1998; Schmoker, 1999; Fullan & Hargreaves, 1991;) indicates the challenge of instructional leadership may be too great for one leader. According to Danielson (2007) administrators report feeling overwhelmed, unable to accomplish operational duties and still make time to focus on improving the instructional program. Achieving this lofty goal will require a collaborative effort involving all members of the learning community. Many schools are adopting a distributed leadership approach to address this issue. (Camburn, et al., 2003; Neuman & Simmons, 2000). This particular approach allows teachers with content area expertise to take on leadership roles in their areas of strength and beyond their classroom duties. (Camburn, et al., 2003; Crowther, Kaagan, Ferguson, & Hann, 2002; Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001). Teachers assume the role of department chair. They act as curricular leaders, guiding staff development and ensuring consistency from course to course. They share best practices and serve as models for their peers. They serve as club advisors and mentors to students, encouraging them to become active contributors to their communities. Much of this role diversification can be attributed to the Carnegie Corporation. Recognizing that the power to improve instruction lay with teachers, it argued teachers should not only be experts in curriculum and instruction, but also key leaders in programmatic changes, professional development and school reform (Force, 1986).
Ultimately, cultivation of strong teacher leaders requires principals to consciously build leadership capacity within and across individual faculty members. Fullan and Hargreaves (1996) posit that today’s leaders must “crack the walls of privatism,” replacing teaching in isolation with a collaborative spirit in order to distribute leadership and get the results they desire. Success as a principal lies in one’s ability to assess teacher strengths in context, further build on these strengths, and motivate teachers to exercise them publicly. Add to this list the ability to know when to step aside and let others lead, and a principal is equipped to take an organization to another level where teachers focus on instructional improvement and the principal keeps the vision, rallying staff to come together around a common goal of improving student learning. It is precisely this type of leadership that fosters sustainability of school mission and vision over time (Giles & Hargreaves, 2006; Hargreaves & Fink, 2006).

The reform era is revolutionizing the way principals approach their jobs. Now more than ever, a results-based orientation is the lens through which principals conduct school business. However, principals alone cannot produce the large-scale improvement (Conley & Muncy, 1999; Crowther, et al., 2002; Danielson, 2007; Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001; Lambert, 1998). This study examines the multiple ways in which high school principals develop a culture of teacher leadership to assist them in meeting organizational goals.

Problem Statement

The reform era holds schools accountable for student performance. In order to achieve expected results, many principals understand they must broaden their
leadership base, and reach out to teachers, the true experts of classroom instruction. Unfortunately, not all teachers view themselves as potential leaders. Principals must convince teachers that leadership is a professional responsibility and a natural companion to classroom instruction. Thus, building teacher leadership capacity is an essential component of achieving sustainable results (Crowther, et al., 2002; Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001; Lambert, 1998; Murphy, 2005). Nowhere is this more important than in high schools, where student performance lags, and organizational structures and content vary.

Purpose

This study examined the principal’s role in promoting teacher leadership. It identified specific principal behaviors that motivate teachers to take on greater leadership roles, and examined the role of the principal in building organizational capacity. The study may provide practitioners with a framework for engineering organizational conditions that allow for sustainable, effective teacher leadership practices. While a variety of definitions of teacher leadership exist, for purposes of this study teacher leadership was defined as “the process by which teachers, individually or collectively, influence their colleagues, principals, and other members of school communities to improve teaching and learning practices with the aim of increased student learning and achievement” (York-Barr & Duke, 2004, p. 287-8).

Specifically, the study thoroughly examined the role of the principal in building teacher leadership capacity in three comprehensive, public high schools in one large suburban school district in southern California. The perceptions of both principals and teacher leaders were examined. The study was designed to provide
insights that can be used by principals interested in building leadership capacity within their schools.

Research Questions

The following questions guided this study:

1) What principal behaviors and organizational conditions do teacher leaders perceive as empowering or constraining their development of teacher leadership capacity?

2) What deliberate decisions do principals make to increase organizational capacity in relation to teacher leadership?

3) How do teacher leaders perceive their ability to serve as instructional leaders influencing school reform efforts?

Methodology

A qualitative methodology was employed for this descriptive case study because comprehensive answers to “how” and “why” questions were sought. (Creswell, 2005; Maxwell, 2005). The study was based on data gathered from two sources – principals and teacher leaders. It relied on survey data as well as in-depth, semi-structured personal interviews and focus groups (Patton, 1990; 2002) of 15 high school teachers viewed as leaders on campus and their three principals. Although some assistant principals also work to build teacher leadership capacity, and therefore could have been included in the sample, they were consciously excluded from the study, because their responsibilities are so varied (Celikten, 2001), and responses might not consistently yield the in-depth data sought. Assistant principals were, however, involved in identifying the teacher leaders that participated in the study. A
brief explanation of the procedure used in identifying participants is provided below. A detailed explanation of the process is included in Chapter 3.

An online survey identified teacher leaders at three comprehensive high schools within a suburban California school district. The teacher leader population was identified by their peers and administrators. A purposeful sample of 15 teachers was invited and agreed to participate in personal interviews and focus groups. The interviews and focus groups were designed to gain more in-depth responses and to determine if there is anything unique about the ways in which individual teachers experience teacher leadership. Three high school principals were also interviewed to gain insight into the principals’ views on teacher leadership and how they leverage it to achieve organizational goals.

All interviews were audio-taped, transcribed and analyzed using coding schemes (Miles & Huberman, 1994). This analysis revealed important insights about teacher and principal perceptions regarding teacher leadership. Teacher leader interviews were also used to triangulate responses provided by principals. In other words, teacher leader responses were intended to confirm whether or not principals’ espoused theories are consistent with their actions (Argyris & Schon, 1974).

Significance

At the heart of this study was the desire to know how high school principals can build teacher leadership capacity so it can be used as a tool to help improve organizational performance. It set out to add to the body of knowledge about teacher leadership as cultivated and supported by principals who make deliberate decisions about organizational capacity building. It focused on this issue in the context of the
high school campus, an area previously not very well studied, and an area with unique challenges that compound the problem. It attempted to identify specific strategies for creating school cultures that support teacher leadership. While previous studies have examined teacher perceptions about principal leadership behaviors (Blasé & Blasé, 1999; Leithwood & Jantzi, 1998; 1999), this study was designed to capture the voices of individual teacher leaders and how they experience their principals’ leadership capacity building efforts. This focus is important because this area has received little attention from past researchers and it could provide principals with insights into how they may better support teacher leaders in long-term, sustainable ways. A number of researchers (Barth, 2001; Harrison & Lembeck, 1996; Danielson, 2007; Murphy, 2005; Smylie & Brownlee-Conyers, 1992) state, it is important to investigate how principals can best leverage teacher leadership to help carry out their visions, and to keep the focus on continued improvement. It is also important to know whether or not principals perceive they are building leadership capacity via specific strategies and whether teacher leaders have the same perceptions. Teacher leaders can also inform principals on what strategies may be more effective at the high school level.

**Conceptual Framework**

This comprehensive study analyzed how principals perceive they build teacher leadership capacity with how teacher leaders perceive principals act. The study required examination of the literature on teacher leadership and principal leadership as it related to developing and supporting teacher leadership, building leadership capacity, and distributing leadership. The review of the literature began with an overview of teacher leadership, barriers and frustrations, and the principal’s role in
removing the obstacles to teacher leadership. Next, research on building leadership capacity was examined; as many contend the job of school leadership is enhanced by teacher participation (Crowther, et al., 2002; Fullan & Hargreaves, 1991; Lambert, 1998; Lieberman & Miller, 1999; 2004; Murphy, 2005). The review found that one benefit to building leadership capacity was the ability to then distribute leadership, allowing others (i.e. teachers, students, parents, and staff) in schools to lead. How principals supported the development of teacher leaders, the ways in which they distributed leadership to teachers, and how we could ensure that this is widespread and occurs frequently, was a specific area of interest. These three frameworks – teacher leadership, building leadership capacity, and distributed leadership – shed light on how principals and teacher leaders, working in concert, could develop effective cultures of school improvement. Figure 1.1 depicts the relationship between these bodies of literature. They are reciprocal in that each one builds upon another.

Figure 1.1: Relationships between the Bodies of Literature
Limitations of the Study

In order to protect the integrity of this study, potential researcher biases were disclosed and data were triangulated when possible. Participants reviewed excerpts from interview transcripts and a doctoral colleague reviewed the coding of several transcripts for accuracy. The sample size included principals and teacher leaders from only three high schools. While the sample size was small, the study yielded valuable insights beneficial to those interested in promoting teacher leadership. Because informants were required to self-report the study could be open to scrutiny, but use of multiple informants from the same site helped to keep responses authentic. The proactive measures discussed above helped to shore up methodological concerns, resulting in a valid study that can serve as the basis for future research.

Summary

The context of the school reform era with corresponding accountability measures and their impact on the role of the principal was discussed in this introduction. Developing and supporting teacher leadership for use as a tool to help improve organizational performance was also briefly discussed. When teachers demonstrate leadership capacity, a principal can distribute leadership, thus better accessing teacher leadership skills to meet organizational goals (Harrison, 2005). This study specifically examined the principal’s role in promoting teacher leadership and building leadership capacity, as perceived by principals and teacher leaders in the context of high performing suburban high schools in Southern California. A conceptual framework that guided this study was offered and potential study limitations discussed.
In the next chapter, the literature review lays the foundation for this comprehensive study examining the ways in which principals build and support teacher leadership capacity. Here several studies on teacher leadership, distributed leadership, and principal leadership are deconstructed, analyzed and reconstructed into a conceptual framework that guided the study. “Unpacking” the many theoretical frameworks associated with teacher leadership and school improvement provided the background knowledge and context required to formulate research questions. An investigation of these questions eventually revealed insights into how principals may best tap into teacher strengths and leverage their talents to reach school improvement goals.
CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

Introduction

The previous chapter provided a general overview of this study and what it hoped to accomplish. The study’s primary objective was to identify principal behaviors and organizational conditions teacher leaders perceive as either empowering or constraining their development of leadership capacity. While a significant literature base exists, there is a lack of empirical studies on the topic, particularly at the high school level. Chapter 2 examines the literature in more detail. It begins with an examination of the principal’s role, and the need for additional help in accomplishing the work expected of the school principals. Teacher leadership is considered as a potential support. Research on the benefits and challenges of teacher leadership as well as the principal’s role in building teacher leadership capacity is examined. The chapter concludes with a discussion of distributed leadership—what it is, what it is not, and how creating a distributed leadership culture may help principals achieve organizational goals.

The Changing Role of the School Principal

The job of the school principal has become increasingly complex in recent years (Archer, 2004). According to Danielson (2007) “Principals today are expected to be visionaries (instilling a sense of purpose in their staff) and competent managers (maintaining the physical plant, submitting budgets on time), as well as instructional leaders (coaching teachers in the nuances of classroom practice)” (p. 15). A significant research base (Cotton, 1993; Hallinger, 2003; Hallinger & Murphy, 1985;
Sergiovanni, 1984) suggests instructional leadership is a key factor in improving student achievement. Instructional leadership as used here is a form of principal leadership characterized by high expectations for students and teachers, close supervision of classroom instruction, coordination of schools’ curriculum, and close monitoring of student progress (Hallinger, 1992).

Sadly, Gentilucci and Muto (2007) indicate that “Even though instructional leadership is the espoused priority of principals, it is often shunted aside by the demands of day-to-day school management” (p. 219). Petzko, Clark, Valentine, Hackmann, Nori & Lucas (2002) found evidence of this in an online survey of 1,400 middle school principals. During a twenty year time frame, principals indicated they spent most of their time on school management, personnel, student activities and student behavior. However, they reported that they should have spent this time on program development, personnel, planning, and school management. Gentilucci and Muto’s (2007) study of principal instructional leadership in three middle schools in three contiguous California school districts also makes a compelling argument for principals needing to be freed up from “non-essential” administrative work. The study captured student perspectives on the impact of principal instructional leadership both on the playground and in the classroom. It found students were “motivated to try harder with their academic work” when their principals were perceived as being approachable as opposed to “watchful sentries around campus.” (p. 228) Furthermore, students reported:

Principals who demonstrated high-influence instructional leadership behaviors walked around quietly and checked individual work, frequently giving advice,
gentle correction, praise, and encouragement. Students perceived that interactive principals who ‘got to know them,’ ‘checked on their work,’ and ‘helped them with assignments’ had more powerful influence on their learning than principals who simply sat in the back of the classroom and observed passively. (p. 231)

The body of empirical research on the power of instructional leadership continues to grow. Perhaps the most notable study of this decade has been Waters, Marzano and McNulty’s (2004) meta-analysis of school leadership. The research reflects the largest sample size ever for a leadership study—2,802 schools and approximately 1.4 million students. It concluded “a substantial relationship [exists] between leadership and student achievement” (p. 3). It also found 21 specific leadership responsibilities significantly correlated with student achievement. These 21 responsibilities are not just “important” the researchers contend, but rather “essential.” The study argues that while this “framework” is not foolproof, schools that focus on these responsibilities are better equipped to enhance educational leadership and increase academic achievement. The study aligns with Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom’s (2004) finding that “leadership is second only to classroom instruction among all school-related factors that contribute to what students learn at school” (p. 3).

After considering this research, it is difficult to dispute the critical impact principals have on student learning, especially in the area of instructional leadership. Sergiovanni (2006) however, is critical of labeling the principal as instructional leader: There are surely better labels. How about principal-teacher? At least principal
teacher suggests a kind of community with teachers. Instructional leader suggests that others have got to be followers. The legitimate instructional leaders, if we have to have them, ought to be teachers. And principals ought to be leaders of leaders; people who develop the instructional leadership in their teachers. (p. xii)

Sergiovanni is not alone in making the call for teachers as leaders. Other researchers (Fullan, 2002; Hoerr, 1996; Peterson and Kelley, 2001; Sherrill, 1999) also suggest teachers should share responsibility for instructional leadership in light of increasing demands on principals. The next section explores their assertion by examining the notion of teacher leadership as a tool for assisting principals in meeting organizational objectives.

Teacher Leadership

What is Teacher Leadership?

Researchers are at odds on how best to define teacher leadership. Perhaps the definitional problem is best articulated by Wigginton (1992) who argued, “The issue of teacher leadership is devilishly complicated. And it doesn’t help matters that the phrase itself is frustratingly ambiguous” (p. 167). One must only read the paragraph below for sufficient evidence to support Wigginton’s claim.

York-Barr & Duke (2004), after reviewing two decades worth of teacher leadership literature defined the construct as “the process by which teachers, individually or collectively, influence their colleagues, principals, and other members of school communities to improve teaching and learning practices with the aim of increased student learning and achievement” (p. 287-8). Harris and Muijs (2003)
define it as “…a form of agency where teachers are empowered to lead development work that impacts directly upon the quality of teaching and learning” (p. 40). Crowther, et al. (2002) view the concept as “…facilitat[ing] principled action to achieve whole-school success. It applies the distinctive power of teaching to shape meaning for children, youth, and adults. And it contributes to long-term, enhanced quality of community life” (p. 10). Katzenmeyer and Moller (2001) who argue their definition is constantly evolving as they continue their studies submit “Teachers who are leaders lead within and beyond the classroom, identify with and contribute to a community of teacher learners and leaders, and influence others towards improved educational performance” (p. 5). Patterson and Patterson (2004) define a teacher leader as “someone who works with colleagues for the improving of teaching and learning, whether in a formal or informal capacity” (p. 74). Even teachers are uncertain about how to define the construct. Suranna and Moss (2000) interviewed twelve elementary school teachers. Half of them were unfamiliar with the term and the others were reluctant to share their definitions, fearing they would not align with a textbook definition. While there are certainly some commonalities, for example, all definitions cited above focus on student learning and each speaks to the role of the collective; the lack of consistency begs for further examination of the construct.

**Formal versus Informal Teacher Leaders**

Historically, the generic term “teacher leader” was used to characterize any teacher who took on leadership responsibilities outside of the classroom. However, currently researchers are beginning to distinguish between formal and informal teacher leaders. This distinction helps to delineate between those teachers who were
traditionally thought of as leaders and those who do provide school leadership, but maybe not as originally construed. Birky, Shelton and Headley (2006) characterize formal teacher leaders as “those given familiar titles, and the positions are generally identified by the principal and compensated either by additional salary or in exchange for lighter teaching roles” (p. 88). According to Patterson and Patterson (2004), “They serve as department heads, grade-level chairpersons, team leaders, mentors for new teachers, peer coaches, or members of curriculum development task forces” (p. 74). Danielson (2007) adds “These individuals typically apply for their positions and are chosen through a selection process” (p. 16).

Informal teacher leaders, on the other hand, are:

recognized by their peers and administrators as those staff members who are always volunteering to head new projects, mentoring and supporting other teachers, accepting responsibility for their own professional growth, introducing new ideas, and promoting the mission of the school. (Wasley, 1991, p.112)

“[They]…emerge spontaneously and organically from the teacher ranks….have no positional authority; their influence stems from the respect they command from their colleagues through their expertise and practice” (Danielson, 2007, p. 16). When defined in this manner, informal teachers are likely to include individuals who write curriculum, share best practices, or those who bravely ask critical questions of themselves and their peers when discussing student learning. They may also be teachers who take the initiative to spearhead an interdisciplinary project in a grade level where collaboration is a four-letter word.
A Profile of the Teacher Leader

Krisko (2001) conducted a qualitative study designed to create a profile of potential leaders. Participants with varying levels of experience from pre-college to teacher leader responded to open ended interview questions. Descriptors were developed and patterns analyzed, resulting in eight identifiable attributes of teacher leaders:

1. Intrapersonal sense – aware of personal strengths, weaknesses and goals.
2. Interpersonal skills – supportive and work well with others; communicate effectively.
3. Lifelong learners – continually seek new knowledge to create a better understanding of situations and experiences.
4. Find humor – witty and creative. Use humor to break tension as they solve problems.
5. Creative – constantly seek viable options for solving problems, open to different ideas, highly energetic and tolerant of obstacles.
6. Flexible – effective listeners, seek to understand, open to change.
7. Efficacious – think critically and act deliberately as they decide how to resolves issues.
8. Take responsible risks – confront authority, willing to accept uncertainty or confusion. Will take risks after measuring potential consequences.

This profile is a useful tool for those principals considering expanding their
leadership base perhaps via a distributed leadership model. Distributed leadership is extensively explored later in this chapter. The next section makes an argument for teacher leadership as a logical and effective tool.

*Why Teacher Leadership?*

It was established earlier in this literature review that teacher leadership can help to make the workload of school principals more manageable. But, teacher leadership is not just about better utilization of existing resources to fill a void. The research indicates there are several other important reasons for cultivating a culture of teacher leadership. Four of these are discussed in detail below.

**Expertise.** The traditional career path of most principals begins as a classroom teacher. Here, he or she becomes an expert in a particular content area before aspiring to the ranks of administration. As content area specialists, teachers become masters of curriculum and instruction in their specific niches. They know the content standards, the scope and sequence, how to access resources, historical trends that have occurred over the years, and the nuances of teaching their subject matter. However, upon entering the world of administration, much of this expertise is lost, as administrator development programs do not focus on curriculum, but rather leadership, personnel, and finance. As an administrator one is expected to coach and evaluate teachers and resolve departmental issues in a variety of content areas—often unfamiliar. “[While] a school administrator cannot be an expert in everything….a group of teacher leaders can supply the variety of professional knowledge needed for sustained school improvement” (Danielson, 2007, p. 16).
**Relationships.** Spillane, Hallett, and Diamond (2003) studied 84 teachers in eight Chicago elementary schools to obtain their views on instructional leadership. Specifically, they looked at how teachers view influential others as leaders. 83.3% of teachers surveyed viewed the principal as influencing their instructional practices. However, nearly 80% cited other teachers as being influential. Teachers rated other teachers as most influential in the area of human capital or knowledge, skill, and expertise. This means, that when it comes to content, teachers respect the expertise of their peers. Perhaps this is because they believe their peers best understand their experience; their relationships are in fact based on common experiences.

Mangin’s (2006) study on teacher leadership and its impact on instructional improvement also provides critical empirical support for teachers as leaders. She found that teachers were most receptive to teacher leaders when the content delivered was new, presented in a non-threatening manner, and helped to facilitate complex instruction. Another important finding was that “as teachers grow accustomed to notions of teacher leadership and changed practice, they may become more receptive to activities that demand greater change” (p. 187-8).

**Teacher Morale.** Teaching is a flat profession, without much of a career ladder. Some teachers become experts and are passionate about education, but do not envision themselves as administrators. While there are some aspects of the job that are intriguing, other parts may be considered too mundane or cumbersome. In this case, teachers must either contemplate other careers or remain in the classroom and risk becoming stagnant or frustrated. Teacher leadership is an option for those
interested in challenging themselves and making a greater contribution without having to leave the classroom. Teaching and leading do not have to be mutually exclusive.

These claims are supported by findings of the 2001 National Board Certified Teacher Leadership Survey (National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, 2001). The study, based on 2,186 questionnaires returned by National Board Certified Teachers, found 99.6% of respondents were involved in at least one leadership activity, and on average they were involved in ten! They indicated involvement in leadership activities increases their desire to continue teaching, thus increasing their career satisfaction and confidence.

*Sustainability.* Heller and Firestone (1995) offer additional evidence of the value of teacher leadership. They studied eight schools that successfully implemented Social Problem Solving, a program designed to provide elementary school students with critical thinking and problem solving skills that can assist them in dealing with complex issues such as substance abuse, delinquency, the spread of AIDS, and in-school disorder (Elias & Clabby, 1989). The results of this qualitative study indicated a critical mass of teachers were instrumental in implementing and sustaining the program. They provided informal support and encouragement to one another and kept the enthusiasm going by inducting new teachers as they joined the organizations. Interestingly, the principals did not stand out as key players in the process. Perhaps the most important finding of this study is that there does not necessarily have to be one person in charge in order for a program to be successful or for change to occur.

Lemons (2005) encountered similar evidence in his multiple case study of distributed leadership in three urban high schools. Here, teachers also reported that
other teachers had the greatest influence on their practice. In these schools, leadership was minimally distributed, with principals and assistant principals responsible for most instructional leadership. Principals encouraged teacher involvement not by providing them formal leadership roles or responsibilities, but by tapping into their informal authority, encouraging them to influence and sway their teacher peers. The same was true in the area of teacher collaboration; although some teachers assumed formal responsibilities, administrators provided most of the guidance and direction that encouraged teachers to work together. This “global participation” is critical if change is to be sustained because teacher tenure often exceeds that of principals (Danielson, 2007, p. 14).

**Barriers to Teacher Leadership**

The previous section gave an overview of the benefits of teacher leadership, and the supporting research indicates it is a legitimate tool for helping schools meet organizational goals. Why then is it not more prevalent and widespread? In this section some of the barriers to creating teacher leadership cultures are addressed. A review of the literature indicates there are three common barriers faced by teachers attempting to take on greater leadership roles. Johnson & Donaldson (2007) refer to these as “the triple threat”—autonomy, egalitarianism, and seniority. Their findings are based on a qualitative study of 20 teacher leaders conducted by the Project on the Next Generation of Teachers (Moore Johnson, Donaldson, Kirkpatrick, Marinell, Steele & Szczesiul, 2009)

*Autonomy.* Teaching is an isolated profession and autonomy is highly regarded. Many teachers are reluctant to allow those identified as teacher leaders to
enter their classrooms for fear they will be evaluated or judged (Johnson & Donaldson, 2007). Katzenmeyer and Moller (2001) also speak to the norms of autonomy when they say “The egalitarian norms among teachers do not encourage a teacher to take leadership roles. The norms respect the privacy of other teachers, and the consequence of violating this expectation may be to suffer rejection from peers’ (pp. 79-80).

Lieberman & Friedrich (2007) examined obstacles teacher leaders faced in a study of teacher leadership journeys conducted with participants in the National Writing Project. One participant reported:

It’s one thing to stand up in front of strangers…and ask teachers to try something they may not have tried, to show them ways to teach writing, maybe even to ask them to write and share something….It is quite another thing to get up in front of your coworkers and tell them they should teach differently. (p. 43-4)

Clearly, those teachers who seek to lead face resistance from their peers, if not directly then indirectly through the cultural norms that protect their autonomy.

_Egalitarianism & Seniority._

Other teacher leaders are challenged by the perception that they are not qualified to lead their peers (Johnson & Donaldson, 2007). Their colleagues question why is it that this person is considered to be an expert or more competent than I? This is especially true when a young leader is charged with “coaching” a veteran. It also occurs when people who adopt teaching as a second career, seek to advise people with more years teaching experience.
Subject matter competence also poses an issue. In a study of two restructuring high schools, Little (1995) interviewed 53 teachers, 21 of which were current or former teacher leaders. The two schools had different models for restructuring. One maintained the traditional department head structure, while the other reorganized into four different academic houses. The study revealed subject matter affiliation is a critical issue. While the department heads still faced some resistance, they were respected as experts in their content area. However, teacher leaders in the school that restructured into academic houses struggled with the perceived administrative edict:

You are responsible for the teachers in your own house, whether it’s your area of expertise or whether it isn’t, because if you’re an excellent teacher, if you’re a model teacher, you can provide that resource, whether you’re an English teacher [talking to] a math teacher or a science teacher or a French teacher, or whatever. And hopefully, we have enough expertise to help teachers in all subject areas. (p. 53)

Teacher Leader Identity.

When teachers decide to lead, they frequently face an identity crisis. Lord and Miller (2000) eloquently capture this conundrum.

Teacher leaders identify themselves as teachers, as classroom practitioners whose experience and knowledge are honed by their years with students and curriculum and whose credibility among their peers is typically based on their classroom work. On the other hand, teacher leaders are called to be leaders in a profession that historically has few recognized avenues for teachers in
leadership roles. Teacher leaders are different from administrators, the obvious leadership path in the education profession. (p. 7)

Wasley (1991) adds that as a result of their positions, teacher leaders often feel more isolated than they do as classroom teachers. They also often meet resistance from other teachers. Donaldson (2001) reminds us that the norm of autonomy in some schools “permits some colleagues simply to dismiss [teacher leaders] and their efforts to build connections” (p. 87). Hence the struggle – teacher leaders feel compelled, and are pushed by principals to share their voices and expertise, but they must do so in communities in which they no longer feel fully embraced as members.

Coping Mechanisms

Faced with the previously outlined challenges, teacher leaders adopt coping mechanisms to “…avoid provoking other teachers’ fears, deflect opposition, and diminish tensions…But these strategies also tend to legitimize the traditional culture of teaching, and its norms of autonomy, egalitarianism, and deference to seniority” (Johnson & Donaldson, 2007, p. 11). The same study went on to explain some teacher leaders interviewed refrain from volunteering, even though they are qualified to fill a need. Some only work with those individuals who are most willing and receptive to working collaboratively. Others market themselves as “facilitators,” simply interested in connecting teachers with resources they could use to improve their practice. While these “survival” strategies may be necessary for some teacher leaders, administrators must work to build school cultures in which teacher leadership is the norm.

The next section discusses how principals can better support teacher leaders.
**Principal Support of Teacher Leadership**

The principal plays a very important role in supporting teacher leadership. Barth (2001) issues a challenge that follows the well known educational mantra of the reform era “All students can learn.” He suggests “All teachers can lead.” He goes on to state “Indeed, if schools are going to become places in which all children are learning, all teachers must lead” (p. 105). Crowther et al. (2002) claim “Where we have seen teacher leadership begin to flourish, principals have actively supported it or, at least, encouraged it” (p. 33). Several arguments, both empirical and theoretical, support this assertion. A doctoral dissertation on teacher leadership conducted by Sawyer (2005) divides the teacher leadership supports into three categories: school culture, principal influence, and organizational structure. While I like this structure, and will use it here, I believe all of these supports fall under the purview and responsibility of the principal.

**School culture.** Anderson (1992) contends that a positive school culture fosters teacher leadership, which leads to positive results in student outcomes. This is also supported by quantitative research based on the National Longitudinal Study of 1988 (NELS:88) data. Three separate studies consistently showed that teacher community has a positive statistical effect on student achievement gains (Lee & Smith, 1995, 1996; Lee, Smith, & Croninger, 1997). Community as it is used here refers to groups of teachers coming together to discuss best practices and to teach and learn from each other. The overall objective of such interactions is to improve student learning. In an era demanding “results” these studies make a credible argument for teacher leadership as a tool capable of increasing academic achievement.
Muijs and Harris (2003) and Lambert (2003) suggest principals must create school climates that are conducive to teacher participation. In other words, they must develop cultures of teacher leadership. But what do schools with teacher leadership cultures look like? Katzenmeyer and Moller (2001) have found that they have seven unique characteristics. These are depicted in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1: Dimensions of Teacher Leadership in Schools where Teacher Leadership is the Norm.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trait</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Developmental Focus</td>
<td>Teachers are supported in learning new knowledge and skills and are encouraged to help others to learn. They are provided with needed assistance, guidance, and coaching.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognition</td>
<td>Teachers are respected and recognized for the professional roles they take and the contributions they make. A spirit of mutual respect and caring exists among teachers. There are processes to recognize effective work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autonomy</td>
<td>Teachers are encouraged to take initiative in making improvements and innovations. Barriers are removed and resources are found to support teachers’ efforts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collegiality</td>
<td>Teachers collaborate on instructional and student-related matters. Examples of collegial behavior include teachers’ discussing strategies, sharing materials, or observing one another’s classrooms.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>Teachers are actively involved in making decisions and have input on important matters. Department or team leaders are selected with the participation of teachers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open Communication</td>
<td>Teachers send and receive information in open, honest ways in the school. Teachers feel informed about what is going on in the school. Teachers easily share opinions and feelings. Teachers are not blamed when things go wrong.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Environment</td>
<td>Teachers experience general satisfaction with the work environment. Teachers feel respected by one another and by parents, students, and administrators. Teachers perceive the school as having effective administrative leaders.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Barth (2001) presents the idea of the principal as culture builder, and like Katzenmeyer and Moller, provides several actions principals can take to build a culture of teacher leadership:

1) Expect teachers to lead and communicate this vision regularly;
2) Relinquish authority to teachers;
3) Trust that teachers will be responsible with authority;
4) Empower teachers to seek solutions to organizational challenges;
5) Include all teachers in school leadership, strategically tap them to work on issues about which they are passionate;
6) Protect and support teachers who take on leadership roles;
7) Recognize and value teacher leadership efforts;
8) Share the responsibility when teacher leaders fail; and
9) Give credit for success (pp. 110-114).

Similarly, the multiple case study research of Crowther, et al. (2002) which examined teacher leadership in twenty-one schools in Australia over a five-year period, supports the claim that school cultures characterized by mutual trust and respect, a shared sense of responsibility, open communication, and the freedom try new ideas, are fertile ground for cultivating teacher leadership.

Principal influence. Traditionally, the principal has been viewed as the central figure in the schoolhouse. However, this viewpoint is changing (Fullan, 2002; Hargreaves & Fink, 2006; Wasley, 1991) as enthusiasm over the concept of expanding teacher leadership grows, and as organizations become “flatter.” If we are to be successful in making teacher leadership the norm, principal support is essential.
According to York-Barr and Duke (2004) “Principals play a pivotal role in the success of teacher leadership by actively supporting the development of teachers, by maintaining open channels of communication, and by aligning structures and resources to support the leadership work of teachers” (p. 288). Lambert (1998) concurs stating “Principals’ leadership is crucial because they are uniquely situated to exercise some special skills of initiation, support, and visioning” (p. 24). Lambert’s leadership capacity building strategies will be discussed in more detail later.

Crowther, et al. (2002) through their case study research have identified seven charges principals much champion nurturing teacher leadership.

1) Communicate strategic intent: Principals should have a strong sense of purpose and make their vision public and explicit. By acting consistently with transparent values, principals model an important value and strategy for teachers. “If the principal’s educational worldview is apparent through words and deeds, potential teacher leaders have a model for futuristic thinking about their workplace and can reflect, explore, and experiment through their teaching” (p. 52).

2) Incorporate the aspirations and views of others: Principals should tap into the creativity and energy of teachers. When their ideas are enacted, trust and commitment are built. When principals show that they value teacher contributions, potential leaders clarify and refine their personal values. Most importantly, they gain confidence.

3) Pose difficult-to-answer questions: Principals who ask open-ended, seemingly hypothetical questions such as “What if?” and allow staff to
“explore the world that lies outside our immediate consciousness” enable teachers to explore their own pedagogical beliefs and values. They also encourage participation of potential leaders who might otherwise go unnoticed, and generate meaningful conversation which otherwise might not occur.

4) Make space for individual innovation: Principals should encourage individual thoughts and ideas. Potential teacher leaders are not always aware of their strengths and when principals allow them the freedom to explore and share in a safe environment; their leadership skills develop and mature.

5) Know when to step back: If potential leaders are to be valued and encouraged, they must be provided ample opportunity to lead. This means principals must take a back seat. They must allow teachers to lead and be secure with the knowledge they are supporting the professional growth of their staff. This is how learning organizations develop.

6) Create opportunities from perceived difficulties: Successful principals create “an environment of no blame—in which processes, not people, are scrutinized when things go wrong” (p. 61). They encourage teachers to think outside of the box and view failure as a learning opportunity for all.

7) Build on achievements to create a culture of success: Principals should inspire teachers to become guardians of the school culture. This is done through modeling positive problem-solving techniques.
Organizational structure. The success or failure of teacher leadership efforts is greatly impacted by organizational structure. Research has demonstrated that traditional, hierarchical school structures inhibit teacher leadership, while decentralized structures such as communities of practice and professional learning communities grow teacher leaders (Forster, 1997). These structures are characteristic of what Senge (1990) coins learning organizations, places “…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 to see the whole together” (p. 3).

While many authors have published on the topic (Astuto, Clark, Read, McGree & Fernandez, 1993; Kruse & Louis, 1993; 1995; Louis, Marks & Kruse, 1996; Scribner, Cockrell, Cockrell & Valentine, 1999), Dufour and Eaker (1998) are considered to be the professional learning community gurus. They characterize professional learning communities as being different from traditional organizations in six significant ways. These schools share a common mission, vision, values and goals. They are structured to work interdependently in collaborative teams in an effort to achieve these common goals. They embrace the idea of collective inquiry. This means that they continually challenge the status quo in search of practice that will produce greater student learning. They are also action oriented. In other words, they don’t just talk about potential strategies for resolving learning issues, they implement them. If after experimenting with a strategy for an agreed upon period of time they find it ineffective, they either make minor adjustments or scrap the idea in its entirety, opting for another strategy instead. The culture of collective inquiry fuels this action
orientation step. This continual “tweaking” and revisiting is what supports the development of a culture of continuous improvement. Schools that are committed to continuous improvement value the process of learning as much as they do the result. Consequently, they don’t look at developing an action plan as a chore, but rather an integral, disciplined means of operation – the outcome of collective inquiry. Possessing a results orientation is the final characteristic of professional learning communities defined by DuFour and Eaker. Ultimately, this means success is assessed based on results, not intent, because in a culture of school improvement despite the best intentions, if students are not producing concrete learning gains, then all of our efforts are for naught.

While the empirical research on learning organizations is limited, two studies are applicable here. Wheeler (2002) conducted an eight-week action research project in elementary school in which he found the implementation of Senge’s (1990) five disciplines of learning organizations increased teachers’ collaborative learning activities. Because collaboration with colleagues is an essential teacher leadership component, it can be inferred that schools structured as learning organizations experience increased teacher leadership.

Vinella (2007) is another quantitative study that suggests Senge’s (1990) five disciplines of learning organizations are useful tools for educational leaders. Here principals from the 50 highest and lowest performing high schools on New Jersey’s high school exit exam were surveyed as to their perceptions about the characteristics of learning organizations present in their schools. An equal-sized, stratified, random sample was used in order to provide greater validity. Principals of high performing
schools found characteristics present to a great extent and those of low performing schools only found them present to a moderate extent. This significant difference in the degree to which schools developed learning communities has serious implications for a principal trying to boost student achievement and for teacher leadership – they may want to consider creating an action plan for implementing Senge’s five disciplines.

Professional development can also help to cultivate teacher leadership. Not the predominant model of a district-sponsored professional growth day planned without teacher input, but rather a meaningful experience such as action research. (Zeichner, 2003) Brockerville (1996) advocates for a more comprehensive training program.

Educators need a model of PD that brings groups of teachers together regularly to reflect on who we are, what we value, who we teach, what we teach, how we teach and why we teach the way we do. Action research for teachers is about studying what is happening in our school and deciding how to make it a better place by changing what and how we teach and how we relate to students and the community. It can be carried on by a single teacher or by a group of teachers working collaboratively (sometimes with students) on a given problem area. (pp. 1-2)

Thornton, Langroll, Jones, and Swafford (2001) write of a systemic professional development program for middle school mathematics teachers. The project aimed to increase algebra readiness in minority students by the end of eighth grade. Although it was not intended, teachers who participated in this program emerged as teacher leaders, contributing both at the site and district level.
Restructured schools are also ripe for teacher leadership. In one of the most extensive studies on the work of teacher leaders, Miles, Saxl, and Lieberman (1988) concluded that restructured school communities contain a menu of structures that promote teacher leadership. This includes new leadership opportunities such as mentor, site council membership, and professional learning community team leaders. Smylie (1995) concurs, indicating while traditional roles such as department chairs can do the same, there is growing evidence of “less positional, less structured, emergent forms of teacher leadership” (p. 4) in restructured schools.

Time is another major factor. Barth (2001) points out, “…most teachers are overwhelmed with existing duties. School leadership is an add-on, a desirable add-on perhaps, but an add-on nonetheless” (pp. 90-91). Teacher leaders report lack of time being one of the greatest obstacles to their involvement in leadership activities (O’Connor & Boles, 1992; Ovando, 1994; Paulu & Winters, 1998; Suranna & Moss; 2000). Schools that are creative in their use of time, are able to create more opportunities for teacher participation.

Despite compelling arguments articulating the benefits of teacher leadership, some question its merits, claiming it depletes classrooms of outstanding teachers who have a demonstrated impact on student learning. This is understandable in light of the fact that several studies including Haycock (1998) substantiate the teacher as the most important factor in a child’s education. However, a teacher’s reach can extend beyond the classroom. Scherer (2007) views the issue differently. “By inviting expert teachers to assist in improving learning conditions throughout the school, we aren’t removing our best teachers from the classroom. We are extending their reach” (p. 7).
I rely on the words of Lieberman & Miller (2004) to close this section. When teachers cast off the mantle of technical and managed worker and assume new roles as researchers, meaning makers, scholars, and inventors, they expand the vision of who they are and what they do. They come to view themselves and are viewed by others as intellectuals engaged in inquiry about teaching and learning. Central to this expanded vision of teaching is the idea that teachers are also leaders, educators who can make a difference in schools and schooling now and in the future. (p. 11)

With the argument for teacher leadership substantiated, it is important to consider how teacher leadership capacity is built. The next section provides a comprehensive examination of teacher leadership capacity and the role of the principal in building it.

Building Leadership Capacity

In 2004, Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, and Wahlstrom conducted a study funded by the Wallace Foundation that gives principals credit for playing a central role in school reform. This study asserts “Leadership is second only to classroom instruction among all school-related factors that contribute to what students learn at school” (p.3). According to Donaldson (2006) leadership is “the mobilization of people to adapt a school’s practices and beliefs so that every child’s learning and growth are optimized” (p. 3). Donaldson’s definition gets at the heart of what has become the expectation for school leaders in the current era of reform and accountability. A leader’s success is now gauged by the success of the learner. This
shift holds leaders accountable for concrete evidence-based results that had been neglected or overlooked historically.

Given the current climate, it is now more important than ever that school leaders focus their efforts on building leadership capacity. This is supported by a study conducted by Marks and Printy (2003) that examined 24 restructured elementary, middle, and high schools in an attempt to tease out the value of an integrated leadership model. They began with the premise that transformational leadership is important, but it alone cannot bring about the desired student performance results required in today’s educational climate. Transformational leadership as used here means “the motivation of followers by raising their consciousness about the importance of organizational goals by inspiring them to transcend their own self-interest for the sake of the organization” (Bass, 1985; Bass & Avolio, 1993 as cited in Marks & Printy, 2002). In order to truly impact teaching and learning, transformational leadership must be teamed up with shared instructional leadership (Blase & Blase, 1999). This results in what Marks and Printy term “integrated leadership, [which] then reflects the transformational influence of the principal and the shared leadership actions of the principal and the teachers” (p. 377). The study found where integrated leadership was normative, teacher effectiveness and student achievement were high. Hence, it can be deduced that the time a principal spends building leadership capacity is extremely valuable in that the greater the number of teachers prepared to lead, the greater the opportunity for integrated leadership activities.
Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, Meyerson, and Orr (2007) capture the enormity of the charge indicating principals “must be educational visionaries and change agents, instructional leaders, curriculum and assessment experts, budget analysts, facility managers, special program administrators, and community builders” (p. 1). It is clear that in order to maximize efficiency and effectiveness, today’s principal needs a cadre of leaders supporting student learning. Consequently, this portion of the literature review focuses on the principal’s role in building capacity.

Defining capacity

The success of any school improvement effort is contingent upon the leadership capacity of an organization. Lambert (1998) defines leadership capacity as “broad-based, skillful involvement in the work of leadership” (p. 3). She views leadership as an organizational property as opposed to a behavioral trait found within certain individuals, and a principal is responsible not only for building his or her own capacity, but also that of teachers and support staff. In order to be successful a leader must convince teachers to view themselves as leaders too. They need to be comfortable with the idea that leadership is a natural companion to classroom instruction. Teachers lead students on a daily basis; why should they fear leading their peers? It is after all for the benefit of student learning. According to Lambert (1998) “The skills and dispositions of effective leaders include convening and facilitating dialogue, posing inquiry questions, coaching one another, mentoring a new teacher, and inviting others to become engaged with a new idea” (p. 18).

Lambert (1998) created a leadership capacity matrix (Figure 2.1) to graphically depict the various levels of leadership capacity demonstrated in schools. She cautions,
however, that organizations do not always fit into neat little boxes, so it is important to be mindful of this as we try to characterize varying degrees of leadership capacity.

![Figure 2.1: Leadership Capacity Matrix](image)

Organizational leaders strive to work their way into the fourth quadrant where both participation and skill levels are high (a.k.a. high leadership capacity.) The matrix defines five essential aspects that characterize schools with high leadership capacity.
To clarify, leadership is distributed and involves multiple players including teachers, parents, community members, and administrators – the broader the diversity of the participants the better. This collaborative work requires exceptional communication skills to ensure everyone buys into the shared vision, understands the goals and there is consensus about actions to be taken. People on the team are inquisitive; they want to understand student performance data and how they can impact student achievement for the better. They regularly reflect on results and do not shy away from asking probing questions about practice. Once a culture of collaboration and inquiry is established, teachers take ownership for student success, and thus undergo a transformation whereby they are no longer just responsible for what goes on within the four walls of their classrooms, but in the schoolhouse at large. Students are no longer my students, but rather our students.

As individual capacity builds, so does self-confidence. Teachers begin to view themselves and each other differently. They view their peers as resources and they also recognize the value they contribute. Thus, teachers become more comfortable teaching other adults. Many teachers feel empowered to take on leadership roles outside of their school sites, perhaps providing professional development to other teachers in the district. The energy is truly contagious. And, this is all possible because individuals come together to rally behind a common goal—student success, and they work in a trusting environment of mutual respect. This doesn’t just happen by accident; it happens by design. Principals deliberately engineer such climates by modeling expected behaviors and holding people accountable to high standards of
professionalism. The end result is improved instruction and increased student learning.

Newmann, King, and Youngs (2000) define school capacity as “the collective power of the full staff to improve student achievement school-wide” (p. 300). Focusing on both the individual and the organization, they developed five dimensions of school capacity which closely mirror Lambert’s construct: effective principal leadership; professional community consisting of shared goals for student learning, collaboration and collective responsibility, and reflective professional inquiry; program coherence with coordinated instructional programs focused on clear goals; technical resources (i.e. high quality curricula, assessment tools, computers, etc.); and knowledge, skills, and dispositions of individual teachers. Knapp (1997) added teacher professional development. Using this as a framework for a study of two restructuring elementary schools in Washington, Borko, Wolf, Simone and Uchiyama (2003) conducted case studies of the building of individual and collective capacity as reform initiatives were implemented. The key finding was that while the schools were characterized as “exemplary” in early stages of reform, schools should be evaluated for capacity rather than outcomes. While we don’t always have the luxury of time, especially when restructuring is mandated, this makes sense when considering Collins’s (2001) notion of the flywheel effect. The metaphor, initially used to illustrate the practices of companies that were able to sustain long term success, builds on the premise that it takes a disciplined, constant, collective effort of small pushes to move a flywheel. The movement is slow at first, but over time, momentum builds and the flywheel turns almost effortlessly.
One example of where the flywheel concept has been successfully applied in an educational setting is at Adlai Stevenson High School in Lincolnshire, Illinois. Kanold (2006) tells of his experience as principal of Stevenson and how the staff at that school developed a professional learning community to lift the underperforming school from the depths of failure into one of America’s top 100 high schools. The community devised a cycle of continuous improvement to protect against apathy and keep the staff moving towards greatness—greatness being a point that is never reached. Because the staff acts in accordance with its collective values and adheres to the guidelines set forth in the cycle of continuous improvement, they have gained the momentum to which Collins refers. They have built deep leadership capacity into the fabric of the organization. And, because the system is in place and the staff remains faithful to it, as new people enter the system, they are acculturated to operate consistently with existing norms of practice. It is this behavior that promotes sustainability.

The principal’s role in building leadership capacity

Linda Lambert is arguably the best known authority on building leadership capacity. Hence, the bulk of the research in this section can be attributed to her. Lambert (1998) contends that sustainable leadership is contingent upon building leadership capacity. In order for the programs and improvements developed under one administration to survive beyond a leader’s tenure, teachers must have the capacity to continue the essential work. Adlai Stevenson High School is a prime example of an organization in which the organizational capacity is sufficient to withstand the
departure of the figurehead and still produce results. The school has successfully withstood three leadership transitions!

While it is difficult to refute the fact that teachers are responsible for carrying out most of the school improvement work, principals still play a critical role. Lambert (1998) cites the building of collegial relationships among staff as one of the most important contributions of the principal. She finds that teachers are often in a dependency relationship with their principals. For example, they may not be accustomed to acting without first asking permission. Or perhaps they look for the principal to take the lead before they are willing to step forward. In other words, teachers are frequently uncomfortable in the shoes of the leader. It is foreign to them; and they need to be trained to act as leaders. Principals must be careful not to perpetuate this minimalist behavior and instead encourage teachers to take risks. Then, they must celebrate the successes. In the event that a teacher is unsuccessful in an attempt to lead, it is incumbent upon the principal to praise the effort, and then debrief the experience to determine what can be learned. Practice is the key to helping teachers begin to feel comfortable in their “leadership skins.”

Newmann and Wehlage (1995; 1996) contend that leaders of successfully restructured schools build organizational capacity by maintaining a collective focus on student achievement. These principals constantly tout their visions and engage staff in conversations that lead to deliberate action consistent with the vision. This modeling by the principal and public valuing of what is important provides teachers with concrete examples of what is expected. Blase and Blase (1999) also provide some insight into what principals do to develop capacity in their teaching staff. In a
 qualitative study of more than 800 teachers they examined how principal instructional leadership influenced teachers. They found principals who are effective instructional leaders use a broad-based approach, integrating reflection and growth to build a school culture of individual and shared critical examination for improvement. They view change as an opportunity for learning. This supports the development of professional learning communities and communities of practice. The strategies the study found to be most effective were talking with teachers to promote reflection and promoting professional growth with respect to teaching and learning.

Youngs and King (2002) strengthen this finding with a longitudinal qualitative study of nine urban elementary schools in different states. They found “Effective principals can sustain high levels of capacity by establishing trust, creating structures that promote teacher learning, and either connecting their faculties to external expertise or helping teachers generate reforms internally” (p. 643). In addition to the behaviors mentioned earlier, Table 2.2 offers several specific behaviors as proven strategies principals can implement to build leadership capacity. When a principal consistently practices these behaviors, he or she becomes a teacher of teachers. Eventually, the strategies will begin to appear in teacher-to-teacher interactions, thus expanding leadership capacity.
Table 2.2: Capacity Building Strategies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Capacity Building Strategies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pose questions that hold up assumptions and beliefs for reexamination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remain silent, letting other voices surface</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promote dialogue and conversations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raise a range of possibilities but avoid simplistic answers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keep the value agenda on the table, remind group that what they have agreed on is important, focus attention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide space and time for people to struggle with tough issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confront data, subject one’s own ideas to the challenge of evidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turn a concern into a question</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be wrong with grace, candor, and humility</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


School Improvement: A Product of Leadership Capacity

A leader’s primary motivation for building leadership capacity is ultimately linked to student achievement and school improvement. This requires a focused change effort and, just like a fine wine, leadership capacity takes time to mature.

Lambert (2005) conducted a study of 15 high leadership capacity schools in an attempt to identify what it was that these organizations did in order to sustain long-term success. She discovered that these schools shared several things in common including a distributed leadership approach, a vision-driven, student-focused conceptual framework, a data rich inquiry cycle, and structures and processes that supported leadership capacity building. Table 2.3 depicts the principal behaviors in each of the three phases of school improvement efforts – instructive, transitional, and high capacity, and provides the readers with important insights into how the school improvement process unfolds.
Table 2.3: Phases of School Improvement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase</th>
<th>Action</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Instructive: School organizes itself around a collaborative process where staff explores norms, teams, vision, use of data, shared expectations, and ways of working together.</td>
<td>Principal directs focus on results, plants seeds for important conversations, solves difficult problems, challenges assumptions, confronts incompetence, establishes structures and processes that engage colleagues, teaches new practices, and articulates beliefs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transitional: Principal releases some control as some teachers begin to emerge as leaders.</td>
<td>Principal provides support by continuing the important conversations, coaching, and problem-solving in a safe and trusting manner.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Leadership Capacity: Teachers play a more prominent leadership role. Teacher-principal relations are more reciprocal.</td>
<td>Principal serves as a facilitator or co-participant. He or she is no longer needed to mediate conversation, frame problems or challenge assumptions independently, as teachers have increasingly assumed this role.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Notice the change in the role of the teacher over time. In the initial or instructive phase, the teacher is not directly mentioned, but the description implies the teacher acts primarily as a learner, trying to make meaning of the new work being undertaken. Here the principal acts as teacher. In the transitional phase, teachers assume greater leadership responsibility, but the principal takes an active role in scaffolding teacher work and serves as a coach. When an organization reaches a level of high leadership capacity, teachers lead the work and the principal is a co-participant. The teacher-principal relationship is reciprocal.

As leaders attempt to build capacity, it is important they are cognizant of these distinct stages of implementation. This will them help sustain their efforts during times when they feel their leadership is not having an impact. They can also find support from their educational peers within common communities of practice.
Teacher Leadership: A Distributed Measure

Harris (2003) suggests “the literature and associated empirical work on teacher leadership provides an important starting point in understanding and illuminating how distributed leadership actually works in schools” (p. 318). Darling-Hammond, Bullmaster and Cobb (1995) also make a solid argument for teachers as leaders, and distributed leadership when they suggest “teacher leadership doesn’t have to be restricted to formally defined positions but can be embedded in the tasks and roles that do not create artificial, imposed, formal hierarchies and positions” (p. 87).

Thus far we have established a need for teacher leadership—the job of the principal has simply become too complex. The previous section provided a framework for building teacher leadership capacity and the role of the principal in building capacity. Next, the construct of distributed leadership is discussed.

An Overview of Distributed Leadership

While first introduced in the mid 1900’s, distributed leadership has recently emerged as a tool to combat the frustrations of today’s school administrators. In contrast to the “Great Man Theory” (Borgatta, Bales & Couch, 1958), which features organizations spearheaded by charismatic, almost larger than life authoritarian leaders, the distributed leadership framework allows leaders to leverage the strengths and abilities of all organizational members. It focuses not on the traits of the leader, but rather the leadership practice of multiple leaders and followers. Much of the writing surrounding distributed leadership is theoretical in nature and definitions vary (Bennett, Wise & Woods, 2003; Hargreaves & Fink, 2006). At inception the construct remained loosely defined, describing leadership as fluid, passing from one individual
to another, depending on the situation (Gibb, 1954). Expanding upon this rudimentary
definition, Johnson (1997) underscored the sharing of leadership responsibilities,
proposing that distributed leadership is placed “not in the individual agency of one,
but in the collaborative efforts of many” (p. 2). In practice, such collaboration
introduces its own set of challenges, as participants wrestle with the social, political,
and cultural dynamics of collective deliberation and action. Theorists continue to
pursue a more accurate understanding of these complexities, advancing distributed
models as one of the current theoretical frameworks for educational leadership.

Leading theorists characterize distributed leadership as a network of fluid
relationships within which multiple leaders and followers interact, for the benefit (or
intended benefit) of an organization (Elmore, 2000, 2002; Gronn, 2000, 2002;
where individuals or groups interact in concert, pooling their knowledge and expertise
in an effort to achieve a common goal. This collaboration has a synergistic effect
whereby the end result is greater than that which could be achieved individually.
Elmore (2000) described the distribution of leadership functions specifically within a
context of instructional improvement. According to Elmore, school leadership is the
“guidance and direction of instructional improvement” (p.13) and the knowledge base
for school improvement rests with teachers. Hence, distributed leadership
appropriately empowers those who possess the knowledge and have the greatest
ability to affect change.

Spillane, Halverson, and Diamond (2001) recommend that researchers focus
on the school as a unit of analysis rather than the individual leader or leaders.

Principals alone do not lead schools to greatness; their success is contingent upon the efforts of a team (Spillane, 2005). Lashway (2003) concurs:

Effective principals do not just string together a series of individual actions, but systematically distribute leadership by building it into the fabric of the school. Leadership is distributed not by delegating it or giving it away, but by weaving together people, materials, and organizational structures in a common cause. (p. 3)

Neuman & Simmons (2000) share a corresponding viewpoint:

Distributed leadership calls on everyone associated with schools . . . to take responsibility for student achievement and to assume leadership roles in areas in which they are competent and skilled. Leadership is no longer seen as a function of age, position, or job title. Indeed, it is a characteristic less of an individual than of a community and is a responsibility assumed with the consent of the community. (p. 10)

While definitions vary, common themes emerge. First, distributed leadership is a framework for analyzing leadership practice. It is not a practice, but rather a perspective (Spillane, 2004, 2005, 2006). In a distributed model, leadership is stretched over an organization, rather than resting in the hands of a few at the top of an organizational hierarchy (Bennett, et al., 2003; Lambert, 1998; Ogawa & Bossert, 1995; Pounder, Ogawa, & Adams, 1995; Spillane, et al., 2001). This distribution results in a flatter organizational structure and, some argue, a more empowered and effective organization. Additionally, distributed leadership is not about dividing task
responsibilities across different roles, but rather across situations (Bennett, et al., 2003; Copland, 2003; Spillane, 2005, 2006; Timperley, 2005). Individuals who work in schools in which leadership is distributed, possess a collective vision and view the business of teaching and learning as a shared responsibility (Bennett, et al., 2003; Copland, 2003; Lambert, 1998; Ogawa & Bossert, 1995; Pounder, et al., 1995; Spillane, et al., 2001). Finally, schools that exhibit cultures of distributed leadership act as professional learning communities (Bennett, et al., 2003; Berman & McLaughlin, 1978; Hargreaves & Fink, 2006; Spillane, 2006). Wallach, Lambert, Copland, and Lowry (2005) in a report analyzing distributed leadership in small school conversions clarify the concept as:

moving away from reliance on the traditional high school hierarchy toward shared practice that embodies the following qualities: leadership is shared among people in different roles; leadership is situational rather than hierarchical; and authority is based upon expertise rather than formal position.

(p. 2)

*Extending Leadership Beyond the People*

Spillane (2006) brings clarity to those wrestling with the multiple definitions of distributed leadership.

A distributed perspective on leadership involves two aspects: the leader-plus aspect and the practice aspect. While the leader-plus aspect is vital, it is insufficient on its own. The leadership practice aspect moves the focus from aggregating the actions of individual leaders to the interactions among leaders, followers, and their situation. (p. 12)
By providing this distinction he gives researchers license to delve deeper into leadership practice and to identify the nuances captured within the interactions of multiple players who “wear different hats” depending on the situation. The key words here are *situation* and *interactions*. Situation is more than the environmental context and interactions include more than exchanges between people. Once again, Spillane (2004, 2005, 2006) helps clear the murkiness by adding routines and tools to the environment. Routines are interdependent practices in which multiple parties repeatedly interact in the course of their work. Tools are instruments that shape interactions. Classroom observation protocols, student assessment data, and lesson plans are a few tools commonly used in schools. Just as the leaders and followers in an interaction can change, so can the tools and routines.

Now that a conceptual definition of distributed leadership has been established, it is important to make some distinctions between distributed leadership and other forms of leadership.

*What Distributed Leadership is Not*

Because the notion of distributed leadership is still in its infancy, there are lingering misconceptions about how it is defined. Perhaps the most popular misconception is the idea that distributed leadership is a trendy new label for delegation. This is not the case. Whereas delegation calls for the transfer of responsibility for a task or assignment to a subordinate and is dependent upon an organizational hierarchy, distributed leadership is far more complex. Just like delegation is not a synonym for distributed leadership, nor is shared leadership, collaborative leadership, team leadership, dispersed leadership, or democratic
leadership. According to Spillane (2005), distributed leadership is a lens through which leadership practice may be viewed. In 2006 he eloquently wrote, “Distributed leadership is not a blueprint for doing school leadership more effectively. It is a way to generate insights into how leadership can be practiced more or less effectively” (p. 9). In other words, distributed leadership is not necessarily a form of leadership practice, but rather a framework that can be used as a tool to analyze leadership in different contexts. Spillane and Orlina (2005) go on to characterize distributed leadership as a product of the interactions of school leaders, followers, and aspects of their situation. Spillane (2005) clarifies:

> Depending on the situation, a distributed perspective allows for shared leadership. A team leadership approach does not necessarily involve subscribing to a distributed perspective in which leadership practice is viewed as the interaction of leaders, followers, and situation. Similarly, a distributed perspective allows for leadership that can be democratic or autocratic. (p. 5)

Thus, distributed leadership involves multiple leaders, some with formal authority and some without. It lies not in the actions of a leader, but rather in the interactions between leaders and followers and the activities and tasks they set out to accomplish. Further, leaders and followers will change roles over time depending on the situation, and the expertise required. Finally, distributed leadership is “a set of functions or qualities shared across a much broader segment of the school community that encompasses administrators, teachers and other professionals and community members both internal and external to the school” (Copland, 2003, p. 376).
Like with many other theoretical constructs, there are varying degrees to which organizations practice distributed leadership (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006). Some organizations practice it occasionally, when in it feels most convenient; while others have engrained it into their culture and thus, practice it regularly. The most evolved point along this distributed leadership continuum reflects total decentralization of leadership authority whereby there are multiple leaders and decision-making authority is passed from one leader to another based on the knowledge and skill set required in a given situation.

**A Case for Distributed Leadership**

With the theoretical framework in place, it is important to examine the empirical base that makes an argument for distributing leadership. Leithwood, Jantzi, Ryan and Steinback (1997) conducted an extensive mixed method study involving 2,727 elementary and secondary school teachers and focusing on the impact of principal and teacher leadership. While both demonstrate a significant influence, “principal leadership seems to be about a third stronger than teacher leadership” (p. 24). While this study does not speak directly to the collective impact of distributed leadership, the combined data may lead one to conclude distributed leadership would result in even greater influence.

Using this same sample, Leithwood and Jantzi (1998, 1999) studied the impact of distributed leadership on student engagement in school and concluded neither principal or teacher leadership had a significant impact. When examined more closely however, the results indicate teacher leadership far outweighs the impact of principal leadership before taking into account the moderating effects of family educational
culture. When this variable is taken into account, teacher leadership effects are reduced, but remain at least as strong as that of principals. Although principal and teacher leadership do not appear to have a significant impact on student engagement, the authors caution practitioners not to dismiss their potential influence because when compared to other sources of leadership, these two hold the most promise.

Timperley (2005) examined the impact of distributed leadership on school improvement using the lens advocated by Spillane (2004). The four-year qualitative study focused on prescriptive literacy improvement efforts at seven elementary schools in New Zealand. Largely centered on the literacy leader’s role in spanning the boundaries between teachers and principals and providing instructional leadership support, the study relied on leadership team interviews, team meeting observations, and student achievement data. It yielded mixed results; in year three, a majority of the schools did improve after applying the instructional strategies advocated by the literacy leaders. However, while improvement was evident, it was not significant. Had the study been extended, greater achievement may have been realized.

Gordon (2005) attempted to demonstrate a correlation between distributed leadership and student achievement with a mixed method study. Using a survey generated by the Connecticut State Department of Education and based on the work of Elmore (2000) Gordon gathered both quantitative and qualitative data to measure the impact of distributed leadership on school performance. She believed that by examining the dimensions of distributed leadership found in high-performing schools but absent for low-performing schools, she might be able to identify a set of strategies consistent with high performance and sustainability. The study included 36 schools
(elementary and secondary); 15 in need of improvement and 21 participants in the Connecticut Urban Leadership Academy. After data cleansing, the sample size was 1,257. She attempted to show a relationship between four areas: mission, vision, and goals; school culture, shared responsibility, and leadership practices as indicators of distributed leadership. The results revealed high and low performing schools differed across all four areas, but school culture was the only category that reflected a significant difference. A multiple regression analysis indicated school culture might be a statistically significant predictor of school performance.

An earlier study by Camburn et al. (2003) examined leadership distribution in 374 elementary schools. They found that schools participating in a comprehensive school reform (CSR) effort were staffed at higher rates in terms of leadership positions and received more staff development focused on instructional practices. Several of these CSR schools had program coordinators whose primary focus was school improvement and instructional leadership. By assigning these individuals a leadership role, clearly communicating expectations for building instructional leadership capacity in teachers, and coupling this message with significant staff development, the leadership circle is effectively expanded. While the study provides some insight into how CSR programs reconfigure and activate leadership, the authors caution that additional research is warranted. The scope was limited in time, and relied on self-reported data. Measuring student achievement in schools with CSR coaches is another avenue for further research on this topic.
Distributed Leadership Disputed

The existing literature on distributed leadership is limited when it comes to those who dispute the concept. However, Gunter & Ribbins (2003) do shed some light in this area.

While distributed leadership tends to be seen as normatively a good thing, it has also been contested . . . most notably because of the complexities of who does the distribution, who is in receipt of the distribution, and what does it look like within the realities of site based performance management. (p. 132)

This confusion over the complexity of the concept and its definition are only part of the problem though. Perhaps the most damning condemnation of distributed leadership comes from Silins, Mulford, and Zarins (2002). They acknowledge that leadership is relational and can be exhibited by any members of schools or their communities. However, when they conducted a four-year longitudinal study in Australian high schools they were unable to measure a significant correlation between distributed leadership and student participation in and engagement in school.

Moreover, this caused them to posit that distributed leadership may actually serve as an additional burden to teachers who are already overworked and stressed. Similarly, Fullan (1995) was unable to find a connection between student involvement and learning and a decentralized leadership structure. Pounder et al. (1995) also failed to show a direct link between overall leadership in school and student achievement.

Challenges to Distributing Leadership

Distributing leadership is an intriguing idea; however, as alluded to in the prior section, it is not without its challenges. Chrispeels (2004) examined six obstacles
principals face in sharing leadership. Note the word *sharing* is used as a synonym for *distributing* here, as Chrispeels uses these terms interchangeably throughout her work. Organizational structure is one of the greatest obstacles principals face in sharing leadership, operating within hierarchical structures and reporting to an external body in the form of school district personnel. The directives provided by district personnel negatively impact a principal’s ability to focus on building a distributed leadership culture at the school site, and some principals are reluctant to *share* since they are ultimately accountable. Others fear systems enacted at the site level may appear to counter those mandated by the district, thus showing a lack of support. According to Chrispeels (2004) “the stronger the institutional norms of hierarchy and control, the less likely the leaders will sense agency and authority to act to distribute leadership” (p.10). The fact that it is difficult for many to see beyond the traditional teacher role compounds the problem, especially when dealing with veteran teachers. Pressure from unions that want to limit the teacher role to instruction and to adhere tightly to contractual agreements is another barrier. Chrispeels also cites ignorance as a factor. Principals who have not experienced distributed leadership firsthand, may not be cognizant of its benefits, and therefore, are not as motivated to implement it. A lack of intra- and interpersonal skills is provided as a final roadblock to executing distributed leadership. Principals who do not possess strong communication skills, empathy, listening skills, and the ability to facilitate group discussion are clearly at a disadvantage.

Timperley (2005) added the dynamic of teachers being led by other teachers to the work of Chrispeels (2004). She discovered “teacher leaders with high
acceptability among their colleagues are not necessarily those with expertise. Conversely, the micro-politics within a school can reduce the acceptability of those with expertise” (p. 418). Hence, simply distributing leadership does not necessary equate to building instructional capacity.

**Building a Distributed Leadership Culture**

At this juncture the reader should have a comprehensive understanding of distributed leadership, how it impacts teachers and principals, its benefits and its shortcomings. However, absent the knowledge of how to create an environment in which distributed leadership thrives, this information lacks real value. A case study of fourteen schools conducted by the Hay Group Education and commissioned by National Center for School Leadership (NCSL), detailed five factors essential “in establishing, extending and sustaining distributed leadership” (Arrowsmith, 2004, p. 22). These factors, later referred to as “Pillars,” are defined in Table 2.4.

**Table 2.4: Five Pillars of Distributed Leadership in Schools**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Pillar</th>
<th>Characteristics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self-confident and self-effacing headship</td>
<td>- Distributed leadership usually begins with a change of head.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Distributed leadership is given, not taken.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Head has drive to influence and empower others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clarity of structure and accountability</td>
<td>- Clear delegation of authority to lead, not simply responsibility for tasks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Investment in leadership capability</td>
<td>- Strong self image as a “leader” informed by internal model of “good leadership” and values.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A culture of trust</td>
<td>- Trust and respect are required to support an informal leadership network and culture of inquiry.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A turning point | A major event gives momentum to the evolution of distributed leadership.
---|---


The characteristics outlined in this table have significant implications for school leaders interested in instituting a distributed leadership model at their sites. However, the reader should heed the following cautions. First, while Arrowsmith (2004) indicates distributed leadership usually begins with a change in head, this is not a deal breaker. Distributed leadership can occur without this transition, although it will likely be more challenging to implement. Regardless, the same “reculturation” process is essential in initiating such a dramatic change. According to Fullan (2001) reculturation is the process whereby teachers question and change their beliefs and practices. As cited in Patterson (2002), Fullan argues that “restructuring a school without reculturing accomplishes very little in terms of changing what teachers do in their classrooms or in changing relationships among people in schools that are mediated by deeply held cultural assumptions” (p. 56). Additionally, while Hay Group Education has found distributed leadership to be given, not taken, other authors (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006) challenge this stipulation, arguing it is taken as much as it is given. Consensus on this issue has yet to be reached.

**Summary**

To situate this study within what is known about teacher leadership, the principals’ role in supporting it, how it is cultivated and how it can become more
widespread, this chapter reviewed the literature on the changing role of the principal, teacher leadership, leadership capacity building, and distributed leadership.

The literature on the changing role of the principal indicated that with the increasing demand to produce evidence of student learning, the job description of the principal has become very complex and arguably, unmanageable for one individual despite their qualifications and level of commitment. Principals acknowledge the need for increased instructional leadership, but are too bogged down with other aspects of the job that they are unable to adequately attend to this need.

Teachers are considered as a potential amelioration. The literature on teacher leadership revealed that teachers can act both formally and informally. Teachers are respected for their expertise and thus are well qualified to expand the leadership base in schools. However, the current structure of the profession poses challenges when teachers try to expand their influence beyond the walls of their classroom. The professional culture of autonomy, egalitarianism, and seniority is a significant barrier that must be addressed.

If they are to access the potential of teacher leadership, principals must develop school cultures that support the building of teacher leadership capacity. A framework for building high leadership capacity schools is examined. This is of critical importance as it acts as an engine that allows for leadership distribution.

Finally, the construct of distributed leadership is examined. While the body of empirical research in this area is limited, especially at the high school level, distributed leadership shows some promise as a systematic approach to contending with the increased demands of the principalship, and is definitely worthy of further study.
CHAPTER 3
Methodology

Introduction

Chapter 2 reviewed the literature on building leadership capacity, distributed leadership, and principal leadership as it relates to developing and supporting teacher leadership in high schools. Gaps in the literature were noted. Chapter 3 begins with an overview of the study purpose and the research questions. It then addresses study design and the rationale for selecting the methodology. Detailed information on participants and sample selection rationale is provided. Data collection and analysis procedures are explained. Issues of validity and reliability are also addressed. The section concludes with a summary of the study methodology and highlights what the reader can expect to find in Chapter 4.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to investigate how principals use teacher leadership as a complement to their own instructional leadership to bring about school reform. The study examined how teachers in three comprehensive high schools within one school district in Southern California experience their roles as teacher leaders. Specifically, the study explored the roles of these teachers in building organizational capacity, and how their leadership development was supported or constrained by principals. Teachers’ roles as instructional leaders and their interactions with principals were paid close attention. The study also examined principals’ perceptions about ways in which they support teacher leadership and build leadership capacity. However, the primary objective was to elicit stories of how teachers experience
principals’ capacity building measures at the secondary level. A review of the literature uncovered many studies related to principals’ instructional leadership, but few focused on teacher perceptions of principals’ role in building teacher leadership capacity, thus suggesting a need for the study. The findings reveal several insights useful to principals interested in building leadership capacity within their staffs and distributing leadership among their staffs.

Research Questions

Three questions guided this study:

1) What principal behaviors and organizational conditions do teacher leaders perceive as empowering or constraining their development of teacher leadership capacity?

2) What deliberate decisions do principals make to increase organizational capacity in relation to teacher leadership?

3) How do teacher leaders perceive their ability to serve as instructional leaders influencing school reform efforts?

Research Design

This single case study elucidated teacher perceptions of how they experienced principal efforts to build teacher leadership capacity in their high schools. It was primarily qualitative in nature, although descriptive statistics were used to analyze some of the data. The study took place in three phases – teacher leader identification; teacher leader questionnaires, interviews, and focus groups; and principal interviews.
**Phase 1: Teacher leader identification**

With 322 potential teacher leaders at three sites, and the desire to conduct personal interviews to access rich responses it was important to arrive at a manageable sample size.

**Table 3.1: Potential Study Participants**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Asian</th>
<th>Filipino</th>
<th>Latino</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Administrators</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>178</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>292</td>
<td>322</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Teachers and administrators (principals and assistant principals) in the three high schools participating in the study were invited to complete a seven question online survey (Appendix A). The survey instrument, which was administered via Survey Monkey, required participants to identify up to five teachers on their campus who they view as leaders in a variety of categories.
The questions on the survey were structured so that respondents identified teacher leaders in a variety of areas including: improvement of teaching and learning, instructional issues, curricular issues, classroom management, diversity issues, staff development and student interventions. The content of the survey was similar for teachers and administrators, though not identical because the questions were role specific.

The response rate for administrators was 92.3%. All three principals completed the survey, as did 9 of 10 assistant principals. The response rate for teachers was much lower. The researcher sent teachers sent two reminders via email, and principals also sent emails to staff encouraging participation. This resulted in an overall teacher response rate of 37.2%. While this was lower than desired, it does represent the views of 120 teachers. Therefore the teacher to administrator participation ratio is 10:1.

![Figure 3.2 Teacher Leader Survey Response Rate](image)

The survey data was then used to inform the study sample. Identification by peers was essential because simply going to a list of people serving in traditional leadership roles posed two challenges: 1) They may be serving in name only and not
really acting as leaders; and 2) Key individuals who act informally rather than serving on structured committees, may be overlooked. Failure to identify the individuals faculties say are the “true leaders” would result in a weaker study. The involvement of those teachers who are not characterized as leaders by their peers was limited to informing the sample.

In order to qualify as a potential participant, a teacher must have been identified as a teacher leader by both their peers and administrators. Teachers nominated 221 of their peers as teacher leaders.

Administrators nominated 105 teacher leaders. Ninety-one of the teachers named by administrators as teacher leaders were also nominated by their peers.

Figure 3.3: Teacher Leaders Nominated by Administrators and Peers

Next, these 91 teacher leaders were examined more closely. Two lists were created – one reflecting the teacher votes and one reflecting the administrator votes. Teachers on each list were ranked according to the number of nominations they received in descending order. The top 10 teacher leaders identified on the teacher list and the top 10 teachers on the administrators were considered for participation. Upon closer
examination it was determined that five teacher leaders were ranked in the top 10 of both lists. In other words, teachers and administrators commonly identified 5 teacher leaders in the top ten. Since these the names of these five appeared on both lists, the total number of potential participants was 15.

When contacted by the researcher, all 15 agreed to participate in the study.

**Phase 2: Teacher leader questionnaires, interviews and focus groups**

Teacher leaders (n=15) nominated by their peers and administrators were invited to participate in personal interviews and focus groups designed to elicit their teacher leader experiences as well as their perceptions about the ways in which principals support or constraint their leadership. The email soliciting their participation is attached as Appendix B. Prior to interviewing, participants were asked to complete a pre-interview questionnaire (Appendix C), in order to obtain demographic information useful during the data analysis phase of the study. Interviews were conducted at a place and time convenient to participants, and generally did not last more than one hour. They were audio-taped and later
transcribed with the permission of the interviewees. The teacher leader interview protocol is attached as Appendix D. The interview protocol consisted of several structured and open-ended questions that enabled the researcher to keep a strong focus on the research questions, yet resulted in a conversational style that allowed participants an opportunity to guide the process (Yin, 2003). The researcher also developed a Research Question Matrix (Table 3.2) linking interview questions to research questions to ensure ample data was collected.

Table 3.2: Research Question Matrix

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Interview Question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Q1: What principal behaviors and organizational conditions do teacher leaders perceive as empowering or constraining their development of teacher leadership capacity?</td>
<td>How does your principal help you in your role as an instructional leader? (TIP: 3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What would you like to see your principal do to better support your leadership? (TIP: 4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How has your principal supported you to further develop and lead other teachers? (TIP: 5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tell me about how your professional development needs have or have not been met. What type of training have you received that you believe has been helpful? Where did it come from? Did you request it or was it suggested to you? (TIP: 6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The research indicates a strong personal relationship with the principal is really the key – that they like each other is what is important. What do you think? Give me an example of when you have really felt it’s clicking. (TIP: 7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Question</td>
<td>Interview Question</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>--------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What have been your interactions with principals in general? Not necessarily this principal, think of former principals and assistant principals. Have they been helpful to you in your work? How so? (TIP: 8)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have you had any other mentors that have motivated you to lead? What actions did your mentor take to support or encourage you? (TIP: 9)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Looking at your school culture as a whole, what are organizational structures, characteristics, or conditions that compel you to take action to improve the school or to lead your peers? (TIP: 10)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Q2: What deliberate decisions do principals make to increase organizational capacity in relation to teacher leadership?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview Question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In what ways do you support teacher leadership on your campus? (PIP:1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What steps have you taken as principal to ensure that teachers have an active leadership role in carrying out the school vision? (PIP: 2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As a site principal, how do you leverage the strengths of the teachers on your campus to help you meet your school improvement goals? (PIP: 3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What additional support, if any, do you think teachers need to develop their leadership skills? (PIP: 4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You have a real need to maximize the organizational capacity, so you must make some deliberate decisions about that. What are you doing in this area? Is it working? Are you building organizational capacity? What evidence do you have to support this? How do you think teacher leaders perceive this?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3.2 (Continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Interview Question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(PIP: 5)</td>
<td>How do you know who you can count on to help increase the organizational capacity of the school? (PIP: 6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How do you identify what they need to be able to increase the capacity of the school? (PIP: 7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What are three major reforms going on at your school right now? Who do you look to to support that? How do you get your information about that? Have you got any professional development going on around that? (PIP: 9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What value does teacher leadership add to student learning and to the quality of school life on your campus? (PIP: 10)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q3: How do teachers perceive their ability to serve as instructional leaders influencing school reform efforts? | You were identified as a teacher leader by your principal and peers. What do you think you do that causes them to view you as a leader? (TIP: 1) |
| Tell me about your ability to serve as an instructional leader influencing school reform efforts. (TIP: 2) |
| What is the principal’s vision for your school? (TIP: 11) |
| How, if at all, did you have input into developing this vision? (TIP: 12) |
| How do you help to support and carry out the school vision? (TIP: 13) |
| How could teacher leaders be supported to fully implement the school vision? (TIP: 14) |
Table 3.2 (Continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Interview Question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes teachers have ideas that may have the ability to change organizational</td>
<td>Sometimes teachers have ideas that may have the ability to change organizational effectiveness for the better, but they are reluctant to either take action or to share their opinions. What do you think could be done to help encourage more teachers to participate in implementing the school vision? (TIP: 15)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>effectiveness for the better, but they are reluctant to either take action or to share their opinions. What do you think could be done to help encourage more teachers to participate in implementing the school vision? (TIP: 15)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If you could have one thing that you think would enable you to be a better teacher leader, what would it be? (TIP: 16)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q4: What obstacles do teachers experience when trying to increase organizational capacity as it relates to teacher leadership?</td>
<td>What challenges do you face in trying to support teacher leadership and build leadership capacity? (PIP: 7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How does the system inhibit or enhance your ability to cultivate teacher leadership capacity? (PIP: 8)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This tool was used as a reference throughout the interview process and the analysis phase of the study.

**Phase 3: Principal interviews**

Principals were asked to participate in personal interviews similar to those conducted with teacher leaders. The primary purpose of these interviews was to identify the deliberate decisions they make to increase organizational capacity in relation to teacher leadership. These interviews were also recorded and transcribed. The principal interview protocol is attached as Appendix E.

Personal interviews and focus groups yielded rich responses about how principals perceive their role in developing and sustaining teacher leadership; how
teacher leaders perceive the principals’ role in building teacher leadership capacity, and how teacher leadership is or might be better supported by high school principals. The power of qualitative studies in providing the researcher access to an in depth understanding of the reality of individuals in unique settings is well documented in the literature (Merriam, 1998; Patton, 2002). Another advantage of using qualitative methods is that they are fluid, enabling the researcher to explore different avenues of interest as the process unfolds. Yin (1994) contends a case study methodology is appropriate when context plays a key role in understanding the phenomenon under study. A case study whereby details about unique circumstances at play can be uncovered and openly explored was selected because teacher leadership is likely to look differently across sites.

Context

The research was conducted within the context of three different comprehensive high school campuses in a nationally recognized suburban pre K-12 school district in Southern California. High schools were selected as the focus of the study given their size, the continuous struggle principals’ face in leading them in the Accountability Era, and the limited amount of prior research in this area.

Data Sources and Collection

Participants

Three high school principals, nine assistant principals and 120 teachers participated in the survey portion of this study. The same three principals and 15 teachers participated in the interview/focus group phase of the study.
Sampling

Two sampling techniques were used. A purposeful sampling method was used to obtain the sites and their accompanying principals. Upon making the decision to focus on high schools, a continuation school was excluded from the study because it was not comprehensive in terms of curriculum offered and population served, and it was much smaller in size. This left four qualifying high schools within the district. However, because the researcher is employed at one of these sites, it was excluded in an effort to protect the validity of the study. The principals at the remaining three sites were asked to participate in both the survey and interview components of the study. The participation of the assistant principals at these sites was limited to the survey in which teacher leaders are identified.

A snowball sampling strategy was implemented to have teachers identify other teacher leaders. According to Creswell (2005) this gives the researcher access to individuals whom he or she may not know, but are likely to have important insights into the research topic. This ultimately results in a more reliable study.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was ongoing and overlapped data collection. While use of predetermined descriptive codes (Miles & Huberman, 1994) was considered, a more inductive approach advocated by Strauss (1987) was selected. This approach enabled the nuances of individual contexts to be considered. As survey data came in, it was coded and themes identified. At the conclusion of each interview, a contact summary memo detailing the experience and noting potential emerging themes (Miles & Huberman, 1994) was created. In effect, these became field notes and were used as a
quick reference for comparing data. The formal analysis, however, began following the transcription of data. Transcripts were read thoroughly. The researcher also listened to each audio-recording at least twice, in an effort to capture any nuances in conversation or tone that may have been lost during transcription. Initial themes and relationships were identified and documented in memos (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

All of this work was supported by the use of the Hyper Research software program. This software enabled the researcher to easily access information and effectively supported the data analysis. An analogy of a blanket can be used to summarize this process. The analyzed data are like threads. Interpretation is the process of weaving the threads into a fabric that can stand the test of time. That test, known as validity is discussed in the next section.

Validity

Maxwell (2005) says of validity “…it depends on the relationship of your conclusions to reality, and there are no methods that can completely assure that you have captured this” (p. 105). While one can’t be certain a study is valid, much can be done to protect the internal validity of a study. In this case, the following actions were taken: triangulation of data, member checks, peer debriefing, and uncovering researcher bias.

Triangulation of Data

According to Creswell (2005) “Triangulation is the process of corroborating evidence from different individuals, types of data, or methods of data collection in descriptions and themes in qualitative research” (p. 252). This study triangulated teacher leader responses to interview questions with principal interview responses.
Member Checking

In order to ensure that the information gathered was accurate; participants were emailed portions of the interview transcripts that were cited in the study, and asked to thoroughly review them. They were asked to add clarifying comments in red, so they could be easily accessed. This measure protected against transcriber error, and ensured interpretation was consistent with intent.

Peer Debriefing

Lincoln and Guba (1985) recommend peer debriefing as “a process of exposing oneself to a disinterested peer in a manner paralleling an analytic session and for the purpose of exploring aspects of inquiry that might otherwise remain only implicit within the inquirer’s mind” (p. 308). In order to protect the integrity of the study a peer with doctoral research experience read three interview transcripts and checked the appropriateness of the researcher’s coding.

Researcher Bias

Maxwell (2005) says:

In qualitative studies, the researcher is the instrument of the research, and the research relationships are the means by which the research gets done….The research relationships you establish can facilitate or hinder other components of the research design, such as participant selection and data collection. (p.83)

The researcher is employed by the school district studied. At the time of the study, she did not work at any of the participating sites. However, she did work previously as an assistant principal at one of the study sites, and thus had pre-existing relationships with several informants. Careful consideration went into how these
experiences might impact the study. It can be argued that researcher bias might be an issue. On the other hand, knowledge of the people and the organizational history can also be viewed as an advantage in soliciting accurate and meaningful responses. She contemplated using an alternate interviewer but decided her relationship with the principal could be characterized as open and honest, and based on prior experience; he would trust her to protect the confidentiality of his responses. Potential teacher leader participants were asked to excuse themselves from the pool if after reviewing the protocol they did not feel comfortable discussing issues of practice with the researcher. None of the initial participants dropped from the study.

Limitations of the Study

In addition to the validity issues discussed above, this study has several other limitations. For example, the study is limited to three school sites within one school district. This certainly precludes generalizability; however, the research is definitely beneficial to this specific district. Also, the fact that it adds to the body of research on the subject at large is not to be dismissed. The use of self-reporting informants posed another potential challenge; however, the ability to triangulate data provided by the principal with that provided by teachers helped to ensure accuracy.

Summary

This study provides principals with a stronger base for reconsidering the role of teachers as instructional leaders. It adds to the body of knowledge by focusing on teacher leadership on high performing high school campuses, as cultivated and supported by principals making deliberate decisions about organizational capacity building. It also identifies strategies for creating school climates that support teacher
leadership. Finally, while previous studies have examined teacher perceptions about principals’ instructional leadership, this study is unique in that it focuses on principals’ leadership capacity building behaviors and it includes an in-depth interview component, which is missing from prior studies.

Three questions guided this study:

1) What principal behaviors and organizational conditions do teacher leaders perceive as empowering or constraining their development of teacher leadership capacity?

2) What deliberate decisions do principals make to increase organizational capacity in relation to teacher leadership?

3) How do teacher leaders perceive their ability to serve as instructional leaders influencing school reform efforts?

A qualitative case study design was selected in order to gather rich responses about how principals support and constrain teacher leadership – specifically, how it is perceived by teacher leaders, how principals act to build teacher leadership, and how it might be better supported by high school principals. Data was collected via surveys, personal interviews, and focus groups. It was analyzed using the Hyper Research software program. In order to protect the validity of the study researcher bias was disclosed, and strategies such as triangulation of data, member checking, and peer debriefing were implemented. Limitations of the study and remedies were discussed.

The findings of the study are discussed in Chapter 4.
CHAPTER 4

Results

Introduction

This study explored the principals’ role in building teacher leadership capacity in high schools. More specifically it examined teacher perceptions about their principals’ leadership efforts and how they support and/or constrain teacher leadership. It also looked at the strategic decisions principals make to leverage teacher strengths in implementing change initiatives. The study was conducted in three high performing high schools in a suburban, Southern California school district. By focusing on high performing schools, the researcher aimed to gain insight into what works so these practices could be replicated in other schools. While the body of research on building leadership capacity is growing, it remains scarce, especially at the high school level.

This chapter presents findings that emerged from the investigation of the following three research questions:

1) What principal behaviors and organizational conditions do teacher leaders perceive as empowering or constraining their development of teacher leadership capacity?

2) What deliberate decisions do principals make to increase organizational capacity in relation to teacher leadership?

3) How do teacher leaders perceive their ability to serve as instructional leaders influencing school reform efforts?
Answers to these questions are gleaned from survey data and interviews with principals and teacher leaders. The chapter begins with a description of the case study to provide the reader with the context of the organizations. A summary of the methodology including a description of participants is also provided. Next, the findings are shared. Findings are separated into two sections, those emerging from questionnaires and those rising from personal interviews and focus groups. The data uncovered via interviews is presented thematically. Findings associated with each of the three research questions are provided. The chapter concludes with a summary and a brief introduction to Chapter 5.

Description of the Case Study

Three high school principals and 15 teachers participated in either individual personal interviews or focus groups in an effort to capture their perceptions about teacher leadership and the principal’s role in building capacity. The study took place in a suburban school district in Southern California. The researcher had unique access to study participants because she was also employed by the district. Although user generalizability is limited in this study, the findings may offer valuable insights to administrators interested in building organizational capacity.

Summary of Methodology

A brief summary of the study’s methodology is provided below. However, a more comprehensive explanation can be found in Chapter 3. The reader will find a review of the research design, study participants, data collection procedures, and data analysis procedures below.
Research Design

This study examined the principal’s role in promoting teacher leadership. It identified specific principal behaviors that motivate teachers to take on greater leadership roles, and scrutinized the role of the principal in building organizational capacity. It also looked at ways in which principals may constrain teacher leadership. Three comprehensive high schools in a high-performing suburban, Southern California school district served as the context for the study.

Data Sources and Collection

Participants. The population of this study consisted of high school teachers at three comprehensive high schools within one district. Teachers, principals, and assistant principals were asked via a survey instrument (Appendix A) to identify the teacher leaders on their campuses in a variety of areas. Up to five teachers could be identified in each area. Only those teachers viewed as leaders by both their administrators and their peers were considered as potential participants. The results were tallied, and the top 10 teachers identified by other teachers and the 10 teachers receiving the most votes from administrators formed the sample (see Figure 3.4). Because five participants were commonly identified in the top 10 of both groups—teachers and administrators, the total number of teacher leader participants was 15. This combined with the three site principals resulted in a total of 18 participants.

Data Collection Procedures. Data for the teacher leader portion of this study were collected via personal interviews and focus groups conducted by the researcher. The positionality of the researcher (a fellow employee of the district) was likely to have strengthened the findings, as the researcher was well known and enjoyed a
reputation of being “real” among teachers. The same interview protocol was used in both interviews and focus groups and can be found in Appendix D. Prior to conducting the interviews, teachers completed a pre-interview demographic survey (Appendix C) the results of which are summarized in Table 4.1.

Principals were also interviewed. The principal interview protocol is included as Appendix E. As was mentioned in Chapter 3, the researcher deliberately excluded assistant principals as study participants due to the lack of consistency of assignments from site to site – some assistant principals perform primarily transactional duties, whereas others act as instructional leaders making transformational decisions. All participants consented to having their interviews audio-taped for future transcription and analysis.

**Data Analysis & Findings**

The researcher analyzed data according to themes that emerged from participant responses (Merriam, 1998; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Patton, 2002). The results were then used to answer the research questions. The data analysis procedure encompassed several steps. First, immediately following each meeting, the researcher listened to the audio-taped recording. Next, transcriptions of the meetings were created. The researcher then read each transcript multiple times, coding for patterns and themes using Hyper Research software. A sample of the data collected were shared and discussed with a fellow doctoral candidate for peer examination (Creswell, 2005; Merriam, 1998) in order to strengthen the validity of the coding. This process resulted in the merging of some themes, and ultimately led to a more credible study.
Demographic Findings

This section outlines the data resulting from the questionnaires. Each teacher leader who agreed to participate in the study completed a pre-interview questionnaire (Appendix C). The results of the questionnaire are provided in Table 4.1. This questionnaire elicited demographic data about the sample including age, years of experience, and area of expertise.

Table 4.1: Teacher Leader Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>content expertise</th>
<th>years teaching</th>
<th>years in district</th>
<th>years in current position</th>
<th>teaching first career</th>
<th>Prior career</th>
<th>age</th>
<th>gender</th>
<th>ethnicity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>special education</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>world language</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>nurse, aerobics</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>secretary</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>F</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>social science</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
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<td>45</td>
<td>F</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>math</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>19</td>
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<td>n/a</td>
<td>41</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>2</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
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<td>31</td>
<td>31</td>
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<td>n/a</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>M</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>34</td>
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<td>34</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>world language</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Filipino</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Collectively, participating teachers have 230 years of experience in the profession.

The average years of experience exceeds 15 years, yet a majority of the participants
have spent 10 or fewer years in the classroom. The average number of years of employment in the school district is nearly 12.5 years. The average number of years spent in their current positions is nearly 12. Teaching was the first career for most of these teacher leaders. The teachers range in age from 26 to 62 with a mean age of 40. All but three of the teachers are female, and only two are minorities. The leaders represent all core content areas with the exception of science. More than half are English teachers.

Of the three principals participating in the study, two are male and one is female. They range in experience with between 2 and 20 years principal leadership experience. All three began their careers as teachers. Two were promoted from existing assistant principal positions within the district.

*Findings from Interviews and Focus Groups*

This section presents qualitative data obtained via personal interviews and focus groups. Twelve personal interviews (nine with teacher leaders and three with principals) and three focus groups with three pairs of teachers were conducted. The resulting data represents contributions from 18 individuals. The section begins with profiles of the teacher leaders and principals constructed based on responses to interviews and focus group questions. This provides the reader with a lens for examining and evaluating the data. Next, the data are reported by theme. The section concludes with comprehensive responses to each research question based on the thematic data.

*Teacher Leader Profile.* The teachers that informed this study can be classified into two groups – formal teacher leaders and informal teacher leaders. As was
reported in Chapter 2, formal teacher leaders can generally be defined as those teachers who hold a formal leadership title and receive compensation for that role (Birky, Shelton & Headley, 2006). This category includes but is not limited to department chairs, teachers on special assignment, and members of the math or literacy councils. In contrast, informal teachers are those people who are respected as leaders and looked to as role models or content area experts, but do not receive any additional compensation for their leadership (Wasley, 1991). Many teachers lead because they view it as a professional responsibility. By definition, eleven of the fifteen teacher leader participants in this study are formal teacher leaders.

One interesting outcome of this research was the creation of a teacher leader profile (see Table 4.2). The profile contains descriptors provided by the teachers and administrators who participated in the interviews and focus groups. As the researcher reviewed the interviewed transcripts, these descriptors were repeatedly used to describe the characteristics and behaviors of teacher leaders. Although it does not distinguish between formal and informal teacher leaders, it became apparent through the profile that many of the individuals described as leaders by their peers and administrators shared similar traits.
Table 4.2: Teacher Leadership Traits

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Principal Profile</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A profile of a principal who supports the development of teacher leadership capacity also emerged from the interviews and focus groups. During the interviews, principals shared how they interacted with teachers, how they supported teacher leadership, and generally how they performed the duties of instructional leadership. Teachers discussed their perceptions about their principals’ leadership and capacity building measures during interviews and focus groups. A review of the transcripts resulted in several descriptors that could be used to characterize the traits of the principals of these high performing schools.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4.3: Principal Leadership Traits

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Carefully observe instruction</th>
<th>Put students first</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Respected, but not always liked</td>
<td>Visionary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pushes and facilitate teacher thinking</td>
<td>Allow teachers freedom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Give teachers ownership</td>
<td>Provide resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledge and value teacher effort</td>
<td>Hold others accountable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Take instructional leadership seriously</td>
<td>Accessible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Willing to learn</td>
<td>Good listener</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value collegial relationships</td>
<td>Strong follow through skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respectful to teachers</td>
<td>Possess integrity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humorous</td>
<td>Visible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenge the status quo</td>
<td>Supportive</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Interestingly, many of the characteristics observed in teacher leaders were also common to principals.

In the next section research findings are presented by theme.

**Thematic Findings**

In addition to evidence that led to the development of the aforementioned profiles, data were analyzed and categorized by themes. The researcher organized the findings thematically in order to develop a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon of principal leadership as it related to building teacher leadership capacity. Initial coding resulted in 50 themes. This was not surprising given the researcher’s deliberate decision to implementing an organic approach to data collection. She purposely avoided the use of pre-identified themes or categories in an effort to maintain open to emerging insights. After carefully combing through the data, the number of themes was narrowed to 10, as many themes were collapsed and incorporated into more global categories. Table 4.4 lists the themes that ultimately surfaced from the data.
Table 4.4 Emergent Themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>List of Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>empowerment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>culture of continuous improvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>collaboration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>clear expectations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>professional development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>support for teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>organizational structures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>challenges</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Each of these themes is discussed in detail throughout the remainder of this chapter.

*Empowerment.* All three principals mentioned empowerment as a strategy they use regularly to help build teacher leadership capacity. Within this theme of empowerment lies an interpersonal piece and a technical aspect. The interpersonal empowerment comes from explicit praise, “I am so proud of you.” “You did a great job on that project.” “I can’t tell you how much I appreciate your help.” One principal shared an experience from his teaching days.

An assistant principal came up to me and said, ‘you’re applying for the department chair opening.’ And I thought, ‘Well, no. I’m not ready for that.’ And she said, ‘Yeah, and everybody expects you to apply.’ And what I remember back from that is, I think we do not often enough sit with people and tell them what we think of them and ask them about their plans – where they see themselves going in the organization. I think the more time we would spend with teachers doing things like that, the more time they would know that we believe in them.
The technical aspect of empowerment entails creating opportunities for teachers to lead and excel. Teachers and principals alike accentuated the importance of having the freedom to experiment with different strategies and take on new responsibilities both inside and outside the classroom. Seven of the 15 teacher leaders interviewed reported their principal gave them the freedom to experiment with new ideas. One teacher indicated the only thing holding her back was her own motivation. “Maybe I should have taken more initiative to do some things, but in terms of people standing in my way, there hasn’t been that….I can’t think of a time when I or people I have worked with ran into much of a wall in terms of they had an idea and administration said no.”

Her principal provided further evidence of the entrepreneurial spirit present in the district.

I think people have to feel empowered to do that or they won’t take risks. And I think people who are going to help…have to be allowed to take risks….If you can’t trust the people you hire to do that, and you can’t give them the message that it’s okay to do that, then you’ve got a problem. At the same time, you’ve got to be prepared to go to them and hold them accountable for things. And say, you know what, I know I told you to do such and such, but you’ve gone too far. Let’s reel it back in a little bit, but don’t stop doing things.

Each spoke to the importance of finding ways to tap into teachers strengths and asking them to take on new responsibilities or to assume leadership roles. According to one principal, “If you want to keep people in your organization and keep them fresh and keep your school moving forward, they have to know what they can do and what you want them to do.” He is selective about who he invites to take on new challenges, being sure their strengths are aligned with the task at hand. This ensures the likelihood of success. He believes that once “people taste leadership a little bit, they
either like it or they don’t like it.” Another principal told of a time when she tapped a
less experienced campus supervisor to organize security for her school’s graduation
ceremony.

We didn’t even know he had it in him. He had maps, charts, and timelines. What he did was one of the most professional, amazing things I have ever seen….He is not getting paid extra for that, but he is not going to need to. He feels very proud of himself. He knows he is treated and respected as a professional and highly regarded. He got a lot of praise from everyone. He feels really, really good about himself… With leaders you have to put them where their passions and strengths are.

While this example involves a classified staff member, it is illustrative of the results
that come when teachers are provided the opportunity to “run” with an idea.

The theme of empowerment was far less prevalent among teachers. Only 3 of
the 15 teachers interviewed provided responses that were coded as empowerment.
These teachers indicated that encouragement from their administrators is a motivator
for them. They like being told that what they are doing is helpful. One teacher
described it as “I work at a site where I am taken seriously and appreciated and where
I feel I have a contribution to make and it is very positive.” Another shared “They
have let me know that what I do is helpful and beneficial.” A third explained

I think the administrators have been very appreciative of anything that I can do and have said things like if you need a day out of the classroom to meet with kids individually who are struggling GATE kids, go ahead and do it. But then
I also have issues as far as being an AP teacher and feeling like I’m in a time
 crunch to get through curriculum, so being pulled out of class isn’t always the
best option. But I think they’re just realistic in their expectations of how much
I can get done, and I think they also offer pull-out days to support that.

While few teachers expressed feeling empowered by their principals directly, none
appeared to view their principal as a barrier to their leadership. Certainly, the fact that
nearly two thirds of the teachers within these organizations are viewed as leaders
indicates there are ample opportunities to lead, and teachers are empowered in some way to take action.

*Culture of continuous improvement.* The interview and focus group data clearly indicated each of the three schools participating in the study possessed a strong culture of continuous improvement. In a focus group one teacher conveyed her principal’s expectation “He pushes us to go from good to great. He really realizes that we do a great job; let’s just keep getting better.” Another department chair at her site added, “He does say we are getting there, but we can improve. He doesn’t want us to get too comfortable that we don’t need to improve because we are good.”

A majority of participants expressed a commitment to placing student needs first. This was seen as an integral part of their ability to continuously improve. Several teachers described their school cultures as being “student-centered” and as leaders, they felt comfortable challenging their peers with the mantra “Is that what’s best for kids?” They appreciated that decisions were made based on this criteria. When speaking of his own experience, a teacher eloquently captured the essence of what was a common refrain for many:

> Then I always have this burning question....What if we do this just a little bit differently, will it still get the same outcome? Will it still hit the standard? This year it was some technology stuff. What if we did a teleconference with college professors about this topic we are studying? What if we blogged? What if we…fill in the blank? So I guess I just try to push my content and the angles at which we look at the content to the envelope?

A veteran female teacher at another high school explained her commitment to the concept of continuous improvement:

> I want to be, when my time comes to walk over the hill and into the sunset, that I’ve had over 30 years of experience one year at a time. I don’t want to have
one year of experience 30 times. Because I know I can do better, and it’s important to try to do that. Our population is becoming more diverse here on the campus, and the nature of our clients is changing. It’s really important that we keep up with that.

Each of the principals interviewed provided concrete examples of challenges their schools face and the steps they have taken to collectively address these issues.

For example, the lagging performance of English Learners continues to be an area of focus at all high schools in the district. One principal recalls assuming the principalship on his campus and what he discovered about English Learners.

When I got here the Latino kids all hung out in the same place all the time, outside a single teacher’s classroom. I was glad they felt comfortable with that teacher, but there was a sense of prejudice, and it’s not completely gone. That was bothersome to me. I think we have shattered that. I think Latino kids feel pretty comfortable in all parts of campus here. And that’s a win for us. That’s a good thing. Has it affected their achievement yet? A little bit, not a ton, and not enough. We’re about a D grade in that and we’ve got to do better.

Another principal explained that improving the performance of English Learners at his school had been a four year effort. In that time he witnessed a shift in perspective from a one person English Learner program, to collective ownership of the success of this group of students.

Collaboration. Collaboration was a major theme at all three schools. Collaboration takes on many faces. For example, best practices are shared freely during professional development time, and regularly among teammates. It is commonplace for teachers to attend conferences off campus and bring their new learning back to their teams at their sites. One principal commented on this practice.

We make sure they get up at the next staff meeting and ask them to share some of their experiences, because they are the best commercial. When they hear it from their colleagues…the people who go on these are the ones who are hungry for learning and the people they tend to have a lot of respect for. When
they hear these teachers say, ‘I did this and I really recommend it,’ they will listen.

The principal of this school deliberately chooses to allocate surplus funds on researching best practices rather than spending them one-time training or temporary resources. Another principal explained his approach.

I try to analyze how change really happens with teachers in classrooms. I’m pretty sure it’s related to collaborative work. We moved a couple of our strongest Advanced Placement teachers this year. We put people in to collaborate with them and we moved them into regular U.S. history classes and regular World History classes, so they can have an influence on other people.

Another principal accentuated the benefits of peer to peer observation in terms of building collaboration. A team of teachers at his school had piloted a program in which they observed teachers both inside and outside their content areas.

If we could really get peer to peer going school-wide, where you are seeing a colleague teach four or five times a year and someone is seeing you teach, and not evaluating just informational only. You would see a lot of different strategies being shared and a lot more focus.

These are just a few examples of ways in which principals perceive collaboration on their campuses. A multitude of other stories were revealed. This perspective was not unique to principals; teachers expressed similar thoughts. A new teacher illuminated her experience educating her entire high school staff on the concept of differentiated instruction.

It just so happens I had gone to this conference and so I said I have a pretty good handle on it; let me show a few people, and started working with teachers that way a little bit. And then I had an opportunity at the beginning of the year, when it seemed that differentiation was going to be one thing that our staff focused on, to do a whole-staff presentation that went fairly well.

Another teacher explained her motivation for collaborating.
I was on a mission to make it a little more exciting and real. So I have been sharing that with teachers through the five years I have been here. Whether it was, ‘I tried this instructional strategy, I did this yesterday with my students, and you should try it in your math class.’

A veteran teacher with over thirty years of experience recalled the benefits of collaborating with a colleague early in her career.

I worked with a dear friend of mine and we would watch each other and say, ‘Hey, you need to do this and this.’ I trusted her and she trusted me; that kind of stuff was very impactful…[Also] when you’re working with colleagues and…you’re [questioning] what about this lesson? How did you present this lesson? How did you get this across? Why is this…oh, that is a good idea. Actually watching them in action is marvelous. Worth a million bucks!

While collaboration is prevalent at all three sites, it is not an isolated, internal activity. For example, one teacher extolled the benefits of working with her peers from across the district on a committee designed to support a district-wide literacy initiative. She indicated it was helpful for her to learn about the performance expectations at other sites, the challenges they faced, and the plans to address issues of concern. She felt it was affirming to know that her peers struggled with similar issues – she was not alone.

Relationships. All teachers and administrators mentioned the importance of having strong working relationships with one another. Principals acknowledged the need to spend more time with their teachers and to work towards developing deeper relationships as demonstrated by the following comment.

I am a realist enough to know that with 120 teachers and ex number of staff and ex number of coaches, I’m not nearly as close to people as I’d like to be. And so, I’m not sure everybody knows me as well. They know me in a certain capacity, but …that’s one of my challenges – to spend more time with [my] teaching staff.
Teachers also indicated strong principal-teacher relationships are key to the effective operation of their schools. They acknowledged that principals with strong interpersonal skills were able to leverage their relationships to move even the most difficult teachers along in their practice. This had a positive impact on student learning. One teacher recalled a prior principal’s knack at capitalizing on the strength of her relationships.

She knew how to get in with the social science [department], which is an old boys network on this campus. She knew how to get in there and have them rally around a cause. She was a politician, your ultimate campaigner.

Several teachers indicated they had a strong relationship with their administrators. One veteran teacher explained that she had worked with several principals over the course of her career in the district. What she learned over time is that the difference between the successful principals and their not so successful counterparts comes down to relationships. “Before you can make any movement forward, you have to have that relationship, that trust.” When asked about her current principal, a teacher new to the district smiled and said enthusiastically,

He just makes an effort to have a personal relationship with everyone on staff and I haven’t seen that with other principals and that’s just really amazing. Even if it’s just he sees my door open, pops his head in and says what can I do for you? And if I say, I actually need this, he follows through right away. He’s the same way with the students too….I think he makes a real effort [in this area.]

Accessibility to principals was a major sub-theme within the area of relationships. Teachers want access to their principals. When they have an issue that needs discussing, they want to be able to call up the principal and set up a meeting to discuss it. As a whole, they feel that when they ask to see the principal, it’s because
they are acting as leaders, trying to bring forth information critical to the success of the organization. A department chair expressed appreciation for the professional expectations for leadership her principal created. This freed her up to act responsibly, and not feel compelled to have to check in with the principal about smaller issues. Another teacher leader described his principal as “a leader who listens and a leader whose people feel okay to challenge or speak about whatever. Her door is always open.”

In summary, teachers reported about the importance of having strong professional relationships with their principals. In order to lead most effectively, they need to have easy access to their principals. Sometimes they may just want to run an idea by their principal before they act. At other times it is to alert the administrator to an issue that could have significant implications for the organization. Teachers appreciate the “open door” policy and do not tend to abuse it. They understand the role of the principal and are respectful of time constraints. One of the principals validated the teacher perspective about accessibility to the principal. He said, “I believe people want their leaders to lead. They want to see them….I think that there’s this perception when you are out there, that you know what’s going on, that you’re on top of things.”

*Clear Expectations.* 100% of principals and 60% of teacher leaders spoke to the importance of having clear expectations and then holding people accountable to them. To follow are the “non-negotiables” that appear to be present at all three schools.
Principals are expected to hire quality people. One teacher shared her perspective.

You have to recruit teachers who generally care about kids. When you care about kids then you want to do more for the school. I didn't need a personal invitation to do all these things I just wanted to, I wanted to make things better. It begins with the type of people you hire, their commitments to kids and commitments to the whole student—not just I teach math. I like to go to their baseball games; I notice when they get haircuts. It starts from when they hire us.

Her principal’s perspective was aligned to her thinking as evidenced by his comments on the matter.

You don’t want somebody on your staff [who isn’t moving the school forward.] As soon as you have a concern, get rid of them. Get rid of them. You can believe in the good in people, that it’s all going to work out okay, but you know what, if you have a concern, let them go work it out in someone else’s school. Don’t take the risk. It won’t increase your popularity oftentimes, but your staff wants the best people around, your kids and your families do. So I think many principals fall back on the complaint of tenure and are not willing to get in and tackle and dig into people’s goodie bags enough.

Collaboration is another expectation. All three of the participating high schools have developed cultures that support and expect collaboration among the faculty. Each site builds time for professional development into the bell schedule to support collaboration at the team and department levels, although the amount of time varies by site. The level of satisfaction with how professional time is used also varies from person to person. One principal provided some history on weekly professional development at her site.

There was this sense that professional growth time on Wednesday morning is supposed to be teacher run; ‘don't tell us what to do,’ but you can't really completely do that. There has to be some accountability built in and then give the teachers the freedom of it. It has been about a two year process of us
having conversations about the responsibility as well as the privilege and how do we balance that and be accountable for our work.

Her counterpart at another site added, “We are going to be collaborative. We are going to involve you and invite you whether you like it or not.”

Communication among the staff must be open and respectful. Open communication is an essential component in building a positive school culture. It is okay to dissent or disagree with one another, but people must be considerate. It is also important that all voices be heard. One person should not dominate the conversation. Some teachers who were new to their schools or to the profession expressed difficulty in voicing their concerns or opinions in their team meetings. At one site, an administrative team frustrated by staff members who verbally attacked them in staff meetings began to call people on the inappropriateness of their behavior. The principal reflected on his decision to tackle this issue head on.

In some respects that has helped us gain a little bit of traction because teachers don’t realize when they are totally bad-mouthing you, undermining everything you stand for, and everything you have worked hard for because they stand up and say their piece and then walk away.

A veteran teacher at the same site also alluded to the need for respectful communication. “If I have a problem with [my principal] I would just go in and tell him. And I would tell him respectfully. And that’s the kind of relationship we need to see more of.”

A final expectation at all sites is the need for staff to work hard in support of all students. The responsibility for educating children is too great to leave to chance. Schools don’t have a minute to waste. This is exemplified by the following quote from a principal, outlining his approach to school leadership.
You’ve got to keep an edge. You’ve got to keep it on your teachers. You’ve got to be pushing on them. You’ve got to hold them accountable. And at the same time you’ve got to love them, you’ve got to praise them, you’ve got to give them what they need to make them move, you’ve got to interact with them. You have to value the work they do. It’s hard work to make schools go.

Professional development. All three principals acknowledged the importance of professional development for their teachers. The district has been working to provide teachers with structured professional development opportunities throughout the year. One vehicle for doing this is the Teaching and Learning Cooperative (TLC). The TLC was born of the idea that teachers know best what their professional development needs are. It is a voluntary program that focuses on teacher-driven staff development, with the goal of improving student achievement. It encourages teachers to create staff development plans around areas of need, and to invite others both on site and across the district to collaborate together. Under the TLC, teachers are given the opportunity to either present a plan or choose to participate with colleagues on a previously approved proposal. Teachers serve as facilitators and learners; both are compensated for participation. (Roberston, 2008)

An initial examination of TLCs indicates these are valuable sources of professional development for teachers. This is substantiated by the fact that since the program’s inception during the 2004-05 school year, 471 teachers have secured salary adjustments by earning TLC credits (L. Turner, personal communication, December 19, 2008). One principal relayed a recent conversation during which a new teacher conveyed, “I really value those TLC meetings where teachers feel safe enough to say, ‘I am struggling with how I taught absolute value. How did you do it?’” She elaborated below.
It’s being in a safe place to have those professional conversations. When you start trusting people will recognize that you have a lot to offer and a lot to learn, and you get that culture that we are all learning from each other. We are all really leaders ultimately and responsible for that. It is not just some people are leaders, everybody really is, it is just where is your area of leadership going to fall and you need to step up to that. When people feel respected they get that, ultimately that is good for kids. When people aren’t afraid to show that they don’t know how to do something, but they can listen to each other as leaders its powerful what starts happening in our classrooms.

After reflecting on the prior year, one principal credited the TLCs with generating good work that benefited his site. “Some silent leaders are starting to bubble up…I am going to try to push people in that direction, tap on certain shoulders and see what I can do, because we are definitely struggling with some issues and we need help.”

Teachers participating in the study took a variety of steps to improve their practice. Responses reflected a broad spectrum of activities including: professional reading, attending conferences, taking classes, conducting action research, or pursuing a Master’s Degree or National Board Certification. One teacher touted “Beyond the Masters, beyond all the things I have done, the National Board Certification was probably the most impactful. It was really the first time I was required to sit back and take a look at myself. That was when that reflection piece started.” Another teacher credited a conference on differentiated instruction with changing her practice. She attended the conference with a team of teachers from her site.

It was a lot of learn, reflect, and then you are ripping open the back of the book to write down what you want to do. It was a three-day conference and I really had time to process and hear things again and again, see them on video in action. The time span was great – the opportunity to really dive into a philosophy.

As a result of having participated in this training, this teacher had the confidence to step forward and discuss what she had learned with a few of her colleagues. Later in
the year, she had the opportunity to conduct a whole-staff presentation on
differentiated instruction – one of her school’s strategies for meeting the goals set
forth in its Single Plan for Student Achievement. She became a “differentiated
instruction guru” on campus – supporting teachers in their efforts to improve practice.
Eventually, she teamed up with another colleague and offered a TLC on differentiated
instruction, enabling her to influence teachers across the district. She also supported
her site by opening up her classroom doors to those interested in observing
differentiated instruction in action. Her administrators also encouraged other teachers
to access her expertise.

In addition to the TLCs, the teachers at each school have structured
professional development time on site. This may occur before school, after school,
weekly, or every other week. Regardless of structure, this time is used for a variety of
purposes including articulation, assessment development and analysis, adult learning,
etc. Teachers expect that this time be meaningful for them and their students. There
is sometimes a battle between what teachers perceive as meaningful and what
administrators must get accomplished. Inevitably, teachers are most satisfied when
they decide how the time is spent. One teacher touted professional development time
at her site to be “fantastic.”

Any times we have in the morning on Wednesday’s are teacher directed, that
just started this year. Before we didn't have teacher directed days, but now it is
getting in the works and I think it is developing. We have so much time with
our departments and we use that time to align curriculum, common
assessments, cross grading. The English department has been working on
finishing our literary analysis model papers. Next year we are going to work on
our non-fiction.
While teachers and principals alike acknowledge the value of structured professional development, several teachers expressed frustration with the effectiveness of the current model. Teachers’ chief complaints can be summed up as lack of accountability, frequent disruptions, and primacy of test scores. In most circumstances teachers are not required to produce a product from professional development time. One teacher lamented “Professional development time hasn’t been used as effectively in that I’ve never really felt that we’ve had a product that we’ve started and finished over time, and had total staff buy-in.” Disruptions come in the form of district-mandated initiatives or the Western Association of School Credentialing (WASC) accreditation process. WASC requires schools to participate in a self-study process over a one-year period. During this time organizational goals are developed and a team of educators visits sites to verify the study and provide feedback. The result is an action plan schools use to drive their instructional programs. Teachers perceive conducting the self-study and planning for the site visit as an encroachment on their professional time. Finally, time spent discussing state summative assessment scores is also viewed as an impediment to meaningful professional growth. While teachers value the feedback received, they believe that a two-four hour discussion of data pertaining to students who have already moved on to the next grade level is excessive. One frustrated teacher complained, “Knowing the scores, great. They’re important to know for a half hour discussion, reflection, and move on, but we spend hours on it.”

A veteran English teacher shared her dissatisfaction with the current model.
I’m not a huge fan of professional development in the sense that I think most professional development has come at us from other people who have said, this will be good for you. We know this will be good for you and a vast majority of that...has been a waste of my time. But, what I did was I asked Jane Schaffer to come back....15 years after her first presentation to us. She came back on our professional growth day and showed us her new stuff. Now, that was a good day because it was what we wanted, from a person who spoke our language, in our department.

A veteran math teacher at another school expressed similar frustration.

I have tried for many years to get the math department to run their own professional growth. The administration was planning professional growth all the time. I said, ‘I will plan it, show you we did it, and tell you what we did, if you let me do it.’ We finally got to where we are allowed to do it because the assistant principal trusted me on that. It has made a big difference in our professional growth because we are allowed to grow mathematically.

He elaborated.

[One of the things I am working with them on during] professional growth [is] trying to get them to present a lesson that might work well. They don’t want to do things in front of their peers...I keep modeling it for them. I had a few teachers do that last year but they were the new teachers, the older ones didn’t want to do that. They are all in their private little kingdom, they are absolute dictators and they don’t want to go outside their arena. More of this [sharing during] professional growth will encourage this [behavior.]

Support for teachers. Teachers were very clear about the supports they found to be most useful on the job. The research yielded two distinct categories of support for teachers – instructional supports and provision of resources. Teachers were appreciative of the efforts their principals made to support their instructional programs. A veteran world language teacher explained how her principal supported her work and that of a peer as they conducted a feasibility study on creating a world language academy on campus. The academy would serve as an academic major and allow students to focus their studies around foreign languages and global studies.
So he was real willing to listen to some ideas that we had. I know that he spoke to the district administration on our behalf. He…[provided us] hourly pay to research textbooks and to start to develop a curriculum and a timeline, and to noodle how we would go about recruitment, investigate what population this would serve, and how it would fit into the science and social studies strands.

This teacher shared another experience when her department was considering developing a language lab on their campus. While this was during the tenure of a prior leader, it is telling. She revealed the value of the support she received.

They would give me the time. They would give me access to their bosses. They would give me a sub and allow me to go visit a school that had a language lab that we wanted to go look at. They would call the vendors and bring them into a department meeting so we could all sit and talk. They were doing the support instead of just saying I support you.

Another teacher at this site was grateful for the level of support she characteristically receives from her principal. “If I said I wanted to do a whole focus group on differentiated instruction…I need all this research done. I truly believe he would go home and research.” A third teacher from the same site corroborated this need of teachers to feel supported by their principals.

[He supports me by] leaving me alone, allowing me freedom, and coming through when [I] needed it. I am not one of those people who ask for a lot of help, but when I need it, I really need it. And when I need it, I need it now.

When he goes to a principal with an issue, it is usually addressed within one day. A teacher on another campus expressed that she feels supported when her administrative team tries “to make sure that things are rolling smoothly around campus, and with parents, so we can be the best for our students.” Finally, a teacher at a third site commented, “I love being where I am now because I feel supported and people do value the work that I do and value the conversations I bring to the table.” It is evident
from the interviews that teachers appreciate that the contributions they make do not go unnoticed by their principals.

Principals also support teachers by providing them the resources they need, both for their classrooms and for their professional growth. Fourteen of the 15 teachers interviewed were able to provide concrete examples of resources provided by their principals. These resources include release time to support their peers, observe instruction, and attend conferences, common prep periods, and flexible scheduling. Despite these efforts, from a teacher perspective the demand for additional time is still high. One teacher provided her opinion.

I think if teacher leaders were given more responsibility and if they were given a prep period then they could be more effective and more supportive and they could play a bigger part in helping to develop policy and procedure and noodling the implementation and that sort of thing.

Another teacher echoed similar thoughts.

I want a planning period. There are things that I would like to help my department to grow. I want to be able to sub for them so they can get out and see other teachers. We need to see and be a part of that, especially if we are going to take it beyond the curriculum, going to go the instruction aspect of it. I think giving teacher leaders time to be leaders….I]t would be so beneficial because you have the time out of your schedule to help facilitate learning, which is what you want to do in terms of professional growth and development….Having a prep period to do that and to move people and talk to people, especially your new teachers and your old teachers. I am ten years in, but I need new strategies and would benefit from seeing new strategies.

A teacher who is currently serving as a Teacher on Special Assignment (TOSA) told of the struggle of supporting teachers in the efforts to lead their departments.

We struggle because we want more from our department chairs, and they’re teaching five sections and many of them have kids, so there just isn’t the time in the day for them to do some of the things we would like them to do.
A department chair at her site explained her struggle.

They have trouble giving us time and they have said many times that they want chairs to have a bigger leadership role and do more. Well I am about stretched thin right now and have ideas for doing more and know what those directions would be but I can't get there because it is always tomorrow. I have things on my plate that are always there. I will say this about the administration, for as long as I can remember, they said they would pay for a sub if we wanted to go observe other people. But having a sub sometimes makes more work. They say do it during your prep period, but there are things that are constantly needing to be done during that time.

All three principals indicated they worked hard to support their teachers in a variety of ways. Their leadership can be described as both transactional and strategic.

Transactional leadership as used here means tasks to support the day to day operations. For example, one principal explained:

We try to put out the message that we are here to support making teaching easier. So, what we want to do is whatever it is that facilitates your practice. That is what we want to do. Whether it is taking care of a kid or getting you paper, we can all help. And I don’t ask people to do anything I wouldn’t do. It is about, for us, a kid needs to be picked up from class and the campus supervisors are busy and I hear it on the radio I will go down and pick someone up. It is not a big deal. It is about giving teachers the tools to be successful.

The strategic leadership is deeper and has long term implications around how the school is structured. It has to do with ensuring that employees are seated in the right places – the seats in which they can have the greatest impact on the organization.

One principal elaborated on her experience in supporting teachers to grow as leaders.

Some of the greatest potential leaders are very modest, and they assume that everyone does what they do. I have learned that the first step in supporting leadership is helping people to recognize their own gifts. As I meet with teachers individually, I usually ask them about their passion and point out things that I consider specific strengths, such as “good use of rubrics” or “a heart for the at-risk student” or “great parent communication strategies.” Once
they realize they have something to offer, the conversations move to “how can you share this with colleagues?”

Her counterpart in another school explained his approach for engaging teachers in leadership.

Over time you try and invest in people who you think have potential with small roles and small projects and hope that they grab on to them and are willing to participate. So you might ask them to lead a curriculum revision or ask them to chair a committee or help you report out to the faculty on an issue they’re passionate about.

Teachers provide evidence that principals are on the right track. A newer teacher confided, “I think I did most of my talking in small groups. My administrator told me I needed to be more vocal and get over being a new teacher and that my opinions are valuable.” Another shared her thoughts that administrators “need to identify those creative, hard working, innovative people and try to give them a chance to do things and not give too many things to too few people to where they get tired.”

Vision. The principals participating in the study all expressed an openness to having teachers involved in shaping and implementing the school vision. One principal provided insight into his method for going about this work.

It starts with building our school-wide goals through the leadership team and then rolling those out to the whole staff with some opportunity for input and then proving the data that helps teachers understand why we are working on what we are working on.

Another added “I let other people handle that kind of work. I’ll deliver the message, but I like to develop that message with my staff.” He was skeptical, however, about whether or not teachers would perceive their responsibility for implementing the vision.

I think most teachers would say I don’t really want to deal with the vision piece; I think that’s your job principal. But I think in many ways teachers do
help drive the vision. [For example,] people like being asked to interview. People like being called at home for their advice. People like being called on a Saturday because it means they are important enough in your life to take your time to call them on a day when nobody should be working.

Whether or not they feel they are responsible for building the school vision, for the most part teachers are able to articulate and speak knowledgeably about components of the vision. Table 4.5 details the responses of teachers when asked to define their principal’s vision.

### Table 4.5 Teacher Understanding of School Vision

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<td>I think [principal] wants us to put structures into place that have every kid being looked after. We don’t want anybody slipping through the cracks. And if some kid isn’t being successful for some reason, it is the job of someone here to not just say I taught it, if he didn’t learn it, it’s not my fault. We need to figure out what’s getting in the way of that kid learning and what can we do to make it happen for that kid. I think that is what his vision is and it is laudable.</td>
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<td>Giving kids real life experience. Giving kids a chance to network to meet community members, to build relationships, have skills that you don’t acquire from a classroom but a new environment. Being held accountable…taking risks. I see that as his vision of trying to prepare these kids for the real world and not just knowing content….You have to have that ability to connect with people. Character, integrity.</td>
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<td>Here is the vision, the D/F rate. Improve the far below basic that is it. That’s the vision.</td>
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<td>His vision for the school is for us to be the best that we can be. He has an eye to API scores at all times, which is good and bad, but mostly good. And he gets the idea…we have brought most of our kids up to a pretty high level, and it’s the ones that we’re not…that we really need to focus on, our underachieving groups….He really wants to see all kids succeeding and even though he’s all about test scores, getting kids connected to the school is also very important to him. And so, getting them into athletics and having a lot of options for them in terms of extracurricular activities has been a priority for him as well.</td>
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<td>To go from good to great, I think to be very vague, but I think that’s kind of what he wants. To be a school that better meets student needs.</td>
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Well, I think [principal] is in survival mode. I think almost all the principals are. I think right now we’re all in survival mode. We may have had visions, we may have had ideas, and we have had to put a lot of those on the back burner and just say, oh my God, how are going to deal with things. First it was how are we going to deal with the personnel cuts, now it’s how are we going to deal with the budgetary cuts.

I see his emphasis on seeing that all of [school] not just the very general population is doing very well. I think his vision is to get the students and the staff to recognize that other students exist too and to serve them and their needs. His vision is to get a school that really does promote equity.

I think that the idea of open access, all kids getting to the point where they can take whatever class they want to take.

I think [principal’s] vision is that we as teachers create an environment where kids can excel….that we make all kids college ready….that we work well together and collaborate.

No D’s and F’s.

I think he wants academic rigor. I think he would like to see us move. [School] has done well with what they have really done for a long time. I think people are content and he doesn’t want… there is no… you can’t stop there is no content… keep building.

Ours is a lot about supporting learners that aren’t making it.

[School’s] vision is in our student planner…At the beginning of every year, the leadership comes together. We meet and start off with a discussion of the vision; we continue to go back to the vision. It is constant conversation about the vision. I don't know how much of that goes through to the whole staff. The leadership is being made aware of our central vision. I think that is a very cool and important thing. But I don't remember what it is.

He does say we are getting there but we can continue to improve. He doesn’t want us to get too comfortable. His passion and commitment to kids is evident. All the administration has a love and passion for students, even more than some teachers in one way because they want to reach as many kids as they can.

The usual cliché, safe environment and all students learning. Like what any good leader would do constant improvement. First we’re great, but we can always be better, says the principal. We are headed somewhere. His vision is well stated through WASC and action plans and he brings them up often.
The study revealed that principals rely upon teachers for a variety of leadership activities including serving on interview panels for prospective faculty, collaborating on the master schedule, developing new curriculum, and initiating programs designed to help struggling learners. Involvement in these types of activities allows teachers to be an integral part of the school decision making process. Their inclusion is perceived as being a valued member and contributor to organizational success. A newer teacher discussed her experience on a district leadership committee.

I was in on some of those meetings and I felt I had a voice as a representative of my community in terms of where we were going instead of having anything top down. It was always about from the students up, that we were a part of the discussion and the vision and about making it happen together and I think that that is unique…and a really nice model.

Another teacher described an early encounter with a new principal.

The very first thing she did when she got there is she put the money budget on the table. That was huge, because up to this point nobody even… you were told this is how much money you have, and this is how much money you have. Here it is. This is the pot of money I am dealing with; I need your input. I trust you to do what you need to do. That opened everyone’s eyes. Wow! Maybe I do have some input. I have to be aware that my voice makes an impact.

The same teacher characterized this principal as regularly seeking staff input into decisions. Another teacher on the same campus possessed an opposite perspective of her current principal.

I have the feeling sometimes that the agenda is already set and we can discuss it all you want and I will be polite and sit here and listen to what you have to say, but we are still going to do it my way. And that’s disheartening.

It is important to point out this is only one perception. Another teacher at the same site praised the administrative team for providing teachers a forum for airing their concerns about current issues facing their school.
One of the great things the administration did at the end of the school year, last year, is they put us into groups by area of concern to bring up issues. What kind of changes needed to be made? What kind of issues were not being addressed? What ideas do we have for addressing those issues? When the school year started again one of the main things we covered was all of the changes, structures they put into place to address our concerns. Having that forum to talk and to bring up issues and to be encouraged to bring up things that you are unhappy about or you feel could be dealt with more efficiently or better, I think that really helps to bring people out.

When asked about his efforts to ensure teachers are part of the decision making process, this principal expressed a desire to be inclusive.

When we interview new staff we have teachers from that department involved in the interview. We build a consensus on who to hire so sometimes it is not always my first choice, or maybe sometimes it is not always their first choice, but everybody walks out having been heard. That puts the new teacher on a better footing and they have some buy in with their department as far as department has been involved in the selection process. I do very little this is how it is and that is the way it is going to be. My decision making processes are relatively open and collaborative.

He went on to share an interesting perspective about teachers’ ownership of decisions that may be unpopular with their colleagues.

Teachers a lot of times don't want to own a decision that other teachers are not going to like. Those are the times I have found they put it back on me. Even though we may have discussed it for months, when it comes time and I am saying okay guys what are we going to do? Let's have show of hands. Well we really don't want to show hands; you are the principal and you need to do what you think is best.

This behavior is not unique to this principal or this school site. However, as a whole, teachers believe that policies and procedures should be designed from the bottom up. A veteran teacher indicated “that gives you a chance to make it stick, to make it last, and to be meaningful.” A teacher on another campus explained the importance of capturing all voices and cautioned against missing the voice of the quiet, yet conscientious teacher.
I think probably people who have the biggest barriers are new teachers who have great ideas, working in teams with teachers who also have great ideas, but their ideas trump those of the new teachers because oh, this is the way that it has always been. So I would bet if you talked to new teachers that the wall that they see is not in administration. It’s more in working in small groups with veteran teachers who have very specific ideas of how things should be.

*Organizational Structures.* During the course of the interviews, participants identified a variety of organizational structures that they perceived as supporting the work of the organization. While structures differ from site to site, the one structure common to all three was a leadership team. This team, also referred to as department chairs or leadership cadre, generally consisted of the principal, assistant principals, a counselor, and teachers appointed or elected by other teachers within their departments. Leadership teams meet twice per month. Teachers serving on these teams receive a stipend.

The depth of the work that occurs within the leadership team construct fluctuates between operational and visionary. The level of teacher and principal satisfaction with the work of this team also varies. Consider the comments in Table 4.6 below from teachers in all three schools.
Table 4.6: Teacher Perceptions on the Department Chair Role

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Being a department chair, I have heard from a lot of people, isn't what it used to be. People in our department who were chairs long ago said they didn't do much -- go to meetings and build the schedule. That was a long time ago and now there is more instructional leadership, state testing and so many more issues, it has become a job that people don't want.</th>
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<td>They have the leadership cadre which is the different principals and the heads of each department and they talk about things and they send out the minutes, but…I don’t think the average teacher has a ton to do in that, which is interesting. How do you create and collect honest feedback?</td>
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<td>They roll it around, you do your two year tour, and there are some people who shouldn’t be in the room because they are not really vested in it so they will not take an active leadership role….There are certain departments where it is a fight, and there is one department now where no one would step up to do it, so the person who took it by default isn't always there.</td>
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<td>Today I am no longer the department chair; I did it for two years. We sit in there and we are secretaries for what…all the decisions have been made. Decisions have been made, now I am to go back to my department and say this is what’s happening, whereas that was a whole different focus several years ago. That was a body of intelligent, professional people who came together, who discussed, who mitigated situations….It was not a top down situation; it was true decision making in the chairs and it is no longer that.</td>
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<td>I kind of look at our role here…we’re kind of like the chamber maid. We tidy up, we take care of ordering the linens and making sure that the shoes get polished and set outside the door, and that sort of thing.</td>
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<td>The principal created a culture where he is not going to dictate everything to us; he would like to hear our input….I have to admire him for that. Suggestions we make, even though he may disagree with them, he will still listen to them. The department chair structure is still important.</td>
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The comments of one principal included below, mirror the feelings of several teachers.

I don't know that our teacher leadership team is really doing everything it can do. To me it is more of a catsup and toilet paper meeting, and not necessarily a visionary experience. And I think some of the people in that meeting probably are more default department chairs than they are teacher leaders. We have a lot of teacher leaders in the background that we can't get to become department chairs for whatever reason. Either they don't want to take on a formal role or
they feel like they can work better from the fourth or fifth row of the bus instead of being up front. Sometimes that is a little bit frustrating in that we call it leadership. I want it to be a leadership team where we discuss our direction and our vision. I would say in more than half of our meetings we default into the copy machine and those kinds of things that are more nickel and dime. They are essential, but they are not going to push our thinking or move our operations forward on behalf of kids.

While the leadership team or department chair structure is present at all three of the sites participating in this study, some structures are unique to a specific site, and deserve mention here. For example, in an effort to build a culture of professional learning one school has implemented learning kiosks. The kiosks, which take place once per month during professional growth time, are coordinated by the staff development TOSA. The TOSA emails the entire faculty requesting areas of interest. Teachers respond with their needs and then the TOSA contacts various staff members on campus who are considered “experts” and requests that they facilitate the kiosks. Topics of discussion have included differentiated instruction, formative assessment, and academic interventions. The kiosks provide a forum for teachers to share strategies and best practices, and also help to cultivate professional relationships that extend beyond content area.

Learning walks are another less formal structure implemented at this site. They arose from the self study required for high school accreditation, and have been in place for three years. During the self study, the principal required teachers to select a colleague to observe. During the observation, they were to focus on students and learning, not the teacher. This helped teachers get a better feel for what was going on around them, and ensured the report was meaningful, based on current practice and not
assumption. The feedback from teachers was so favorable that learning walks have become a part of the school culture.

The principal describes the process below.

They will meet in the professional development office and decide what they are going to look at -- student engagement, classroom management, and it depends on who is doing it, but they pick some specific things; it might be different strategies that people use. They just go out and walk around for about 20-30 minutes and pop into classrooms for two or three minutes and watch different people teach…. We advertise to everybody that is a learning walk day and that someone may walk into your room, so no one is caught unaware. [After observing] they go back to the office and debrief what they saw. The goal is not to criticize the teacher, but to look at strategies and have professional conversations [about practice]. It is fascinating for people to see how different it is out there. They always come back and say, wow, I have so much respect for my colleagues; I had no idea that this is the talent they have.

Another school is also attempting to get peer to peer observations off the ground by piloting a structure. While it is similar to learning walks, it is unique in that the observers actually gather data using a research-based instrument developed by Robert Marzano, and then debrief. According to the principal non-evaluative peer to peer observation “is a powerful way to start to change practice because they pick up great strategies and you are more apt to teach more powerfully if you know colleagues are going to be in and out of your classroom.”

The learning lunch is another unique structure that supports teacher leadership at one school site. In order to maintain a culture of professional learning, the principal allows teams of teachers to gather at lunch and work on specific activities that will deepen their knowledge and improve student learning. As a carrot, the principal buys lunch and ensures that sandwiches or pizza are waiting for the teachers. One teacher
shared her team’s experience grading common course assessments during a learning lunch.

When I was teaching Spanish 1-2, all the 1-2 teachers got together with our common assessments and graded them together. You know I would grade my own tests hand it over to another teacher and they would grade it and we would discuss the scores to see if we were on the same page or not.

Learning lunches take place in an area that has evolved into a professional development library. It is set up café style, with comfortable seating, small round tables, magazine racks, and an extensive professional library that supports teachers who are working on advanced degrees or who are simply looking for strategies to improve their practice in the classroom.

In conclusion, regardless of the site, there are plenty of opportunities for teachers to lead. In addition to the structures mentioned above, there are several other opportunities for participation both within, across and outside content areas. Perhaps the impact of this involvement is best described by one of the teacher leaders herself.

The school already has many groups of teachers who get together and work on certain issues, like, the bell schedule committee and the discipline committee. A great number of groups exist because teachers have volunteered their time to work on those things. Just like in high school when you have a school that has tons of clubs, it is just part of the culture that you are going to be involved in a whole lot of other things that are going to take more of your time. I think it’s knowing that most of your co-workers all take on extra loads and it is just something that we all do to for the benefit of the students and the staff. It helps encourage everyone to be willing to step into leadership roles.

Challenges. The act of cultivating teacher leadership clearly is not easy. Neither teachers nor principals were at a loss for words when asked to identify challenges they face in building a culture of leadership. From a teacher leader
perspective, the greatest struggle is the resistance they face from their peers when they try to lead a change initiative. A staff development TOSA explained her dilemma.

If teachers in the school feel like change is a good thing...then it’s easy to be the one who says, let’s try this or let’s do this, but in a situation where teachers think that they’re doing just fine, then it’s hard to be the person who says we need to develop because they don’t see themselves as needing to develop.

Other teachers intimated that they were challenged by holding people accountable to following through with what they agreed was important in department meetings. For example, a collective commitment may have been reached in the “public” meeting, but when it comes to actually executing the agreement, teacher leaders feel powerless because they don’t have the authority to mandate the follow through. The best they can do is say, “This is what you said you wanted to do. Why aren’t we doing it? How are we going to do it? This is what you agreed to.”

An informal teacher leader expressed similar frustration while working with a veteran teacher.

I was starting to discover that he wasn’t doing what we had planned on doing and wasn’t doing what we had collectively agree would be the best thing do it as far as standards and the book went. So, finally I was like you know at this point this is not the battle that I want to fight. I would rather take the curriculum and make it work so that next year when I have tweaked it and done it once I can say here’s what worked and here’s what didn’t and let’s move forward with this.

The same teacher conveyed another story of how veteran teachers attempted to squelch the voice of a newer teacher who expressed concern over a group of students whose needs were not being met.

We had a department meeting and there were teachers who jumped down each others throats for making comments that needed to be said. It was a classic example of a new teacher saying, we do a very good job teaching our rich white kids and a poor job teaching the poor Mexican kids and it is true and it is
awful. If you look at the statistics on the kids are in our classrooms, our white kids are doing fine. It is the Spanish speaking kids who spend most of their time in Mexico who are not doing well in our classrooms and we need to figure out why. I know these kids, and some of them could do the work if they were properly supported, and if teachers were willing to change aspects of what were are doing and rethink how we teach.

In an effort to combat this type of negative behavior that serves as an obstacle to meaningful change, the teacher is considering implementing a suggestion box where ideas are placed in the box anonymously and then read aloud and discussed as a group. This type of action may give rise to more voices and will “protect” those with counter-culture opinions from the wrath of veterans who are resistant to change.

It is important to point out that these types of challenges are not unique to older, more traditionally structured high schools. One of the schools in the study has only been open for about six years and was designed to be a professional learning community, yet teacher leaders report similar struggles.

It is a difficult road to tread because as a teacher leader your responsibility is not to discipline but it is to try to step in before hand so it is not a discipline issue if you are not following the path or not committing to the things that you said you were going to do. So, as a teacher leader that is where I start to see the difficulty coming...What is my role and what is administration’s role in the situation? Then working with them on that to try to figure out what is going to be most effective.

Her principal reports her greatest challenge as “getting the right people on the bus and making sure they understand the responsibility that comes along with the money (the stipend.)” Some people end up serving as department chairs because they don’t mind spending the extra time each month, but when it comes to actually leading in an environment of change or dealing with conflict, they shy away. Another principal considers this a huge obstacle as well.
When you are dealing with something that is very difficult and you lead in a collaborative style, they will come with you right to the edge of the cliff and then when it comes time to make the decision and it’s not something that is real palatable to everybody, you get, well you’re the principal you decide. I have been calling them on that and I struggle with that a lot. You want to be involved, we put you at the table for hiring, we put you at the table for building the vision, we run all our staff development by you but this is a real thorny issue and now you’re saying well you go ahead…you are the principal you need to make this decision, I can only tell you what we think.

Another principal shares, “I hate it when a department chair says, well I don’t have any power over the teachers. Oh my God, you have terrific power!” He explained that teacher leaders are not shackled by the same policies and procedures to which administrators must adhere. They can lead by insisting the hiring of the best qualified teachers. They can lead by sharing their content area expertise with their peers. They can lead by training teachers new and old. They can lead by making demands of their principal that will help create the environment needed to better support student learning. They can lead by example. Despite all this, if “you let them know that you need their leadership people will immediately respond with well…I’m not a leader.” He contends this is not true. “You guys are leaders. Teachers have terrific influence over their colleagues. When they stand up at a staff meeting, everyone stops and listens to what they have to say.” This can be both a positive and a negative, however. One teacher highlights his experience at his school.

From time to time though…we will have teachers that will want to say something significant in a meeting shouted down by teachers who are simply louder though they maybe less informed or the teacher who is speaking up may have a great point. I think that sometimes limits teacher leadership in that they don't want to step up in front of their colleagues because they know they have certain peers that are going to jump down their throat regardless of their message because that is the way some people like to operate in a big faculty meeting setting.
The current conditions of today’s educational climate are also viewed as barriers to teacher leadership. A veteran principal articulated how times have changed for teacher leaders.

In the last ten years with higher accountability in public education, people just feel like they’re too darn busy to do extra things as they might see it. And I think I would agree with them. They have so much more on their plates today than we did in those days. We didn’t do standardized testing, let alone worry about standards. We didn’t do any of the technology stuff that they have to do today. Now, granted much of that helps you have more achievement with kids, but there are more and more lawsuits and rulings, and such and such.”

Principals also sited the structure of the system as an obstacle. This is illustrated in the following anecdote that captures the historical perspective.

There was a time when as administrators we told you do that, don’t do that, and there was a time we paid you horrible wage for tons of work. There was time when we didn’t listen real well, and if I respect that time period and understand that is why some people act the way they do and I listen to that and then I convince them that over time we are going to try to do it differently and better…I will have a better chance of building capacity through my whole organization.

It is tough to listen sometimes to the rhetoric of union in an environment where the teachers are compensated pretty well for 180 days….We are all compensated the same we are all evaluated the same and held to the same calendar and the same responsibilities and if you don’t have the same as a teacher they put you on the outside.

He goes on.

You’re going to be a TOSA? Why would you do that? You’re going to help with attendance? Why would you to do that? You’re going to go to the dark side aren’t you? They do that to each other, when they see folks who are interested in doing something different because there is a comfort in that sameness. That sameness created that strength that got them those benefits and that compensation and how do we break that down while convincing them that we are not going to decompensate those folks who don’t want these extra positions and that it is okay to have some leadership capacity and be inside the teaching unit?
One of his counterparts at another site admitted that some of the success they are experiencing at his school is coming through retirement. “The old-timers are the hardest to push around that—just because it’s not been their world in education for many years."

Perhaps the greatest challenge to these high schools, and arguably the district as a whole is that they are high performing. One principal described the dilemma.

I have worked in an inner city school where we had a 600 API and two on similar schools ranking and you can stand up in front of everyone and say, the state is nipping at our heals and ask what are we going to do? That is a better motivation some times than we are 800 we are great, we are in the top 500 in the nation and top 100 in the state what are we going to do to get better? Our levers are a little shorter…in a plus 800 environment….Reform moves real slow, especially if you are going to be real collaborative and try to get input from staff because there is not the academic data motivating us to be different in a wholesale way.

Findings by Research Question

This section summarizes the data collected via interviews and focus groups as it relates to the research questions that bound this study. Table 4.7 depicts the relationships between the themes and research questions. Several themes overlapped interview questions. This is reflective of the degree to which these themes were prevalent within the organizations studied and the interconnectedness among themes.
Question 1. What principal behaviors and organizational conditions do teacher leaders perceive as empowering or constraining their development of teacher leadership capacity?

Teacher leaders cited a variety of principal behaviors and organizational conditions as empowering. Specifically, they expressed the importance of having a principal who allows them freedom to innovate and try new things. It is essential that principals trust their judgment and expertise enough to allow them to take risks and be creative. Teachers like to be acknowledged for their contributions because this is a sign of confidence. As they feel supported, teachers will take more risks and subsequently continue to grow. It also helps to align people with their strengths and provide them with opportunities to shine. Also, principals must be accessible to teachers. Teacher leaders appreciate working with principals who are approachable and willing to provide feedback, so they can continue to improve their instruction.
One of the organizational conditions that teacher leaders perceived as empowering was having a culture of continuous improvement. Each of the sites at which the teacher leaders work is high performing and there is a strong push to go from good to great. Teachers are expected to continuously improve. Access to professional development opportunities is also important. Whether it is internal peer observations, professional reading book clubs, or external seminars on differentiated instruction, teachers should be provided with the tools needed to extend their learning. Collaboration is another condition that helps teachers develop their leadership capacity. Teachers enjoy sharing best practices not only within their schools, but throughout the district.

According to teachers, clear expectations are also helpful. Not only do they want to know what is expected of them and others, but it is essential that principals hold teachers accountable. Teachers view this as a professional responsibility and without it, student learning is inhibited.

Finally, it is important to point out that none of these capacity building measures can occur without strong relationships – teacher to principal and teacher to teacher. Within these relationships respect develops, ideas are shared, feedback is given and professional growth takes root.

Obviously, constraints to building teacher leadership capacity would be the absence of the behaviors and conditions mentioned above. However, when asked specifically what principals could do to help improve their teacher leadership, nearly 100% of the teacher leaders responded “provide me with more time to lead.” Teachers have difficulty doing all they would like to accomplish within the given school day.
The leaders who are currently TOSAs say they would not be able to do the job that they do without an extra release period. Several of the teachers also expressed difficulty leading without any formal authority. They believe if they truly had the ability to hold their peers accountable, they could have a much greater impact on student success.

**Question 2. What deliberate decisions do principals make to increase organizational capacity in relation to teacher leadership?**

The principals at the three high schools that participated in this study use a variety of strategies in an effort to build teacher leadership capacity. The one thing that they all have in common is that they try to play to people’s strengths. When they have a need, they consider teacher interest and expertise and see how these align with the task at hand. They also seek to understand what motivates teachers to make contributions beyond their classrooms, and try to use that as an incentive. One principal described her experience building capacity this year.

You get the right people and you figure out what their passion is. Everybody has strengths somewhere on this campus. They all have things they are really passionate about and if you put somebody who has a passion and a skill for something in a position where they can learn more about it they get so excited that you can get out of the way. It has been so fun to watch that.

Skill-building is also important. Principals use their best teachers as exemplars. One of the high school principals explained how he took his best Advanced Placement teachers and reassigned them to teach lower level classes. Not only did this provide at-risk students with access to the strongest instruction, but through collaboration it connected some of his less experienced and less effective teachers with the best in the business. The conversations that took place and the
interactions that occurred had the potential to improve instructional practice across the board. All three principals also reported using peer observations in a similar fashion.

Regardless of the approach, good models are essential for building teacher leadership capacity. The staff at another school is using collaboration as a tool for building leadership capacity. The principal describes the approach.

We are trying to run collaboration down through the whole organization. We have guidance counselors and administrators in teams. Assistant principals and counselors attend teacher and grade level meetings together. We ask them to own a whole grade level of kids for their four years of high school. [In doing so] we are trying to model what we are asking teachers to do. We are asking teachers to collaborate and build common assessments, create smart goals for their department and follow through with it. We are trying in administration and guidance to model that collaborative piece and [demonstrate] that we all own a piece of organization beyond our specific role.

In another capacity building effort, last year the staff at one school decided to dedicate a portion of their discretionary funds to researching best practices in the areas of professional growth and interventions. Several teachers visited other schools within and outside the district to find out what was working for them. They went to seminars and workshops with the specific objective of bring back something rich that had the potential to impact student learning in a big way. They tried many new strategies throughout the year. They had teachers working on special projects and gave them release periods to design programs and systems that would enhance the instructional program. This venture involved the entire faculty, so everyone had a stake in its success. At the end of the year, the effectiveness of the new practices were evaluated using pre-designed multiple measures. Only those programs that were most effective remained.
In scanning these examples, it is apparent that in the end relationships are at the foundation of building teacher leadership capacity. Principals must clearly articulate their expectations and hold teachers accountable when they fall short of the target. But this is challenging work. One principal sums up the importance of and complexity involved in building capacity below.

Great schools aren’t about principals standing up and giving inspirational speeches and kids jumping up and down and saying ‘yeah, that’s fantastic.’ They may know us if we’re out a ton, but they don’t really get close to us to where we become the motivating factors in their lives unless we get to know them. It’s the people on the street out there. It’s the teachers and your support staff; they’re the people who are going to move your school. They’re the people who are gonna lead the place. And if you’re not leading them, and your teacher leaders aren’t leading each other, you’re going to have just another one of those old, average, inner city or suburban schools that are just the kind that society complains about. You gotta keep an edge. You gotta keep it on your teachers. You gotta be pushing on them. You gotta hold them accountable. And at the same time you gotta love them, you gotta praise them, you gotta give them what they need to make them move, you gotta interact with them. You have to value the work they do. It’s hard work to make schools go.

**Question 3. How do teacher leaders perceive their ability to serve as instructional leaders influencing school reform efforts?**

100% of the teachers interviewed indicated there were plenty of opportunities for teachers to lead within their schools. However, teacher perceptions about their leadership varied greatly. For example, despite being recognized as a leader by her principal and peers, one teacher did not see herself in that light. “I find it hard to see myself as a leader I feel like this is my job and I am doing it.”

Also, despite having ample opportunities to lead, teachers reported varying degrees of success. In one focus group a teacher reported that teacher leadership was an integral part of her school culture.
At our school it is super easy to do that, and it is expected. The expectation is that you will be a leader whether a department chair or not. It is just that way we operate with our professional growth time and professional learning communities. Within that it is just the culture of the school that you will continue to lead your curriculum in your department. So as a teacher leader it is easy to step into that knowing it is the expectation of all people.

The challenging part becomes reminding people what our goals are….we struggle with all being on the same page. Not saying yes at a meeting, but going back in our rooms. That’s my struggle, helping facilitate people’s issues of not doing what we say we are going to do and to continue to put that out as this is what you said what you wanted to do, why aren’t we doing it? How are we going to do it? This is what you agreed to.

In the same focus group another participant held a contrasting perspective. She is not a department chair, but does lead her instructional team. In this role she is charged with designing and implementing new curriculum units with two new teachers, while a cadre of veteran teachers hang on to another curriculum that will not be permitted for use next year. She fears what the future might hold.

I’m afraid, to be honest, for next year being the leader of these teams, having been told this is my job to fix curriculum, that the two new teachers, who are temporary, won’t be here next year and I will have to have a whole new group, senior teachers to me, but I have to sit down and say here’s the new curriculum, here are your benchmarks, common assessments, common vocabulary, essays go. I’m worried because I know I’m respected, but think that is the kind of thing that is going to meet resistance.

This teacher is viewed as a leader because she brings curricular expertise from another district, yet when it comes to leading veterans, she reports not feeling as confident.

When she meets resistance, she seeks assistance from her department chair.

A veteran teacher expressed his perspective below.

I think that the biggest reform efforts are made in a classroom because moving a whole school is like moving a pack of butterflies. You either are going to have people see the same North Star that you see and help them move in that direction, or you’re not. I try as a department chair to team build a lot, and cheerlead a lot, and keep everybody in the loop. And when they’re not in the
loop, I try to gently nudge them in the loop. And if they’re really not in the loop, I am not so gentle in my nudging. And if I have to, then I speak to the administration, but I really think that [it’s the responsibility of] chairs and teacher leaders...that professionalism should come from within. You shouldn’t have to run to the principal or vice principal to take care of things.

Each teacher leader offered a different story, and experienced a different level of success in their role as a leader. A majority of the teacher leaders viewed lack of time as an obstacle to their success. Most believe they could be more effective if they had an additional release period each day to focus on leadership responsibilities. However, in the end they reported their greatest challenge was overcoming the reality that they were leading their peers, not their subordinates. They had no positional authority to hold people accountable for initiatives they were trying to move forward.

While teachers participating in the study reported few constraints to their service as instructional leaders influencing school reform efforts, they acknowledged many supports. For example, a majority indicated their principals were very supportive. Principals were accessible, encouraging, provided clear expectations, allowed teachers a voice in the decision-making process, and allowed them the opportunity to take risks and to try new things. If a teacher expressed a need for resources, principals found a way to secure those resources. Most of the teacher leaders reported that they felt valued by their principal. These principal supports have enabled teachers to influence change within their departments, on their campuses, and throughout the district. Whether it is writing curriculum, creating common assessments, implementing intervention programs for struggling students, mentoring new teachers, or piloting new textbooks, the teacher leaders participating in this study reported that their contributions have been meaningful and multiple.
Summary

This chapter presented the findings that emerged from a descriptive case study focusing on the principal’s role in building teacher leadership capacity. Survey and interview data obtained from 15 teacher leaders and three high school principals were used to create teacher leader and principal profiles that outlined basic characteristics of the participants of the study. The findings were presented both thematically and by research question.

In Chapter 5, the results of this study are summarized and implications are discussed. Recommendations for future research are also identified.
CHAPTER 5
Discussion and Conclusions

Introduction

This chapter begins with a summary of the study including an overview of the problem, purpose statement and research questions, and methodology. The study findings are then analyzed against the literature reviewed in Chapter 2. The bulk of this chapter is dedicated to discussing the findings and identifying potential implications they have on educational leadership. The chapter closes with recommendations for practice and further research.

Summary of Study

Overview of the problem

The dawn of the new millennium has pushed educational reform into the spotlight and created a greater sense of urgency for change. Students must be prepared to successfully compete in the 21st century global economy. If performance on federally mandated exams is any indication, American students continue to fall short of benchmarks. Unfortunately, the problem worsens as students age – performance of high school students lags behind their elementary and middle school peers. In an attempt to resolve this problem and bring about the reform they wish to see, high school principals increasingly look to teacher leaders for support. The research supports this strategy. The educational pundits agree that teachers are experts on student learning in their content areas, however, not all teachers have the skill or ambition to lead (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001). The challenge for school principals is to build the organizational capacity needed to move student learning forward by
developing in teachers those skills and ambitions to help accomplish this monumental
task.

*Purpose statement and research questions*

The study examined the role of the principal in developing a culture of teacher
leadership. It specifically focused on capacity building measures principals use to
empower teachers to lead beyond the walls of their classrooms and captured teacher
perceptions about their principals’ efforts in this area. The study investigated three
high performing high schools in a large suburban school district in Southern
California.

The following questions guided this study:

1) What principal behaviors and organizational conditions do teacher leaders
   perceive as empowering or constraining their development of teacher
   leadership capacity?

2) What deliberate decisions do principals make to increase organizational
   capacity in relation to teacher leadership?

3) How do teacher leaders perceive their ability to serve as instructional
   leaders influencing school reform efforts?

*Review of the methodology*

The researcher used a qualitative methodology to conduct this descriptive case
study on teacher leadership in high performing high schools. Principals, assistant
principals and teachers in three high schools in one school district were asked to
identify teachers at their site who they considered to be leaders. An online survey was
used to collect this data. The top 10 leaders identified by each group became the
sample. Note, principals and assistant principals comprised one group – administrators. Because teachers and administrators commonly identified five teachers, the overall sample size was 15. These 15 teachers were interviewed either alone or in focus groups. In addition they completed a brief pre-interview demographic survey. The three high school principals were also interviewed.

One-hour interviews were conducted at the convenience of the participants. Interviews were audio-taped, transcribed, and coded for themes. Hyper Research, a qualitative analysis software program, was employed to assist in organizing data and identifying common themes.

This study resulted in several major findings about building teacher leadership capacity. These findings, which help to illuminate strategies high school principals can use when leveraging teacher leadership for school improvement, are summarized in the next section.

Summary of findings

The three research questions guided the researcher to several key findings. A summary of the findings is provided below. Connections to the literature will be made later.

1) The principal plays a critical role in shaping a school culture supportive of teacher leadership. Principals in this study are believed to have empowered teachers to lead in a variety of ways. According to their accounts, they encouraged risk taking and gave teachers license to innovate and try new things. They also provided verbal praise and feedback. Principals and teacher leaders unanimously agreed that having a culture of continuous improvement
was important for their success. All three schools embraced a “good to great” philosophy and put students at the center of all decisions. They are moving towards collective ownership of all students, although this remains one of their greatest challenges.

Collaboration appeared to be valued at all three sites, with weekly or biweekly time built into the school calendar for interdisciplinary teaming, reflection on student progress, and common assessment development and scoring. This time is also used for professional development where whole-staff learning is often the focus.

There appear to be a high degree of satisfaction among teacher leaders when it comes to having access to their administrators. Teachers seek access to their principals during times when they need advice or a sounding board. Principals are careful to guide teacher leaders by facilitating their thinking rather than provide directives. Principals regularly call upon their interpersonal skills to move their agenda forward. The value of principal-teacher relationships cannot be overstated.

Principals at these high performing schools have developed certain “non-negotiables” that underpin their school cultures. First, they report challenging themselves to hire exceptionally talented teachers. Collaboration among faculty is also required. As mentioned earlier, this is supported via professional development time. Open and respectful communication is also a must. Teachers indicated dissent is welcome and viewed as healthy as long as
it is considerate. The fourth and final expectation is that all staff work hard in support of all students.

Professional learning is a key component of school culture in these schools. Teachers have many opportunities to grow professionally with their peers at their sites and across the district. The district supports organizational learning through professional development time, the Teaching and Learning Cooperative (TLC), and enabling teachers to attend conferences. Individual school sites also have unique structures such as learning lunches or peer observation to support ongoing teacher learning. Some teachers also choose to extend their knowledge base by pursuing National Board Certification or advanced degrees.

2) Not all the actions principals take in an effort to support teacher leadership are perceived by teacher leaders as helpful. For example, principals often offer teachers release time to work on a project, attend a conference, or visit other classrooms. Teachers report this is not very helpful because it requires them to prepare more detailed lesson plans for a substitute teacher. Additionally, many find they return to class with even more work because they need to re-teach unlearned content.

3) Although they were identified as teacher leaders by their peers, many teachers have difficulty leading other teachers with whom they work. They may support a change initiative and attempt to get their team or department to embrace it, but when greeted with resistance, especially from more
experienced veteran teachers, they retreat. Many teacher leaders expressed feeling powerless without any real authority.

4) Teacher leaders are well informed about current issues facing their schools and are able to articulate the school vision. They report that they have a say in school decision making, and their principals seek their input on a variety of issues. As leaders, they attempt to ensure that the voices of all teachers are heard.

5) Principals and teacher leaders share many of the same characteristics in common. Interview transcripts were coded for traits of principals and teacher leaders and corresponding tables (Table 4.2 and 4.3) were created to delineate the characteristics of these key players in school reform. The tables reveal that both principals and teacher leaders keep student learning as their number one priority. They value collegial relationships and are open to learning new things. They are good listeners with strong follow through skills. They are supportive of others. Finally, they constantly challenge the status quo.

Findings Related to the Literature

Major findings of the study were summarized in the previous section. This section is dedicated to analyzing how these findings relate to existing literature on building teacher leadership capacity. The research questions provide the initial organizational structure for this section. The section closes with additional findings unrelated to the research questions that emerged from the study. These too, are connected to the existing literature base.
Research Question 1: What principal behaviors and organizational conditions do teacher leaders perceive as empowering or constraining their development of teacher leadership capacity?

The research suggests that principals are essential forces in creating schools in which teacher leadership is the norm (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). In the present study, a majority of the teacher leaders reported being supported by their principals. This support manifested itself in many different ways, but perhaps most important is the creation of a school culture in which teacher leadership is encouraged and valued. Katzenmeyer and Moller (2001) stress the importance of recognition, indicating that when teacher leaders are respected and recognized for the contributions they make, they will be more likely to continually contribute. This is also consistent with Barth (2001) who contends principals who build strong cultures of teacher leadership encourage teachers to seek solutions to organizational challenges, and give them credit for success. Additionally, they scrutinize the process, not the person, when teacher leadership efforts fall short (Crowther, et al., 2002).

We know it is important to honor the efforts and praise teacher leaders for their successes, but how do principals motivate them to lead in the first place? The findings from this study convey that teachers have differing opinions on what inspires them to take action and lead beyond the walls of their classrooms. For example, some teachers reported being empowered when their principal steps out of the way and allows them the freedom to implement new ideas. In fact, Crowther, et al. (2002) cites “knowing when to back away” as one of seven challenges principals face in developing teacher leadership. This case study concluded that many potential teacher leaders are humble
and unaware of their strengths. By honoring these strengths and allowing teachers latitude to test their abilities, principals support the discovery and maturation of important leadership skills in teachers. It is not surprising then that Barth (2001) suggests principals should expect all teachers to lead, and to show their support by relinquishing authority to teachers and giving them autonomy.

Other teachers reported appreciating principals who were readily accessible and who asked a lot of questions about their work. Not only does this serve as an expression of genuine interest, but Crowther, et al. (2002) found that principals who ask open-ended questions that often appear to be hypothetical actually stimulate teacher thinking about their practice. This often results in further exploration and action. Whether a teacher appreciates the freedom to take risks and to work independently, or prefers the safety net of having a principal close by to provide more guidance, strong principal-teacher relationships are critical to building leadership capacity (Donaldson, 2006).

Collegiality among teachers is also advocated by prior research (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1996; Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001; Lambert, 1998; Snell & Swanson, 2000). Teachers need opportunities to openly and respectfully discuss their practice in order to continue to grow. The actions of the principals in this study reflect agreement with this assertion as evidenced by the organizational structures in place at their schools that encourage collegial relationships among faculty. Collaboration time built into the school day, kiosks, and peer observations are a few examples of internal structures in place at some of the school sites. Teachers also access external sources of professional learning through district-sponsored TLCs, conference attendance,
membership in professional organizations, and by pursuing advanced degrees. This need to work together and to grow professionally is fueled by a commitment to continuous improvement. Several of the teacher leaders and all three of the principals interviewed expressed the opinion that while they are considered high performing schools, there is definitely room for improvement. It is this type of attitude that necessitates the prevalence of teacher leadership.

While most teacher leaders consider the principal behaviors and organizational conditions described in the previous pages a means of support, not all actions principals take are viewed in this light. To illustrate, the research cites a lack of time as one of the greatest barriers to teacher leadership (Frost & Durrant, 2003; Johnson & Donaldson, 2006). Consequently, principals frequently provide teachers with release time to conduct research, go on site visits, or to work on special projects. However, several of the teacher leaders participating in the current study implied that a principal’s “gift of time” is not necessarily a gift. While principals believe these actions to be supportive and helpful, teachers report their workload is often greater when they are released because they need to prepare comprehensive substitute plans prior to their absence, and then deal with any issues that arise upon their return.

The current study clearly indicates that the principals at all three sites are presently endeavoring to establish sustainable cultures of teacher leadership. Although, teacher leaders held mixed opinions on the degree to which teacher leadership is an organizational expectation. The research provides further encouragement to continue this practice, as the more engrained and accepted the
notion of teacher leadership becomes, the more likely teachers will be receptive to change efforts in general (Mangin, 2006).

**Research Question 2: What deliberate decisions do principals make to increase organizational capacity in relation to teacher leadership?**

The data hints to a plethora of deliberate actions taken by the three principals in an attempt to develop organizational capacity. These efforts boil down to three categories – vision, strengths, and non-negotiables. Each of these is discussed in detail in the pages that follow.

**Vision.** Each principal expressed the complexity associated with operating a high performing comprehensive high school, and the pressure to continuously improve. While many issues need tending to, it is impossible to tackle all of the challenges their schools face. Therefore, these principals have made conscious decisions about where to focus their efforts. They work collaboratively with their faculties to set school-wide goals and revisit them frequently to measure their progress. The study results supported teacher involvement in this process, as all teachers were able to articulate the at least some of the organizational goals.

The goals vary from site to site depending on the needs of their student populations. One principal explained how her staff focused on professional development and interventions to support student learning. Once collective agreement was achieved, the staff targeted discretionary monies to improve in these two areas. They researched best practices, visited other school sites to learn which strategies were effective for them, and piloted several programs intended to support their development. At another
site, the English Language Learner (ELL) program was selected as the focus, due to the diversity of the student population and the unique challenges they face. By modeling collaboration from the top down, they were successful in creating collective ownership of the success of these students. The program grew exponentially, and teachers began to show evidence of implementing a variety of strategies to support student learning, rather than relinquishing this responsibility to the program coordinator. The principal at the third site indicated his focus was keeping the vision ever present in the minds of his staff and encouraging teachers to take on greater leadership roles. To that end he worked on improving his relationships with teachers. He was visible, accessible and he listened. He was then better able to identify what motivated individual teachers and worked to provide incentives in these areas.

*Strengths.* The principals at all three sites admitted to being strategic about their hiring and placement of staff. They recognized that people have different strengths and they hired to create a diverse balance of strengths within their organizations. As principals became familiar with the strengths of their individual staff members, they provided them with opportunities to exercise those strengths for the benefit of the organization. This was accomplished in a variety of ways. For example, a teacher may be asked to share some recent research at a staff meeting. Other teachers may be asked to lead a kiosk on a specific topic of interest. Or perhaps an administrator observed a unique instructional strategy during a classroom walkthrough. He may ask that teacher to share the strategy with another teacher who may be struggling. Because there is no shortage of highly qualified teachers working in this district, principals have multiple opportunities to value the strengths of the
teachers working in their school sites. By remaining committed to hiring the best teachers available, principals are ensured a deep pool of talent from which to choose.

The leveraging of strengths as described above is highly valued across the district and can be seen not just in high schools, not even just at schools sites, but at the district office as well. Hiring for strengths has been a long-standing practice within this district, but it really gained attention as a deliberate practice for building leadership capacity about three years ago when the superintendent required principals to read Buckingham and Clifton’s (2001) *Now, Discover Your Strengths*. The book, based on research conducted by the Gallup International Research and Education Center, espouses that people all have inborn strengths and talents, and rather than remediating weaknesses, these talents should be developed further. This is also consistent with Katzenmeyer and Moller’s (2001) developmental focus deemed to be characteristic of schools with strong cultures of teacher leadership.

*Non-Negotiables.* Non-negotiables were those things that the three principals were unwilling to compromise on. These baseline expectations at all of their schools, included hiring the highest caliber teachers, requiring them to collaborate with one another, communicating openly and honestly in respectful relationships, and working hard in support of all students’ learning. Some of these have been mentioned earlier, but are addressed briefly in this section again, to accentuate their importance. Principals challenge themselves to only hire those teachers they believe to have the greatest potential to impact student learning. They do not make these decisions alone, however, teacher leaders are involved in the recruitment and selection process as well. This inclusive process values teacher perspectives, and also reinforces for them, their
principal’s expectations and commitment to hiring well. Principals create the organizational structures needed to support collaboration and continuous learning because they know the impact this can have on the teaching and learning process. They also expected teachers to maintain respectful collegial relationships in which open, honest, and supportive communication is the norm. Finally, the principals in these schools believed that all students can learn and expect their teachers to work hard in pursuit of excellence. They expected teachers to seek out new strategies when nothing appeared to be working for a student. Teachers were encouraged to continue to believe in students even if they have given up on themselves. These expectations are consistent with teacher leadership and school improvement literature (Crowther, et al., 2002; DuFour & Eaker, 1998; Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001; Murphy, 2005; York-Barr & Duke, 2004).

Research Question 3: How do teacher leaders perceive their ability to serve as instructional leaders influencing school reform efforts?

The study findings revealed that despite being characterized as leaders by their peers, several teachers reported struggling to bring about change and build capacity in others. This is consistent with prior research on the subject. According to a study of 20 second-stage (four - ten years experience) teacher leaders conducted by Moore Johnson, et al. (2009) teacher leadership is hindered by ill-defined roles. “In the absence of any professional framework or established set of differentiated responsibilities to provide guidance or legitimacy for their roles, teacher leaders’ offers of advice often strained their relationships with other teachers” (p. 12). This results in teachers downplaying their leadership or walking away from it altogether.
West’s (2008) study on ethnically diverse teacher leaders also stresses the importance of clarifying the roles and responsibilities of teacher leaders.

The norms of autonomy, egalitarianism and seniority also posed problems for some of the teacher leaders who participated in the study. Several complained about not having the authority to hold the teachers they were charged with leading accountable. This resistance to conform can be attributed to the level of autonomy inherent to the profession (Donaldson, 2006) and its egalitarian nature (Johnson & Donaldson, 2007). Some teachers also reported that “vocal” staff members served to quiet the voices of some of the newer teachers. Johnson and Donaldson (2007) would indicate this is the dynamic of seniority at play.

While the work of teacher leadership is challenging and there are parts of the professional cultural that have historically exacerbated the problem, these conditions have not stopped many of the teachers in these high performing high schools from leading. It is important to note that while the sample of the study was limited to 15 teacher leaders, over 91 teachers were recognized as leaders by their administrators and peers in at least one of seven areas. This represents 28% of the teaching staff at the three sites. More than one-quarter of the teachers are perceived as leaders in some area. While this is impressive, the data hints there is room for improvement. When we narrow our focus to include only those teachers who were identified by their peers as teacher leaders, the number increases to 221 – nearly 69%! This indicates the pool for leaders may be deeper than principals are aware. The research suggests principals should consider recasting their nets to cover a broader area and continue to extend leadership opportunities to more teachers.
Additional Findings Related to the Literature

Profile of a teacher leader. As principals and teachers responded to interview and focus group questions, a variety of traits and behaviors emerged that could be used to describe teacher leaders. Simple adjectives were used to describe character, such as honest, credible, passionate, and humble. Brief phrases were used to describe behaviors such as “looks for strengths in others” or “stands up for beliefs.” Table 4.2 provides a more comprehensive explanation of these characteristics. Several of these traits of teacher leaders overlap Krisko’s (2001) study findings which led to the development of eight identifiable attributes of teacher leaders – intrapersonal sense, interpersonal skills, lifelong learners, find humor, creative, flexible, efficacious, and take responsible risks.

Interestingly, the same interview responses yielded a profile for the principals participating in the study as well (Table 4.3). Many of the same adjectives that were used to describe teacher leaders were also used to describe principal leadership behaviors. Perhaps this is because the principals model the behaviors they wish to see in their organizations. For example, they put students first and expect teachers to do the same. They are open to new learning and support teacher efforts to grow professionally. They are respectful and expect teacher to treat one another and students in the same manner. They challenge the status quo so teachers will embrace a culture of inquiry, always seeking to improve. One principal elucidated his commitment to modeling what he values.

If we want a friendly school, I gotta go out and model friendly. If we want a respectful school, I gotta go out and model it. I gotta do it in staff meetings. I
gotta do it in interactions with the public. I gotta talk about it. I gotta talk about the things we believe in and the things we want.

Fullan and Hargreaves’s (1991) monograph on teacher and principal responsibility for school reform recommends that principals express what they value and make it explicit for teacher to see. Deal and Kennedy (1982) also encourage this behavior; they indicate coaching and modeling play an essential role in establishing and maintaining cultural norms.

Trust. Perhaps one of the most interesting findings of this study is what was absent from the data. Pick up any book on leadership and one will likely find a section dedicated to trust. In fact, entire books have been written about trust. One of these, Covey (2006) cites trust as being “the one thing that changes everything,” meaning it has a terrific impact on success and failure. The book cites seven high-trust organizational traits: increased value, accelerated growth, enhanced innovation, improved collaboration, stronger partnering, better execution, and heightened loyalty. Quantitative research on the impact of trust on student achievement in school is also becoming more prevalent (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Goddard, Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001). Yet, after conducting nearly twenty hours of interviews and focus groups with 18 educators, yielding more than 350 pages of transcribed text, the issue of trust was barely mentioned. All three principals mentioned it briefly, but only 2 of 15 teachers cited principal trust as a support to their leadership.

This astonishing finding prompted the researcher to seek an explanation. Perhaps participants failed to recognize it as a factor in their leadership because it is presumed as a given due to the high performing nature of the schools. Additional
exploration led the researcher to an emergent construct called organizational mindfulness (Hoy, 2003; Weick & Sutcliffe, 2001). When applied to schools, organizational mindfulness is called school mindfulness. This habit of mind is defined as “a collective capability to anticipate surprise by focusing on failure, avoiding simplification, and remaining sensitive to day to day operations. But when the unexpected happens…mindful schools are committed to resilience; they rebound with confidence and expertise” (Hoy, Gage, III, & Tarter, 2006, p. 242). This definition emanates from a survey of 2,600 middle school teachers from 43 school districts in Ohio. The study deemed faculty trust promotes school mindfulness and mindfulness reinforces trust. Clearly, the participating schools possess some degree of school mindfulness. It is plausible this school mindfulness caused participants to overlook the issue of trust. However, additional research is required to strengthen this argument.

**Conclusions**

The reflections of the teacher leaders participating in this study suggest that principal leadership clearly influences the ways in which they experience their own leadership. In each of these high performing high schools, principals create organizational structures that foster, support, and reinforce teacher leadership. They build teacher leadership capacity by aligning teachers with their strengths and providing them opportunities to excel. They allow teachers a voice in decision making, encourage them to take risks and provide feedback needed to improve future performance. Collaboration and collegiality are non-negotiables for these principals who expect teachers to do whatever it takes to ensure student success. These principals embrace the district vision of all students learning and that ultimately
translates into a “good to great” school culture in which adult learning is honored and valued on par with student learning. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, these principals model what they value. In other words, they walk the talk. They serve as positive examples and role models for teachers seeking to build their leadership capacity. In summary, these high school principals successfully leverage the strengths of their teachers within the context of environments that are best characterized as professional learning communities.

While the small sample size of this study precludes generalization, it does provide the reader with insights into what teachers and principals in three high performing high schools believe builds teacher leadership capacity. The results of the study point to several practical implications that may inform teachers and administrators seeking to better understand the dynamic of teacher leadership and more specifically, approaches for enhancing leadership capacity.

**Implications of the Study for Practice**

Looking back to Chapter 1, the researcher set out to identify how high school principals build teacher leadership capacity to use as a tool in helping to improve organizational performance. There was a desire to know what deliberate decisions principals make when creating cultures steeped in teacher leadership. Ultimately, the study endeavored to capture the voices of teachers who were willing to share how they experienced their principals’ capacity building measures. This is important because schools are complex institutions and the current climate minimizes the chances that a lone leader can achieve success. In order to have a greater chance at success, principals must develop communities of leaders. Following are several important
concepts about teacher leadership gleaned from this study. These implications attempt to provide principals with some insights about how they might best unleash the power that resides within their teacher leaders, and use this power as a tool in realizing their school improvement goals.

*The Principal’s Role*

The results of the interviews and focus groups associated with this study confirmed what the existing research suggests – the principal plays a pivotal role in shaping school culture. The schools in this study each exhibit a culture of teacher leadership. One important implication of this research is the identification of what teachers say their principals do that supports their growth as teacher leaders. Strong working relationships are essential. Teachers need to feel respected and supported by their principal. They need to have access and feel comfortable sharing their thoughts and opinions without fear of retribution. They need to be given honest feedback, so they can continue to grow. The teachers participating in this study also expressed the benefit of having the freedom to experiment with new strategies in the classroom and to take on new roles outside the classroom. They felt their principals encouraged these behaviors. They also explained that the expectation to continuously improve as a school motivates them to work harder. Teachers also appreciated when the principal hired quality people who demonstrated strong instructional strategies and put students first. Then, by requiring collaboration, principals ensure that knowledge is shared. Principals who seek to develop strong cultures of teacher leadership must design these types of multi-faceted environments for teacher leadership capacity to continue to grow.
Shared Leadership

The need to share or distribute leadership opportunities is another implication. Based on the current study it appears that the principal who does this well lays out the vision, clearly states his or her expectations, publicly acknowledges and models desirable behaviors, and holds people accountable for moving towards the realization of the vision. When goals are achieved, success is celebrated, but new targets are established. This is reflective of the good to great philosophy associated with continuously improving schools (Collins, 2001).

But as the existing research suggests, these principals would not be as successful without the participation of teacher leaders. One of the primary questions of this study inquired about the deliberate decisions principals make to build teacher leadership capacity. All of the principals indicated they developed a clear vision in collaboration with their teachers. Collectively they decided on appropriate goals, focused on achieving them and revisited their progress regularly. By allowing teachers a voice in the focus of their work, principals gain a higher degree of buy-in and ownership from teachers than would otherwise be the case. With this buy-in comes commitment that supports their leadership efforts even during the most difficult times.

In addition to involving teachers in the visioning process, these principals skillfully identified the strengths within individual teachers and invited them to take on a variety of roles outside the walls of their classrooms. For example, teachers act as mentors or coaches for new or struggling teachers. They represent the site on district committees. They lead professional development sessions for their peers. They reference the importance of acting consistently with collective commitments.
during intense conversation. All of these behaviors enhance the strength and capacity of the organization.

Interestingly, these principals do not follow a method or a pattern in choosing who will lead; they just connect a teacher to an area of need. The teacher may be a veteran or a first-year teacher. They may be male or female, young or older. It is also important to point out that principals do not shy away from “tapping” individuals who do not see themselves as leaders. In these cases, principals point out how teachers’ strengths align to an area of need and ask them to step forward. Once a teacher accepts responsibility for a specific task or project, the principals allow them freedom to decide how to proceed. However, principals do remain accessible in the event their assistance is needed. The important point here is that none of the teacher leaders in this study reported feeling micromanaged by their principal. As teachers experience success in these leadership roles, they are more inclined to take risks and to continue to grow. As they grow, so does the capacity of the entire organization.

Focus on Strengths

A third implication of this study is that principals seeking to build teacher leadership capacity should first seek to hire the best people available and build upon their strengths. Rather than trying to remediate weaknesses, principals in the high performing schools studied focused on identifying individual strengths within their teachers and then provided them with opportunities to use them for the benefit of the entire organization. Incidentally, they admitted to implementing the same strategy when hiring administrators – you find the holes and fill them with people strong in those areas. It is not necessary for everyone to be good at everything. According to
these principals though, it is necessary to have people with strengths in a variety of areas. They then serve as the models. They set the bar, and their peers naturally seek to measure up. Even if they fall short, the organization as a whole is much stronger due to the collective growth they have made.

Organizational Learning

A final implication of this study is the need to promote organizational learning. The schools participating in the study can be characterized as learning organizations where individuals constantly seek to learn, grow, and improve. Professional learning is valued at each of the sites and teachers are called upon to lead the learning of their peers on a regular basis. Much of this learning takes place within professional growth time, an organizational structure woven into the fabric of all three organizations. While the structures at each site may look a little different, teacher and principal responses indicate much of this time is spent sharing best practices and new strategies to improve student learning. In recent months, differentiated instruction, formative assessment, and academic interventions have been major topics of discussion. Again, this collective learning helps build the capacity of all.

Implications of the Study for Policy

Another implication of this study lies within its methodology. Districts interested in gaining insights into teacher leader perspectives may consider a two-pronged approach. First, they can request input from teachers on who they acknowledge as leaders. Then, they can work with this group or a representative sample from this group to gain access to the information they desire. Empowering teachers to identify who they view as leaders, has two distinct benefits. First, it
provides decision makers with access to the people who are known to be respected as leaders among their peers. This is far more valuable than just relying upon an existing list of formal leaders or simply taking a random sample from the total teacher population. Secondly, the results of any study using this sample are more likely to be accepted (by teachers) as valid because a larger population of teachers had input into the process. They in fact, informed the sample. Therefore, the process is likely to have a greater degree of buy-in from the masses.

Recommendations for Further Research

Further research on the concept of teacher leadership will likely confirm many of the results of this study and deepen the education community’s understanding of the topic. Studies that examine principals’ roles in supporting teachers who are empowered to lead specific change initiatives would be extremely beneficial. Additional exploration of how principals choose who gets to lead would also be helpful. It is also important to identify the impact serving as a teacher leader (both formally and informally) has on job satisfaction and classroom performance. Similarly, future research needs to examine how building teacher leadership capacity influences a principal job satisfaction?

High performing schools also need further studying. For example, is good really the enemy of great (Collins, 2001)? How does teacher leadership capacity in high performing schools compare to that of teachers in schools undergoing restructuring or major reform efforts?

As always, the body of literature would greatly benefit from additional longitudinal studies on teacher leadership. The following questions might be a place to
start. How does a culture of teacher leadership evolve over time? Can restructuring mandates force the development of teacher leaders? What is the impact of teacher leadership on student outcomes?

**Insights of the Researcher**

This study set out to discover how high school principals in high performing schools build teacher leadership capacity and use it as a tool in an era of reform. As I began this dissertation journey, I had no idea what I might find. What I learned is that the teacher leaders and administrators of the schools studied are some of the most dedicated professionals one will ever find. The stories they shared helped to illuminate how they work interdependently to continuously improve the educational experiences of all students. While the data reflected in this report has been aggregated in order to protect the confidentiality of individuals participating in the study, it is important to point out that each school appeared to have its own unique strengths. For example, interview responses led me to believe that one school operates as a true professional learning community. Another school seemed to have a rich culture steeped in tradition and pride. The third showed signs of student interventions taking on a primary focus. This is not to say that one school is better than another – they are all high performing. But what was interesting to me is that while each organization faces a unique set of challenges, teacher leaders and administrators appear to be tenacious about ensuring student success.
APPENDIX A

Teacher Leader Identification Survey

1. Who in your school helps improve teaching and learning?
   Principal will be asked the same question.

2. When you are looking for someone to assist you with instructional issues, which teacher(s) do you go to for help?
   Principal will be asked: Assume a teacher comes to you for assistance with instructional issues, what other teacher(s) might you direct him/or to for support?

3. Who among your colleagues do you go to for assistance with curriculum?
   Principal will be asked: Who do you consider to be your curricular leaders?

4. Which teacher(s) do you seek classroom management guidance from?
   Principal will be asked: Assume you are concerned about a teacher’s classroom management. Who might you ask to mentor this struggling teacher?

5. When thinking or teaching about issues of diversity, who do you go to for assistance?
   Principal will be asked: Who do you consider to be your experts on issues of diversity?

6. Which teacher(s) do you rely upon for professional development?
   Principal will be asked: Which teacher(s) do you seek out to provide staff development?

7. Assume you come up with a plan to assist struggling students. Which teacher(s) would you go to for feedback on your plan?
Principal will be asked: Assume you want to develop an intervention plan for struggling students, which teachers might you select to assist you with this project?
Dear Teacher Leader:

You recently received a survey regarding my doctoral study on teacher leadership. Through the survey process, you have been identified as a teacher leader in your school, both by your principal and your peers. The next phase of my study involves interviewing teacher leaders to learn about their experiences and their perceptions about the ways in which principals support or constrain their leadership. I also want to study how they experience their roles as instructional leaders on a high school campus.

I would very much appreciate your participation. I know as a high school teacher, your time is valuable and limited, so I have tried to streamline the process as much as possible. Your involvement in the study should you choose to commit will be limited to a one-hour small group interview. By participating in this study, you will be making a contribution to [District] as well as the educational community at large.

I will be conducting focus group interviews on Monday, June 2 through Thursday, June 5 at 3:15 in the Principal’s Conference Room [High School]. I would love to hear your stories about teacher leadership, and think you will find it rewarding to share with other teacher leaders at other high schools throughout the district. Please contact me via email or at the number listed below to select a date that works best for you or if you have any questions regarding the study. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,

Kelly Burke
Doctoral Candidate
(760) 622-0918
APPENDIX C

Pre-Interview Questionnaire

Department in which you currently teach:

Number of years teaching:

Number of years in the district:

Number of years in current position:

Is teaching your first career?:

If teaching is not your first career, how did you earn a living previously?:

Age:

Gender:

Ethnicity:
APPENDIX D

Teacher Leader Interview Protocol

1. You were identified as a teacher leader by your principal and peers. What do you think you do that causes them to view you as a leader?

2. Tell me about your ability to serve as an instructional leader influencing school reform efforts.

3. How does your principal help you in your role as an instructional leader?

4. What would you like to see your principal do to better support your leadership or the development of your leadership skills?

5. How has your principal supported you to further develop and lead other teachers?

6. Tell me about how your professional development needs have or have not been met. What type of training have you received that you believe has been helpful?
   - Where did it come from?
   - Did you request it or was it suggested to you?

7. The research indicates a strong personal relationship with the principal is really the key – that they like each other is what is important. What do you think?
   - Give me an example of when you have really felt it’s clicking.

8. What have been your interactions with principals in general, not necessarily this principal, think of former principals and assistant principals?
   - Have they been helpful to you in your work? How so?
9. Have you had any other mentors that have motivated you to lead? What actions did your mentor take to support or encourage you?

10. Looking at your school culture as a whole, what are organizational structures, characteristics, or conditions that compel you to take action to improve the school or to lead your peers?

11. What is the principal’s vision for your school?

12. How, if at all, did you have input into developing this vision?

13. How do you help to support and carry out the school vision?

14. How could teacher leaders be supported to fully implement the school vision?

15. Sometimes teachers have ideas that may have the ability to change organizational effectiveness for the better, but they are reluctant to either take action or to share their opinions. What do you think could be done to help encourage more teachers to participate in implementing the school vision?

16. If you could have one thing that you think would enable you to be a better teacher leader, what would it be?
APPENDIX E

Principal Interview Protocol

1. In what ways do you support teacher leadership on your campus?

2. What steps have you taken as principal to ensure that teachers have an active leadership role in carrying out the school vision?

3. As a site principal, how do you leverage the strengths of the teachers on your campus to help you meet your school improvement goals?

4. What additional support, if any, do you think teachers need to develop their leadership skills?

5. You have a real need to maximize the organizational capacity, so you must make some deliberate decisions about that. What are you doing in this area? Is it working? Are you building organizational capacity? What evidence do you have to support this?
   - How do you think teacher leaders perceive this?

6. How do you know who you can count on to help increase the organizational capacity of the school?
   - How do you identify what they need to be able to increase the capacity of the school?

7. What challenges do you face in trying to support teacher leadership and build leadership capacity?

8. How does the system inhibit or enhance your ability to cultivate teacher leadership capacity?

9. What are three major reforms going on at your school right now?
   - Who do you look to to support that?
How do you get your information about that?

Have you got any professional development going on around that?

10. What value does teacher leadership add to student learning and to the quality of school life on your campus?
REFERENCES


