

LEADERSHIP INFLUENCE ON TEACHER SUPPORT TEAMS IN
HIGH POVERTY ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

A Dissertation
presented to
the Faculty of the Graduate School
at the University of Missouri-Columbia

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Education

by
JASON ALAN STEINGRABER
Dr. Cynthia MacGregor, Dissertation Supervisor

December 2010

The undersigned, appointed by the dean of the Graduate School, have examined the dissertation entitled

LEADERSHIP INFLUENCE ON TEACHER SUPPORT TEAMS IN
HIGH POVERTY ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

Presented by Jason Steingraber,

A candidate for the degree of Doctor of Education

And hereby certify that, in their opinion, it is worthy of acceptance.

Dr. Cynthia MacGregor

Dr. Beth Hurst

Dr. Kevin Kopp

Dr. Robert Watson

DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my incredible family. The past several years have been a trip to say the least, and your patience and understanding during the process has not gone unnoticed. You guys are remarkable.

To my wife, Jen; to quote a marvelous singer, “You are the Wind Beneath my Wings.” You are the definition of a supportive wife. I frequently thank God for graciously providing me with such a wonderful person to spend my life with. I feel so blessed and humbled to learn from you each day. Your focus on the important details life helps keep a person like me grounded every day. Every day I love you more than the day before and I am looking forward to starting a new chapter in our lives – post doctorate program.

To my daughters; Emma and Kate. You guys continue to teach me what is important in life. I love the dancing, singing, shows, games, and daily drama you present. You guys impress me every day with your passion and outlook in life. Remember, God loves you so much and whatever you do, please continue to explore, ask questions, and laugh as loudly as you can – because I will always be there loving you.

To my Mom and Dad. I don’t know what you put in the water when I was younger but something happened and I achieved a doctorate. You guys have always been there for me and I continue to grow and learn from you. Thank you for believing I could do this even when other may have thought differently. I love you guys – make sure there is gas in the boat this summer – we are going to tear up the lake.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank all those who have provided me with support and encouragement in the completion of this journey. I wish to thank my advisor, Dr. Cynthia MacGregor for her guidance, feedback, and encouragement in this work. My continued thanks to my committee members; Dr. Robert Watson, Dr. Beth Hurst, and Dr. Kevin Kopp who gave their valuable time to read this work and assist me with the necessary revisions. Thank you also, all the principal and teacher who have participated in the study and their contributions with this work.

Finally, I would like to thank my wife, Jennifer, who has been a pillar of support and a source of strength for me through early mornings, late nights and weekends of countless hours work during the past several years. Without her support and love the completion of this work would not have been possible. Additionally, I wish to express my love to my girls, Emma and Kate. Your support and ability to make me smile throughout this entire process has been a true blessing

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Leadership Influence on Teacher Support Teams in High Poverty Elementary Schools

Jason A. Steingraber

Dr. Cynthia MacGregor, Dissertation Supervisor

ABSTRACT

The increased accountability to schools and districts to meet federal standings has lead to commencing systematic approaches to the needs of all students. In order for teachers to be able to facilitate instructional strategies that are differentiated and functional for all students they must receive leadership and support. The importance of expertise and leadership in the educational process is paramount, for there is more power in a leadership model and not necessarily in a model that designs its own standards.

This need for expertise and leadership has lead to collaboration among general and special education experts, as well as the students' families, achieves an integrated and effective approach in response to struggling learners. First supported by senior administration in school districts, the Teacher Support Team (TST) initiative relied upon a selected team within each school to show what it can achieve for students.

This leads to the significance of distributive leadership in the TST and creating relational trust by allowing those in the organization to take leadership roles and distribute the leadership appears to be imperative. This allows for greater participation in the organization, as well as greater morale and a relieved workload for the leader. It also encourages leadership in the organization, which benefits the organization as a whole.

The overall purpose of this study was to establish a connection between the role of distributed leadership and the impact of TSTs on elementary students of high poverty. To achieve this, information was gathered from high poverty elementary schools in the Sunnyside Public School District. The study examined key respondents' perceptions on

the leadership within the TST. A mixed method of gathering both qualitative and quantitative data was chosen as the most appropriate approach to collect the data.

The project began by the researcher contacting six high poverty elementary schools within the Sunnyside Public Schools and requesting their participation in the research project. The purpose of narrowing the research to schools that serve a high poverty population is to ensure similarities within the students and communities. Each TST was made up of the building administrator, a TST coordinator, and other teachers as noted by the team. Each team was provided an opportunity to participate in the research activity and it was assured the data was anonymous and not reflective of employment performance or used as an evaluative tool.

The approach to the design was a mixed methods research study. Based on the data gathered via a survey, quantitative information was gathered in order to address the research questions. In addition to the quantitative approach, a qualitative aspect was analyzed. This mixed methods approach was chosen due to the potential to discover true meaning to the research questions. It was also anticipated the mixed methods approach would allow for further research designs to come to the forefront.

Descriptive analyses were performed to support the research questions and sub-parts to the research questions. Findings of this study displayed both favorable and less favorable confidence in the leadership of the TST coordinator and the TST itself. The concerns of the TST coordinator and the TST itself were focused on time being wasted, weak leadership, and teachers who were frustrated with the results of the TST process.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION OF THE STUDY

Increasingly, the role of schools to provide instruction utilized as best practice for all students is becoming apparent. Initiating the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (Public Law 107-110) intensified substantial pressures of accountability within schools. This increased in accountability lead to schools and districts commencing systematic approaches to the needs of all students. Nunn, Jantz, and Butikofer (2009) revealed extensive literature that commonly addresses the teachers' learning, methods, theories, and understanding of instructional strategies. This literature is focused on meeting all students' needs. In order for teachers to be able to facilitate instructional strategies that are differentiated and functional for all students they must receive leadership and support. Mintzberg (1979) mentioned the importance of expertise and leadership in the educational process, for there is more power in a leadership model and not necessarily in a model that designs its own standards.

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (Public Law 107-110), often abbreviated as NCLB, is a controversial United States federal law (Act of Congress) that reauthorized a number of federal programs aiming to improve the performance of primary and secondary schools by increasing the accountability standards for states, school districts, and schools. Currently, the state of Missouri holds laws and strict standards of education accountability and standards for all students (MoDESE, 2008). The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 makes accountability for all students an important component for school and district success. This Federal law requires schools to have indicators when measuring

Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) and each of these indicators represent all students in Missouri, in particular, the Sunnyside Public Schools (a pseudonym).

To meet AYP, 100 percent of all students will receive advanced or proficient on state assessments by the year 2014 (Public Law 107-110). The schools' focus on accountability ushers in a renewed focus on instructional practices in the classroom. These instructional practices are built on meeting all students' needs in the classroom. The Sunnyside Public School District developed a system to address these new demands, which quickly transformed into the Teacher Support Team (TST). This team exists to assist teachers in their instructional practices. Though not developed to help the individual student, it was organized to assist the teachers in the learning process for students.

This collaboration among general and special education experts, as well as the students' families, achieves an integrated and effective approach in response to struggling learners (Witmire, 2008). First supported by senior administration in school districts, the TST initiative now relies upon a selected team within each school to show what it can achieve for students (Creese, Norwich, & Daniels, 2000). Additionally, Creese et al. (2000) found less of a consensus between the TST team and the responsible senior teacher (the TST coordinator) in regards to the purpose and expectations of the team.

This leads to the significance of distributive leadership in the TST and creating relational trust by allowing those in the organization to take leadership roles and distribute the leadership appears to be imperative (Sebring, Hallman, & Smylie, 2003). This allows for greater participation in the organization, as well as greater morale and a

relieved workload for the leader (Sebring et al., 2003). It also encourages leadership in the organization, which benefits the organization as a whole (Sebring et al., 2003).

Furthermore, Anderson (1996) stated:

Schools cannot be understood in functionalist terms wherein they pursue a mythical set of interests and values that are shared by ‘society.’ Instead they must be viewed as arenas of cultural politics in which the outcomes of schools are always contingent on the daily political struggles that take place both within them and without. (p. 951)

Without leadership, the organizational struggles may fester and lead to ineffective approaches in the classroom.

This study focuses on the effectiveness of distributed leadership within Teacher Support Team in high poverty elementary schools. The conceptual framework assists in the identification and explanation of this effectiveness. The concepts involved derive from a review of the literature outlining existing research relevant to the study. The literature review chapter elaborates on these concepts.

Conceptual Framework

This study evaluated the leadership Teacher Support Teams (TST) within Missouri schools deemed as high poverty in a large urban school district. The goal of the study was to determine the connection between the role of distributed leadership and the impact made by TSTs on elementary students of high poverty. The study concentrated on the concept of distributed leadership within the TST. The structure of the TST lends to the building administrator distributing the leadership to a coordinator and this leadership theory, as endorsed by Lashway (2003), points to the leadership being distributed

throughout the school rather than vested in one position. Although, there needs to be a protection of simply giving other staff members some of the principal's current responsibilities, as well as protecting a reshuffling of assignments in organizational thinking that redefines leadership as the responsibility of everyone in the school. Items from the Teacher Support Team Leadership Survey were gleaned in correspondence to each of the concept, and the results of these items were summarized between schools of high poverty with functioning TSTs. The importance of acquiring qualitative and quantitative data to answer the research questions requires a mixed methods approach. Within the TST, a lead teacher assumes the leadership role, supervising the TST in a manner effective to meet the needs of all students. Additionally, a number of factors contribute to student success, as well as the success of a teacher support team. The TST's levels of leadership likely differ within schools that are similar in demographics. The value of leadership within the TST is extremely important. For example, Yukl (2006) said leadership involves diligence by a leader to encourage and facilitate participation by others in making key decisions; in particular, the decision making process of classroom instruction to meet the needs of all students.

Additionally, Sebring et al. (2003) noted trust flourishes when people act in consistent and expected ways. Leaders create relational trust by allowing those in the organization to take leadership roles and distribute the leadership. Maxcy and Nguyen (2006) also pointed out school leadership may be accomplished differently through decomposition, reconstruction, and reenactment of key tasks. This idea continues to support the need for effective implementation of instruction to meet the needs of all

students in the classroom, in particular the struggling learners. This notion points to the TST.

Creese et al. (2000) discussed the importance of collaborative structures in schools and how those structures provide information for improving student instruction. Furthermore, Spillane et al, (2001) contended that the sum of the leadership decision is greater than the sum of each individual's practice. The distributed perspective suggests that improving school leadership by focusing chiefly on building the knowledge of an individual formal leader in the school may not be the most effective. Spillane et al. (2001) concluded distributed leadership spreads the expertise throughout the organization.

While Bolger, Patterson, Thompson and Kupersmidt (1995) stressed the need for a functioning team that takes the issues of poverty and the compounding issues into account for successful instruction, some researchers (Fung, 2004) noted the need for a body of experts who possess effective routines and can train others in these techniques. Perhaps due to radically diverse conditions, expert prescriptions on many areas of public action seem irrelevant or ineffective.

Setting

In 2005, a school district in Missouri initiated Student Assist Teams. These teams were established to implement a new policy on meeting the needs of struggling learners. Initially, the Special Education Department conceived this practice. However, the district quickly realized these teams were needed as a regular education initiative, anticipating the higher levels of accountability necessitated by No Child Left Behind.

During the initial stages of Team Support Team (TST) development, Sunnyside Public Schools presented individual buildings with the opportunity to have a Teacher Support Team. This being said, some buildings chose to create and utilize these teams while others did not. The building administrator decided their school's participation. The school counselor, administrator, and regular education teachers composed these teams, with the building administrator as the primary leader.

Is the importance of TSTs being realized, Sunnyside Public schools ended-up mandating TSTs in each elementary school. The building administrator is still a part of the team, but a teacher leads the team. Sunnyside Public Schools provides the teacher leader a yearly stipend to organize and maintain the process of providing strategies for teacher implementation.

Informal conversations with building administrators highlighted the discrepancy between TST functioning among buildings. Many of these discrepancies correspond to the leadership within the TST. As a consequence of a TST that is not functioning at all or not to its full potential, assumed instructional methods are not meeting the needs of all students. Transversely, those buildings in which the TST is running smoothly showed improvements in their test scores.

The implementation of a highly effective TST with strong leadership has two major implications on a building. First, effective TSTs encourage the development of highly skilled teachers who are able to recognize the need for instruction that meets the needs of all students. Effective TSTs facilitate the excelling of each student in schools and provide these students with the opportunity to be their best. Collecting evidence of TST impact on student achievement is of the utmost importance.

Statement of the Problem

One point of view argues the principal's influence, as the instructional leader, is the center piece to providing instruction in the classroom. However, instruction that is truly differentiated and focused utilizes a team approach and employs experts in the field. Creese et al. (1998) noted it was easier to use such a team approach in small schools. They further noted the weakness of such groups was that they could result in providing "a negative forum for teachers to complain about individual pupils' resulting in unsatisfactory outcomes" (Creese et al., 1998, p. 113). These outcomes need to be directed by a leader who is able to guide the learning in the group.

There appears to be a lack of research not only regarding the importance of leadership and how it impacts instruction in the classroom, but also within research on the importance of this leadership in Sunnyside Public School District that serves students of high poverty. In fact, there is extensive research available discussing the importance of a collaborative teaming approach as well as the challenges of providing effective teachers and teaching for all students (Murnane & Steele, 2007). Additionally, research is available on the impact of poverty on children, the need for schools to respond, and how schools have responded in the past. Research in the area of leadership within the TST is a need that must be addressed within the academic community.

Sunnyside Public School District is a large urban school district in Missouri. Based on information provided within the district, the TST coordinator's responsibilities include, but are not limited to, identifying and training staff members for building TSTs, developing guidelines and referral procedures for the building TST, and providing staff development for teachers regarding TST procedures. Based on information received and

research of district forms, data, and guidelines, no research has been conducted to establish the effectiveness of leadership in the TSTs, including buildings which serve students of high poverty.

Research does exist outlining the responsibilities of the TST coordinator as well as the intervention process (Creese et al., 2000). Additionally, there is research describing the importance of leadership in the TSTs (Creese et al., 2000). However, there is a general lacking of information pertaining to the overall impact of leadership with TSTs and its impact on the overall functioning of the TST. A lack of research also exists in regards to the perceptions of the TST members concerning the leadership role of the TST coordinator, especially within schools of high poverty such as Sunnyside Public School District.

Additionally, there is existing research outlining the importance of focused leadership in schools of high poverty (Creese et al., 2000), although there is a lack of research guided toward the influence of effective leadership among peer groups in schools of high poverty. The distributed leadership within TSTs in schools of high poverty is an area in need of further investigation.

Purpose of the Study

The overall purpose of this study is to establish a connection between the role of distributed leadership and the impact of TSTs on elementary students of high poverty. To achieve this, information will be gathered from high poverty elementary schools in the Sunnyside Public School District. The study will also examine key respondents' perceptions on the leadership within the TST. A mixed method of gathering both

qualitative and quantitative approaches was chosen as the most appropriate approach to collect the data.

Research Questions

Within the context of this study, the following research questions were addressed:

1. Do the teachers have confidence in the Teacher Support Team coordinator?
 - a. Do the teachers believe the leadership role of the TST coordinator has positive influence on the TST?
 - b. Does the stipend provided to the TST coordinators impact their performance?
2. Do the teachers have confidence in the Teacher Support Team?
 - a. Are teachers more likely to refer students to the TST based on the leadership of the TST coordinator?
 - b. Are the referrals from the TST to the Special Education Team appropriate to meet the needs of the students?
3. In what manner does the leadership of the Teacher Support Team coordinator within the Teacher Support Teams impact the overall functioning of the Teacher Support Team in high poverty elementary schools?

Significance of the Study

Creswell (2003) mentioned a mixed methods study can use qualitative and quantitative approaches. Creswell (2003) stressed the combination of the approaches will result in information which provides a deeper and richer understanding of the information. The results of the study will likely provide useful information to the Sunnyside Public Schools, especially to district leaders, building administrators, and

teachers in which students of high poverty are being served. It is hoped the study will contribute to the understanding of strong leadership within the TST.

This study has both a theoretical and practical significance. For teachers, it provides insight into the importance of effective instructional practices. For building administrators, this study may provide strategies for assisting the leaders in the TST and help them recognize leadership growth in the TST. This study should also assist principals in selecting a TST representative who has the qualities needed to get the most out of teachers. Creese et al. (2000) stated this position is crucial due to the immense support teachers need to meet the demands of struggling learners in the classroom.

Some studies have reviewed the importance of the TST in buildings and Creese et al. (2000) discussed the importance of collaborative structures in schools and their relationship to provide information for special education needs. Moreover, Sebring et al. (2003) documented there can be a dissonance when leaders are out-of-sync with the organizational culture and the emotional state of their employees. Sebring et al. (2003) stressed distributed leadership provides a value for effective instruction and support for the emotional state of the employees. This study attempts to go beyond recognizing the importance of a team, it looks at the effectiveness of the leadership within the team. It highlights the crucial role of the TST in buildings of high poverty schools and the importance of a systematic approach to meeting the needs of all students.

Definition of Terms

For the purpose of the study, the following terms are defined:

Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). AYP is a measure of a school's or school system's ability to meet required federal benchmarks with specific performance standards from year to year (No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, 2005).

Teacher Support Team (TST). The TST is a team designed to assist teachers in strategies needed to meet the needs of all students.

No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB). NCLB is the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Act (Public Law 107-110).

Building administrator. The principal of the elementary school is the person who is essentially in charge of the educational system and is the instructional leader in the building.

TST Coordinator. The TST coordinator is a teacher in the elementary school who organizes, conferences, and gathers data from teachers concerning individual students brought to the TST.

TST Leadership. The TST leadership is based on guidance and direction from the TST Coordinator. This direction is utilized to guide and develop a productive team that focuses on assisting teachers on appropriate instruction in the classroom.

High poverty elementary school. For this study, elementary schools in the school district with more than 90% of the students receiving free and reduced lunches were considered high poverty elementary schools.

Interventions from TST. The TST presents a three tiered approach to instruction, each tier with more intensive interventions. The TST meets bi-monthly to discuss interventions to be implemented in the classroom.

Response to intervention (RTI). RTI combines assessment and intervention within a multi-level system to maximize student achievement and reduce behavior problems. Research-based interventions are utilized to determine educational needs for individual students.

Limitations

As mentioned previously, the study will utilize a mixed methods approach, resulting in quantitative and qualitative data. The number of surveys obtained from the teachers can significantly obscure the statistics based on the number of surveys received. If too few surveys are received, hypotheses may be obscured and the data may not be as objective as possible. The study's reliance on reported information provides no assurance the reporters will give adequate time and thought when completing the questionnaire and answering the interview questions. In order to compensate for this behavior, the research will need to take precautions to develop the transitioning in the questioning. Fink (2006) reiterated this includes the survey follow natural sequences as well as the questions need to be easy-to-answer. The accuracy of the data depends on the quality of the information provided by the participants responding to the data collection instruments and the quality of the research tool.

Another limitation relates to the researcher's objectivity. Researchers should avoid close relationships with the respondents that could lead them to overlook truths, but they should also not accept every response without questioning their view of reality. This particular limitation can be a concern based on the relationships developed in the working environments of a school district. However, for this research project to useful,

information needs to be looked at objectively and appropriately leaving out personal assumptions and intuitions.

Finally, information gathered by looking at these particular schools in a district in Missouri cannot necessarily be generalized to all school districts. The findings of this study may not be reflective of other schools in the state of Missouri, and it would be problematic to generalize the findings of this study more widely. In addition, the surveyed sample was limited, and it might be argued the sample was not representative of each school staff as a whole.

Summary

This investigation into the leadership within TSTs in high poverty schools within the Sunnyside Public School District is presented in five chapters that address major themes as follows:

Chapter one provides an introduction to the study and maps the intentions of the research to provide information for readers to understand the leadership roles in TSTs of high poverty schools. This chapter includes: background of the study, purpose, research questions, significance of the study, definition of key terms, and limitations.

The second chapter reviews the literature and research that is relevant and necessary to answering the research questions. The chapter focuses on literature relating to the major themes, including the impact of poverty on children the need for schools to respond, how schools have responded, current initiatives in poverty, leadership in TSTs, and the importance of leadership in the TST initiative.

The third chapter explains and justifies the mixed-methods approach used in the study. Specific areas of this chapter include an explanation of the research design,

descriptions of the study participants, the procedures used for collecting data survey, and document analysis. The approval process, distribution and return of the questionnaire, data analysis process, reporting the results, ethical considerations, and conclusions based on the data are also described in this chapter.

The fourth chapter presents the results and analysis. This chapter includes descriptive statistics to analyze the Teacher Support Team Leadership Survey data and presents an interpretation of the data gathered.

The fifth chapter offers a summary of the findings that are detailed in chapter Four as well as a discussion of these findings as they relate to the literature. The chapter draws conclusions and their relevance to the role of leadership in TSTs which are in buildings that serve students who are in high poverty. This chapter makes recommendations that will inform principals, teachers, and other district leadership, and suggestions on direction for further research in this area.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

“Voices of minority, less educated, diffident, or culturally subordinate participants are often drowned out by those who are wealthy, confident, accustomed to management, or otherwise privileged” (Fung, 2004, p. 4).

Those who work with students and families of high poverty are convinced they are in place to make a difference. For some teachers, their passion is to teach the students the best they can, and, for others teachers, it is to serve through leadership roles in their buildings. The TST, although a relatively new concept, displays its importance clearly. Problems within the TST arise with the distributed leadership in the building where the TST coordinator has the responsibility to provide leadership that is effective for teachers, resulting in appropriate instruction in the classroom.

This chapter provides a review of the literature on the impact poverty has on children and the need for schools to respond. It also examines leadership in teacher support teams and the importance of direction in the teacher support team initiative. The literature related to the research in this study falls into five major categories: the area of the importance of leadership in teacher support team; the impact appropriate instructional practices have on students of high poverty; how schools have responded in the past to children of poverty; current initiatives of children in high poverty and the teacher support teams (TST); and the impact poverty has on children and the need for schools to respond. The following review of the literature describes each of these categories and how they affect and complement each other.

Impact of Poverty on Children and the Need for Schools to Respond

Most policy-oriented discussions of poverty in the United States and its effects on children use the official U.S. measure of poverty, a measure based on income; not only does this measure the issue, but also it is able to guide policies and programs designed to cope with poverty (Lewit, Terman, & Behrman, 1997). Lewit et al. (1997) found in 1997, according to the official poverty measure, some 20.8% of all U.S. children were poor compared with an adult poverty rate of 11.3% in that same year. This percentage also grew from a child poverty rate of approximately 15% in the early 1970s. Children depend principally on the adults with which they live for their well-being. A comprehensive review of the relationship between parental income and school attainment, published in 1994, concluded that poverty limited school achievement (Brooks-Gunn & Duncan, 1997).

Additionally, this intense focus on the importance of interventions for those in poverty lead Lewit et al. (1997) to realize since children live with adults who are poor, child poverty requires some understanding of adult poverty. Education, race, and age strongly affect hourly wages and labor force activity and, hence, adult earnings. As well, children who live with poorly educated, relatively young, or minority race (especially African-American) adults are more likely to be classified as poor than children who do not live in such families (Lewit et al. 1997).

Betson and Michael (1997) pointed out poor families have more children per adult than the population as a whole. In turn, the inequality of earnings among workers increased over the past 30 years, resulting in higher poverty rates in the population and a greater poverty rate among those with relatively low levels of education. Not only do

poor children have access to fewer material goods than rich or middle-class children, but also they are more likely to experience poor health and to die during childhood. In school, as poor children score lower on standardized tests their likelihood of retention grows, and greater chances exist for them dropping out (Lewit et al. 1997).

Poverty in children impacts them greatly in the classroom. Their school readiness, many times, is not where educators would like it. The economic difficulties students of high poverty encounter collide with the educational system at times. An educator's duty requires the educator to provide all students with the best possible educational experience.

Therefore, exceptional importance rests in a teacher's ability to respond educationally in the school building, but also to recognize and embrace culture within the system. The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (Public Law 107-110), often abbreviated in print as NCLB, brought a renewed focus and accountability to all schools in the United States. This accountability is a wake-up call for educators to respond to the needs of all children.

Economic Hardship and the Impact on Education

Children in poverty face many economic hardships which contribute to survival needs. Bolger, Patterson, Thompson, and Kupersmidt (1995) recognized an association between family economic hardships with a wide variety of negative outcomes for children, including low self-esteem, heightened levels of both internalizing and externalizing behavior problems, and lack of acceptance by peers. Existing research suggests that childhood difficulties in behavior and peer relationships link together with adjustment problems in adolescence and adulthood, including delinquency, dropping out

of school, and psychopathology. This association makes the relation between poverty and childhood socio-emotional problems a cause of even greater concern (Bolger et al. 1995).

Additionally, mothers of low socioeconomic status knew less about their children's school performance, communicated a smaller amount with teachers, and managed children's school achievement in an inactive fashion (Bolger et al., 1995). Low parental monitoring of children's peer activities links together externalizing behavior problems in childhood (Bolger et al., 1995) with lower child competence in classroom peer activities. As well, low levels of parental monitoring occur with more likelihood in families under stress (Bolger et al., 1995). Thus, parental behavior tying the family to the school and peer environments appears to be a central pathway from family poverty to negative child outcomes (Bolger et al., 1995).

Educational attainment is well recognized as a powerful predictor of experiences in later life (Brooks-Gunn & Duncan, 1997). Bolger et al. (1995) identified a remarkable range of difficulties encountered at school by children whose families experienced persistent economic hardship. Children who lived in persistent family economic hardship started out behind other children with intermittent hardship (Bolger et al., 1995).

Moreover, poor children suffered from emotional and behavioral problems more frequently than did non-poor children (Brooks-Gunn & Duncan, 1997). Two dimensions of emotional outcomes existed: (a) externalizing behaviors including aggression, fighting, and acting out, and (b) internalizing behaviors such as anxiety, social withdrawal, and depression (Brooks-Gunn & Duncan, 1997). Overall, the greatest difficulties in adjustment developed in children whose families experienced persistent economic disadvantage, followed by those whose families dealt with intermittent economic

hardship; those whose families did not undergo economic hardships reflected the fewest difficulties (Bolger et al., 1995). Children living in persistent economic hardship adjusted negatively across a range of assessments collected in the school environment (Bolger et al., 1995).

Researchers have found strong effects of parental income on cognitive abilities and school achievement in the early childhood years of school (Brooks-Gunn & Duncan, 1997). One possible reason is that extra-familial environments (for example, schools and neighborhoods) begin to matter as much or more for children than family conditions once children reach school age (Brooks-Gunn & Duncan, 1997). Also, school-related achievement depends on both ability and behavior (Brooks-Gunn & Duncan, 1997). Furthermore, children's behavioral problems measured either before or after the transition into school, are not very sensitive to parental income differences (Brooks-Gunn & Duncan, 1997).

Additionally, a potentially crucial reason for educational concerns is the timing of the economic deprivation within the span of childhood (Brooks-Gunn & Duncan, 1997). Few studies measure income from early childhood to adolescence, so no way exists to know whether poverty early in childhood effects later outcomes such as school completion (Brooks-Gunn & Duncan, 1997). Because family income varies over time, wages measured during a child's adolescence, or even middle childhood, may not reflect earnings during the offspring's early childhood (Brooks-Gunn & Duncan, 1997).

Educational Response to a Child's Need

The educational system needs to respond to the needs of all children; in particular those children in poverty. The educational system answered to the needs of children in

poverty through the implementation of resources, such as Head Start. Head Start was created in 1965 to “strike at the basic cause of poverty,” which was seen as a lack of education among the poor (Devaney, Elwood, & Love, 1997, p. 101). Over the years the program matured into the nation’s primary federally sponsored child development preschool program (Devaney et al., 1997). The program is implemented with considerable variation around the nation to meet diverse community needs (Devaney et al., 1997). In addition to the federal income eligibility criterion, local programs add other criteria relating to family characteristics designed to help Head Start better serve community needs (Devaney et al., 1997).

The overall goal of Head Start is to bring about “a greater degree of social competence in preschool children from low income families” (Devaney et al., 1997, p. 101). Social competence encompasses cognitive, intellectual, and social development; physical and mental health; and adequate nutrition. Key principles of Head Start include providing comprehensive services (including education, health, nutrition, social services, and parent involvement), fostering the parent’s role as the principal influence on the child’s development, encouraging parents to be involved in policy and program decisions, and establishing partnerships with community agencies to improve the delivery of services to children and families (Devaney et al., 1997).

To assure that local groups utilize their discretionary latitude constructively, outside bodies monitor student test scores, truancy rates, incidents of crime, and more discerning measure; to detect trends of improvement, stasis, or decline in performance (Fung, 2004). The first is to provide various kinds of supports needed for local groups, such as beat teams, to accomplish their ends that would be otherwise unavailable to these

groups in isolation (Fung, 2004). The second is to hold these groups accountable to the effective and democratic use of their discretionary latitude (Fung, 2004). Somewhat ironically, realizing autonomy requires the sensitive application of external guidance and constraint (Fung, 2004). When factions inside a group dominate or paralyze planning processes, outsiders can step in to break through jams and thus enable the group to better accomplish its ends. When the sluggishness of these groups results in subpar performance, external interventions and sanctions can transform license to innovation and problem-solving (Fung, 2004).

This planning process is vital; if one school hits upon an innovation that works well for its students, for example, a truancy-reduction strategy or effective reading program, market-based mechanisms may be quite slow to spread this good news to other schools that might benefit from it (Fung, 2004). Indeed, if education markets were quite competitive, the most successful schools might prefer to hoard their techniques as a kind of intellectual property for competitive advantage (Fung, 2004). The professional model still presumes a body of experts possesses effective routines and can train others in these techniques (Fung, 2004). This focus on accountability is of the utmost importance when attempting to meet the needs of children.

The Impact of Culture

Approaches for studying organizational culture comprise behavioral patterns and processes (Peterson & Spencer, 1990). This category includes the manifest patterns of behavior that are present in the organization's operations, and those referred to as the "social architecture" of the organization (Peterson & Spencer, 1990). These patterns and processes involve behavioral activities with relatively standard content and form,

sustained and repeated over time distinguishing them from other artifacts (Peterson & Spencer, 1990). Members within the organization may either formally define or informally develop and support such behavioral activities (Peterson & Spencer, 1990). However, determining the cultural impact of these elements requires careful consideration of the manifested processes, the subsequent reactions to them, and their meanings within the organization.

Another consideration in organizational culture focuses on the values and beliefs that the members share about their organization (Peterson & Spencer, 1990). These may be explicitly stated, such as those found in mission statements and organizational charters, or implicitly held and revealed only through members' actions (Peterson & Spencer, 1990). Although an organization communicates their foundational shared values and beliefs, they often present the group in its ideal versus their actual form (Peterson & Spencer, 1990). Members carry the implicit, or embedded, values and beliefs that provide an accurate sense of their organizational reality (Peterson & Spencer, 1990).

The impact poverty has on children and the importance of the school's need to respond is exceptionally important. Daily economic hardships decrease opportunities for children in poverty and harm readiness for starting school. The educational system needs to be cognizant of these hardships and the cultural sensitivity they endure. The significance of student success relies on leadership within programs seeking to meet the needs of children

Leadership in Teacher Support Teams

Many programs seek to meet the needs of students in the educational setting. One program is the Teacher Support Team (TST). TSTs strive for a sense of distributed

leadership, provided by the building administrator. Based on this idea of distributed leadership, instructional leaders present significant roles in implementing effective teams. The leadership of the TSTs is at the forefront of providing effective instructional strategies to teachers to meet the needs of all students in the building (Creese et al., 2000).

In 2005, the Mississippi State Director of Special Education convened a small group of six persons to begin researching models of response to intervention and the research upon which they were based (Boyer, 2008). These purposes were to provide an instructional framework that accommodates the needs of all students and results in the improved achievement for all students. This means appropriately identifying and selecting students for continued services through an IEP based on their demonstrated response to scientific research based instruction (Boyer, 2008).

Appropriate utilization of scientific research based instruction, requires the accessing of the idea of participative leadership. The goal for instructional expertise in this approach to instruction centers on the importance of meeting the needs of students. This means the participative leadership perspective takes many forms, in which a variety of decision actions may be used to engage other people in making decisions. Yukl (2006) illustrated this by acknowledging four decision-making procedures as distinct and meaningful: autocratic decision, consultation, joint decision, and delegation. Further synthesis notes these decision procedures can be ordered along a scale ranging from no influence by other people to high influence. Additionally, as noted in Leithwood and Duke (1999), participative leadership stresses the decision-making process of the group.

Fueled with this knowledge, the Mississippi State Director of Special Education met in early June of 2005 (Boyer, 2008) to review the applications for participation and selected nine schools in nine counties. Ultimately, eleven elementary schools participated in the study. During the summer of 2005, professional development began in earnest for those schools with training for their principals and county directors of special education and, during August, for teachers (Boyer, 2008). The training included not only the concepts and framework of the Response to Intervention (RTI) process, but also the five components of reading and the use of research based interventions. The following six components of RTI were fundamental (Boyer, 2008):

1. Tiered instruction and intervention model
2. Universal screening
3. Research based instruction
4. Progress monitoring
5. Teaming and collaboration
6. Data-based decision making

These six components lead to the beginning of developing a Teacher Support Team (TST) to meet the requirements of these six components of RTI.

The Teacher Support Team

Intervention teams, pre-referral teams, and teacher support teams (TST) are some of the terms used to describe a process utilized in providing assistance to teachers in improving the academic and behavioral performance of students at risk (Mississippi Department of Education, 2005). The TST's purpose is to empower the classroom teacher to become more effective through the analysis and alignment of resources (Mississippi

Department of Education, 2005). Systematically, the process seeks for educators to help educators in improving student performance and well-being (Mississippi Department of Education, 2005). The State of Mississippi requires, through State Board of Education policy IEI, required this process be developed and implemented in a consistent and effective manner (Mississippi Department of Education, 2005). The model consists of three tiers of instruction, such as the following (Mississippi Department of Education, 2005):

Tier I: Quality classroom instruction based on Mississippi Curriculum Frameworks

Tier II: Focused supplemental instruction

Tier III: Intensive interventions specifically designed to meet the individual needs of students

Teachers should use progress monitoring information to (a) determine if students are making adequate progress, (b) identify students as soon as they begin to fall behind, and (c) modify instruction early enough to ensure each and every student gains essential skills (Mississippi Department of Education, 2005). Therefore, the monitoring of student progress remains an ongoing process that may be measured through informal classroom assessment, benchmark assessment instruments, and large-scale assessments (Mississippi Department of Education, 2005).

If strategies at Tiers I and II prove unsuccessful, students begin the referral process to the Teacher Support Team (Mississippi Department of Education, 2005). The Teacher Support Team (TST) is the problem-solving unit responsible for interventions developed at Tier III (Mississippi Department of Education, 2005). The Mississippi

Department of Education (Mississippi Department of Education, 2005) requires each school to have a Teacher Support Team implemented in accordance with their process developed. The school principal as the school's instructional leader, or the principal's designee serves as the chairperson of the TST (Mississippi Department of Education, 2005). However, a designee may not be an individual whose primary responsibility is special education (Mississippi Department of Education, 2005).

The design of these interventions focuses on: (a) addressing the deficit areas; (b) utilizing research based interventions; and (c) implementing as designed by the TST. The success of the TST depends upon two major factors: (a) the leadership of the principal and (b) the development of program interventions that are effective, positive in nature, and can be delivered in the classroom. If the team assumes current efforts are not working, then the team must make a change in order to make education successful for all students.

The Role of the Instructional Leaders

The principal is the instructional leader of the school (Mississippi Department of Education, 2005). The accountability at the school level rests on the school's principal. As such, the central office and community liaison must communicate the instructional procedures to ensure of all students (Mississippi Department of Education, 2005).

All of the effective schools clearly illustrates that the direction and success of the school coordinates with the function of the leadership effectiveness shown by the principal (Mississippi Department of Education, 2005). No Child Left Behind imposes an accountability model that nullifies frequently used excuses for lack of student success, such as low socio-economic standing, lack of budgetary resources, or poor parenting

skills (Mississippi Department of Education, 2005). In order for the TST process to work effectively, the principal needs to lead the process (Mississippi Department of Education, 2005).

Additionally, Yukl (2006) noted participative leadership involves a leader's diligence to encourage and facilitate participation from others in making key decisions (See Tables 1 and 2). Ouston (1987) stated cultures get changed in many small ways, and not necessarily by dramatic announcements from the boardroom. Organizations must participate in the leadership process if they hope that their own preferred future will come to pass someday. This participation in the instructional process holds great importance in an organization. An expert voice, ideas outside the box, and meeting as a team stands as

Table 1

The Definition of an Effective TST

The Local Educational Agency (LEA) must provide support and training for teams initially and annually

New members require training as they join the process

Each member has an understood and assigned role

ALL ideas of members are considered

Members build on each other's ideas and thoughts in a collaborative consensus-building process

Members model respect for each other and for all ideas in an environment free of criticism

(Mississippi Department of Education, 2005)

imperative details to providing children with the best instruction possible.

Implementing an Effective team

The chairperson of the Teacher Support Team shall be the principal or principal's designee (Mississippi Department of Education, 2005). The staffing of the team will be determined by the needs of the student. Teams usually have a minimum of three to a maximum of seven members (Mississippi Department of Education, 2005). Some members will be standing members and other alternate members. Large schools may designate two teams for different grade bands or other divisions in order to divide the intervention tasks into a manageable work schedule (Mississippi Department of Education, 2005). In determining the membership of a school's teacher support team, the leader should make sure that selected members meet certain characteristics:

Table 2

Belief-set of Effective Teams

All students are unique and capable of learning

All students shall experience a level of success commensurate with their abilities.

Teachers have an important role in the problem solving process and in the development and implementation of interventions.

Teachers share responsibility for student learning

(Mississippi Department of Education, 2005)

The team's membership changes due to the student's grade level, subject area, or area of deficiency. However, an established core team exists with alternate members coming in as needed (Mississippi Department of Education, 2005). The core team members include the principal (authority can be delegated), the referring teachers, and any instructional specialists (Mississippi Department of Education, 2005). Collectively,

the TST must perform a number of tasks associated with the process (See Table 3). The principal, as the team leader, ultimately holds the responsibility for the performance or delegation of the following tasks (Mississippi Department of Education, 2005).

Table 3

TST Member Characteristic

Committed to the school's instructional goals and program and willing to accept responsibility for at-risk students' progress

Knowledgeable of multiple teaching strategies and interventions

Respected and approachable by other staff

Experienced in interpreting data

Organized and capable of mapping a course of improvement

Confidential concerning student data and outcomes discussed in the team setting

(Mississippi Department of Education, 2005)

The participative leadership perspective allows for high quality decision making, in which participants identify with and accept the decisions. Satisfaction with the decision process builds confidence in decision making within participants. For instance, Fung (2004) noted that empowered participatory governance encourages people to participate in key decisions that directly impact daily living. The team leader must ensure that the core team members receive assigned appropriate duties that they will carry out consistently in each meeting (Mississippi Department of Education, 2005).

The purpose of the TST is to serve as a problem-solving unit at the local building level. In very small schools/districts, the initial team may start at the district level (Mississippi Department of Education, 2005). The TST provides a model of interactive professionalism and serves as an interactive consultant panel of team members for

classroom teachers within the building (Mississippi Department of Education, 2005). Examination of participative leadership leads one to look at delegation within the organization. The organization and leadership originate in social construction and participation in the organization serves as a basis for decisions. Yukl (2006) noted that delegation involves the transfer of new responsibilities to subordinates and requires further authority to carry them out. Morgan (2006) advised the purpose of effective change depends on images and values that guide action. Any team member may take on assigned case manager duties, specifically referrals to collect information, conducting interviews, and doing observations prior to the team meeting (Mississippi Department of Education, 2005). A well defined TST holds an exceptional importance. Coordination and leadership within the TST creates an order that allows for the establishment of instructional strategies valuable to the teachers and effective for the students.

The Effects of Leadership on the Teacher Support Team

Goldring and Sullivan (1996) discussed the ever changing leadership roles principals must endure if they are to effectively cultivate positive climate within their school cultures. Research indicates these leaders serve as the primary link connecting the internal environment of the school and the external culture of the community. Successful principals create a center of belief shaped around shared meanings, values, visions, goals. Bolman and Deal (2003) asserted people create and recreate the worlds in which they live. Additionally, Goldring and Sullivan (1996) encouraged leaders to utilize the cultural lenses to create effective and shared meanings of reality. Barbarach and Mundell (1993) noted:

The participatory approach of accountable autonomy, however, puts professionals and citizens on equal footing by charging them to develop problem-solving strategies and priorities together. This process is deliberative in that each must try to convince the other of the wisdom of its preferred course of action. (p. 427)

Bensimon, Neumann, and Birnbaum, (1989) stated the quality of decisions refers to the objective aspects of said decisions affecting the group's performance. As discussed in Yukl (2006), a leader's chosen decision procedure affects the quality of the decision and the people's acceptance that are expected to implement the decision. Yukl (2006) idealized the idea of decision making that Vroom and Yetton identified with five decision procedures. The assumption exists that leaders have the skills necessary to use each of the decision procedures, but a leader's skill is not a factor in determining which procedure is most appropriate. Bensimon et al. (1989) noted that effective leadership requires determining the appropriate involvement of subordinates in each decision. Leaders need to be able to recognize their subordinate's characteristics and adjust to meet their needs.

Furthermore, Leithwood and Duke (1999) suggested participative leadership stresses the decision making process of the group. Distributed leadership provides a sense of power and control in the leadership of the faculty, thus strengthening the organization. On the contrary, the perspective of leadership versus management focuses on the functions, tasks, or behaviors of the leader and assumes that these functions are carried out completely. However, as Leithwood, Jantzi, and Steinbach (2000) noted, expectations can best be met by moving towards forms of shared leadership when school leaders face increased demands.

Throughout the research observations found, Ogawa and Bossert (1995)

suggested “administrators lead by shaping the cultures of their school organizations and thus affect the meanings that other participants fix to organizational events” (p. 230). Research conducted from the technical-rational perspective focused on the impact of leadership on organizational goal attainment. This focus broadened from an institutional perspective, depicts organizations as seeking legitimacy, rather than technical efficiency and ultimately survival. Organizations originated in cultures, with those cultures producing patterned behaviors and interactions. Therefore, leadership involves shaping organizations’ cultures and influencing the meaning that people attach to organizational events.

Additionally, influence grows in the school setting within the principals and teachers. Their expertise leads to the norms and practices being put into place. Furthermore, any “educational administrator will recognize the ‘kids come first’ mantra that is obligatory in all public school discourse. However, decades of research concludes that schools and classrooms tend to be highly bureaucratized and teacher-centered rather than student-centered” (Anderson, 1996, p. 948).

Anderson (1996) noted cultural politics refers to the ways schools silence the minority voice or anything challenging the status quo, the area where minority students’ needs are questioned, and the spot determining the placement of power. “Goal displacement” (Anderson, 1996, p. 948) occurs in the difference between the practice and what actually happens in education. Schools claim to use site based leadership and tend to lean toward human resource development, but they are stuck in a system that organizes them rather than looks at their human aspects (Anderson, 1996).

This leads to the concept of culture in the educational setting. Bates (1987) examined the use of culture in a corporate and educational context. Bates (1987) described corporate culture as a system of beliefs, behaviors, myths, and rituals motivating members for the success of the organization. He related the study of organizational culture as a way to increase managerial effectiveness. Bates (1987) stated, “Culture is also carried, communicated, and shaped through individual attempts to understand, master, and participate in the life of the group” (p. 88).

“If culture is what gives meaning to life, then cultural politics would be the battle over ideologies and commitments” (Bates, 1987, p. 89). The community impacts the culture of the school. An analysis of the culture within the school must include a review of the community culture. The authors stress the importance of identifying whether the functional groups have common goals or whether the numerous individuals maintain varying goals (Bacharach & Mundell, 1993). The authors support the concept of an organization’s importance of power (Bacharach & Mundell, 1993). Action drives power, and power remains a focal point in organizational growth (Bacharach & Mundell, 1993). When looking at the TST, there needs to be a focal point, revolving around the success of the students.

Additionally, Martin gave insight into the culture frame by defining culture (Martin, 2002). He described how culture can be defined through functionalism, critical theory, and post-modernism. Most define culture as a shared system of beliefs and values, although others disagree (Martin, 2002). Martin (2002) also attempted to piece several definitions together that help define culture. This includes everything from mutual values and beliefs to sharing the same ethos (Martin, 2002). Some disagree that culture is

shared. Such groups believe culture must be viewed under a common frame of reference and consider only relevant issues within the cultural system (Martin, 2002). When considering uniqueness of culture, one must also remember most cultures and subsystems see themselves as unique. In a study the conceptual definitions of culture need to pertain to the way the study operationalizes the cultural concepts (Martin, 2002).

Martin looked at culture and the differences in definitions of culture (Martin, 2002). Martin (2002) also noted the finding of a wide variety of approaches through the analyzing of how cultural researchers operationalize culture. The article noted information about rituals, stories, familiar attributes of organization, the physical layout of the workplace, and pay systems. The report also looked at how cultures break taboos. Researchers often disagree with how to define culture and how to use it in the workplace; however, many noted it as a detrimental piece to an organization. “Even if workers and managers interpret the ritual differently, they do so in certain and unequivocal terms” (Martin, 2002, p. 70).

The organization operates based on a variety of inconsistent and ill-defined preferences. This arrangement focuses on a loose collection of ideas versus a coherent structure and discovers preferences through action more than acting on the basis of preference (Cohen, March, & Olsen, 1972). Although the organization manages to survive and even produce, its own processes confuse its members (Cohen et al., 1972). The system revolves around simple trial-and-error procedures, the residue of learning from the accidents of past experience, and pragmatic inventions of necessity (Cohen et al., 1972).

There is no match for effects of leadership in the TST. A definite importance

exists to having leadership that is focused, culturally sensitive, and that addresses all the needs of students. This forward momentum of leadership and excellence in the school needs to always be at the forefront. Looking at how schools responded in the past offers educators options so they can best educate children.

How Schools Have Responded in the Past to Children of Poverty

Recognizing the response schools take towards children in poverty provides a solid base of ideas for meeting student needs. Not only are educators able to recognize ideas that may not work, but offer the ability to see where the educational system could go. Viewing the child as a whole and not simply looking at the test score is imperative.

As noted in Pounder, Ogawa, and Adams (1995), viewing an organization through the organism lens provides more clarity to conceptualize their intra-organizational needs. Therefore, organizational subsystems' independence suspends the negative feedback system designed to maintain the homeostatic nature in the midst of the organization and the environment.

The goals should emphasize growth in children's skills rather than whether children meet specific test score targets (Murnane, 2007). A concentration exists where children living in poverty, disproportionately children of color, tend to go to schools with inadequate resources and poorly skilled teachers (Murnane, 2007). The likelihood increases for many of these children to leave school before earning a high school diploma (Murnane, 2007). Even if they graduate, a majority leave school without the skills needed to earn a decent living (Murnane, 2007).

Schools should attract and support experienced, skilled teachers committed to working together over extended periods to continuously improve instruction (Murnane,

2007). The ultimate staff monitors the learning of every student, intervenes rapidly at the first sign that a student is not making good progress toward mastering critical skills, and provides alternatives when conventional pedagogies are not effective (Murnane, 2007). This continued focus needs to remain at the forefront of the educational system.

But few children living in poverty attend such schools (Murnane, 2007). Instead, they typically attend schools where leadership is weak, many teachers lack critical skills, learning problems are left unattended, and instruction is inconsistent (Murnane, 2007). A great many disadvantaged children leave school without the skills they need to earn a decent living and to provide for their own future children (Murnane, 2007). The reasons why disadvantaged children typically receive a poor education are numerous and interrelated (Murnane, 2007), including: (a) housing patterns leave poor children, with learning needs concentrated in particular schools and districts; (b) uncertain city budgets prevent urban districts from hiring skilled teachers in a timely manner; and (c) difficult working conditions leave low-performing schools with the least teaching talent.

During the past fifteen years, reports hold that virtually every state in the country adopted standards-based educational reforms as a primary strategy for improving public education. All standards-based educational reforms include three components (Murnane, 2007): (a) state standards and performance standards; (b) incentives to encourage educators and students to devote the time and energy needed to meet the performance standards; and (c) teachers who have the knowledge, skills, and resources to prepare all students to meet the performance standards.

In the past, building capacity to deliver consistently high-quality instruction to all children held as the most neglected part of standards-based reforms in many states

(Murnane, 2007). By themselves, standards and incentives will not improve student performance (Murnane, 2007). Teachers must know how to achieve the mandated outcomes (Murnane, 2007). However, in most schools serving high concentrations of poor children, teachers lack the requisite skills and knowledge and rarely get opportunities to acquire them (Murnane, 2007). Building teaching capacity is thus as critical to improving student outcomes as appropriate standards and incentives (Murnane, 2007).

Bates (1987) spoke of Constructive Schooling in which the constructive school provided a major contrast with the technical school. The child-centered pedagogy saw children, not as deficit systems, but as lively, dynamic individuals. Bates (1987) noted that it would seem that for school to have an educative purpose rather than a purely instrumental one, administration must inevitably negotiate educational ideals through the processes of cultural politics (Bates, 1987). The article noted that administrators must deal with cultural politics involving educational and social ideals as well as with pragmatic decisions about the formal organization of school practices (Bates, 1987). “The possibility that certain relationships might well be obscured or purposely misrepresented by the legitimating rhetoric of school managers who must deal with external cultures of the society” (Bates, 1987, p. 101). “We have seen that the cultural politics of the school are frequently complex and that the cultural baggage brought to the school by various groups may result in serious conflicts over both ideology and technology” (Bates, 1987, p. 109).

As stated by Bolman and Deal (2003), “No single strategy is likely to be effective by itself” (p. 159). Motivating employees through higher level needs results in

organizations creating a win/win situation in which both the organization and the employee benefit (Bolman & Deal 2003). Morgan (2006) said, “Employees are people with complex needs that must be satisfied if they are to lead full and healthy lives and perform effectively in the workplace” (Morgan, 2006, p. 34). Bolman and Deal (2003) took Maslow’s ideas one step further by developing a theory which espoused leading an organization that allows employees to achieve their goals and ultimately encourages the goals of the organization to be attained (Bolman & Deal 2003).

Researchers learned rudimentary reading and mathematical skills at kindergarten entry predict later school achievement, a finding that supports an emphasis on building these skills in proposed preschool programs (Duncan et al., 2007). Instruction would be organized around a new national curriculum developed for the program from previous preschool reading, mathematics, and behavioral interventions proven to foster children’s academic and attention skills in developmentally appropriate ways (Duncan et al., 2007).

Good, solid teachers are in small supply (Charlton & Kritsonis, 2008). When a school district or a specific campus is fortunate enough to find them, solid teachers must be nurtured and treated as the primary expert resources within the organization (Charlton & Kritsonis, 2008). The process of choosing and retaining a competent faculty is difficult enough, but is even more so if the parties involved come into the new relationship hindered by the attitudes and perceptions of previous school experiences (Charlton & Kritsonis, 2008). Teachers must be appraised and the dubious and alienating responsibility of appraising them goes to the school administrators (Charlton & Kritsonis, 2008). Documentation plays an essential part in the process and, whether it is used to help teachers grow professionally, or to substantiate an initiative toward non-renewal,

this task is best accomplished when teachers and administrators share realistic assessments of strengths, weaknesses, and goals (Charlton & Kristonis, 2008).

Creese et al. (2000) was critical of the importance of teacher collaboration and support. This can be accomplished in many different ways, both formally and informally, within the classroom and outside of it. A key aspect to this process happens when the teacher provides appropriate information to the team. Furthermore, Charlton and Kristonis (2008) found administrator and teacher communication with appropriate interventions in the classroom is imperative and needs to be documented to provide the students with the most effective interventions.

In addition, Charlton and Kristonis (2008) found it hard to find staff sensitive to the needs of all students and many times the success of the student inevitably linked to the success of teachers. Administrative support for the teachers provided teachers with the tools to be the most successful they can be within the classroom. This idea, also supported by Hardy (2008), can be accomplished when a student acted up in class and the TST team brainstorms ways to teach the student. Hardy (2008) emphasized the importance of collaboration among teachers, counselors, and other professionals.

Subsequently, Creese et al. (2000) stated the significance of sharing the expertise among colleagues and providing the opportunities to support students indirectly by building up the teachers. The benefit to this view is a positive atmosphere in the school and a learning environment which is conducive to the success of all students. Research driven instructional strategies develop this kind of true cultural change.

Schools have responded to the needs of children in poverty in various manners and much student learning has been discovered from the implementing of different

strategies. The on-going focus on student achievement and professional expertise is apparent and initiatives in the past continue to lead to present accomplishments. These targeted responses not only met the educational needs of students, but accomplished the concept of recognizing the student as a whole.

Current Initiatives for Children in Poverty and Teacher Support Teams

Current initiatives for children in poverty and the direction TSTs are headed are of high significance. These initiatives allow schools to implement research based programming for students without hesitation. In order for this programming to be successful, leadership is needed. The leadership is focused on guiding the process of providing strategies within the TST which are functional for the classroom teacher.

The distributed leadership and collaborative effort between peers is paramount in a this task. For example, when trying to develop a behavior management plan, it is vital to first identify the target behavior (Burley & Waller, 2005). Important assessment issues to consider when selecting the behavior to modify include (Burley & Waller, 2005): (a) what is the functional level of the child or what are they able to do? (b) does the behavior interfere with the goals for the child? (c) whose quality of life are you trying to change? and (d) are you going to be able to monitor the behavior to see if there is improvement?

Various behavior management plans can be attempted; however, the first step needs to be the determination of the function of the behavior (or to determine why the child is behaving the way that he is). Disruptive behavior could serve a variety of functions, including the acquisition of positive reinforcement, negative reinforcement, or stimulation/sensory regulation (Burley & Waller, 2005). In the case of children with ADHD, it is more likely that the behavior is being maintained by either positive

reinforcement, which may include attention seeking from either peers or an adult/teacher or negative reinforcement, which may include the escape of an activity or task (Burley & Waller, 2005). Different intervention plans need to be established for each child (Burley & Waller, 2005).

The need for interventions addressing the needs of all students is extremely vital. Hardy (2008) stated three-quarters of the children and youth who need mental health services in the United States do not receive them and the treatment many of these students do receive is not enough. As a result, Hardy (2008) discussed how schools need to take the next step and provide these students with interventions and supports.

Consequently, Hardy (2008) suggested it is not the job of the schools to assume the mental health care of students, but to provide flawless access to these services, which are best housed within schools and in partnership with community agencies. Hardy (2008) stated the National Center for Children in Poverty at Columbia University estimates that 21% of low-income children and adolescents ages 6 through 17 have mental health problems. Poor and minority children are also referred to special education in greater numbers.

Furthermore, Creese et al. (2000) found changes in schooling over the last decade have increased demands on school teachers. With this emphasis over the last decade has been a reduced capability to cope with pupils who are difficult-to-teach and challenging-to-manage from within schools' own teaching resources. McMaster, Kung, Han, and Cao, (2008) established teachers should not automatically assume these students are unresponsive or that they cannot benefit from classroom-based instruction. However, Hardy (2008) brought forth among the more prevalent problems addressed by schools are

adjustment issues, such as social, interpersonal, or family problems; anxiety, stress, or school phobia; depression–grief relations; and aggressive or disruptive behavior.

Additionally, Hardy (2008) encouraged the Teacher Support Team to be composed of the principal, teacher, a school counselor, an instructional coach, a mental health consultant, sometimes the student, and others to develop intervention strategies to address the academic and behavioral issues of students referred to the group. Creese et al. (2000) established Teacher Support Teams (TSTs) as a way of supporting individual teachers who request support over a teaching concern relating broadly to special educational needs. Support for learning can take a variety of forms. Help can be to individual children, to small groups or to the teachers themselves. In addition, Creese et al. (2000) stated a TST is an organized system of peer support that consists of a small group of teachers who take referrals from individual teachers on a voluntary basis. The referring teacher brings concerns about classes, groups or individuals in order to discuss and problem solve with their peers. Follow-up meetings are held as necessary. The process is as confidential as the requesting teacher wants it to be.

Additionally, the importance of programming that meets the needs of all students is fundamental, especially when considering the unequal distribution of high-quality teachers (Murnane & Steele, 2007). Poor children and children of color are disproportionately assigned to teachers with the least preparation and the weakest academic backgrounds (Murnane & Steele, 2007). Teacher turnover is high in schools that serve large shares of poor or nonwhite students because the work is difficult, and the teachers who undertake it are often the least equipped to succeed. Murnane and Steele (2007) pointed out that in response to these challenges, policymakers have proposed a

variety of policy instruments to increase the supply of effective teachers and distribute those teachers more equitably across schools (Murnane & Steele, 2007). Such proposals include across-the-board pay increases, more flexible pay structures such as pay-for-performance, and reduced restrictions on who is allowed to teach (Murnane & Steele, 2007). Several of these proposals are already being implemented, but their effectiveness remains largely unknown. To measure how well these policies attract effective teachers to the profession and to the schools that need them most, rigorous evaluations are essential (Murnane & Steele, 2007).

The evidence is clear that urban school districts serving large concentrations of low income students have trouble attracting and retaining effective teachers (Murnane & Steele, 2007). Some school districts have responded to this problem by offering higher salaries to teachers willing to work in hard-to-staff schools (Murnane & Steele, 2007). To date, researchers have only limited evidence on the size of compensating wage differentials that schools with poor working conditions would need to pay to attract a full faculty of effective teachers (Murnane & Steele, 2007). Old and dilapidated physical facilities can be part of the problem, but of greater importance may be the difficulty of serving large numbers of children with complex needs without adequate resources to do the job well. Offering compensating wage differentials makes sense, but only if accompanied by the resources needed to educate well the children in these schools (Murnane & Steele, 2007).

TST interventions are one of many initiatives to assist children in poverty. Recruiting and obtaining teachers who are dedicated to the students, as well as a focus on providing students with the best interventions possible is extremely imperative. The

challenges these schools face as well as the daily challenges these students are against, adds more urgency to the educational importance of these children. These initiatives can be accomplished through effective leadership to facilitate this process; if done properly, can lead to an organization where collaboration is a norm.

Collaboration

Research indicates parental involvement positively impacts student achievement while favorably enhancing family relations within the school environment (Goldring & Sullivan, 1996). Chiefly investigated is the principal's crucial role in creating and sustaining positive relations between schools, families, and community members (Goldring & Sullivan, 1996). Researchers have documented that the lack of parental participation is often caused by the unwillingness of the schools themselves to involve parents, especially ones from the working class (Goldring & Sullivan, 1996). Supported by strong modes of bureaucratic operation, these arrangements have alienated community members' trust and sense of belonging within the school culture. Recent research has stressed the principal's key role in developing enduring relationships between school, family, and community (Goldring & Sullivan, 1996).

Communication is a key for successful RTI and the TST process to happen (Hauerwas & Goessling, 2008). When many individuals are working with various students, it is imperative that interventions are clearly defined with models provided, assessment criteria well understood and written down where it can be useful, and charts and graphs are continually updated (Hauerwas & Goessling, 2008). Communication is the means that makes RTI operate effectively, and it must be done verbally, in writing, and through the use of graphics (Hauerwas & Goessling, 2008). Failure to communicate

among team members, including the teacher assistant, will deprive the student of the true power of an RTI approach, thus adversely impacting the TST (Hauerwas & Goessling, 2008).

Collaborative professional support for teachers is an under-researched area, and the research that exists reports positively on its benefits (Bedward & Daniels, 2005). Reported positive outcomes for teachers from involvement in peer support include the opportunity that it provides for them to become reflective practitioners and to further their professional development (Bedward & Daniels, 2005). Peer support for teachers, in the form of TSTs, provides the focus for one of the studies reported in the present article (Bedward & Daniels, 2005). A TST is an organized system of peer support, which consists of a small group of teachers who take referrals from individual teachers on a voluntary basis. The referring teacher reports concerns about classes, groups or individuals in order to discuss and problem solve with peers (Bedward & Daniels, 2005).

TSTs are novel in that they are an example of a school-based development designed to provide collaboration while giving support and assistance to individual teachers (Bedward & Daniels, 2005). In this way, TSTs address a significant, but neglected, area of school development that has the potential to enhance the working conditions of teachers (Bedward & Daniels, 2005). TSTs involve a sharing of expertise between colleagues, rather than some teachers acting as experts to others (Bedward & Daniels, 2005). TSTs also provide an opportunity to support students indirectly by supporting teachers (Bedward & Daniels, 2005).

The utilization of the TST and the collaborative approaches utilized within the TST leads to the belief that when parents and professionals sincerely respect one another,

they genuinely can gain an effective collaborative relationship (Sheehey & Sheehey, 2007). Problems arise if there is a lack of common ground. Parents and professionals may have difficulty establishing a level of collaboration that will benefit the child because they are coming from very different places (Sheehey & Sheehey, 2007). Professionals' thinking is grounded in theory acquired from years of personnel preparation and accumulated experiences (Sheehey & Sheehey, 2007). The thinking of parents is grounded in personal experiences with their children and whatever information they have been able to glean from professionals, other parents, the internet, and the media (Sheehey & Sheehey, 2007).

The Importance of Leadership in the TST Initiative

The importance of leadership in a school setting, in particular the TST is significant. Morgan and Kristonis (2008) discovered it is hard to find staff sensitive to the needs of all students and many times the success of the student is inevitably linked to the success of teachers (Morgan & Kristonis, 2008). Administrative support for the teachers is imperative as to provide teachers with the tools to be the most successful they can be (Morgan & Kristonis, 2008).

This leads to where Mintzberg (1979) explained "the professional bureaucracy" model as a common organizational structure found where work is standardized, yet complex (such as universities, hospitals, and school systems). The professional bureaucracy relies heavily on training to standardize skills (e.g., through professional associations) and coordinate organizational efforts (Mintzberg, 1979). A large operating core is the hallmark of the model, since a great amount of power rests with the professionals making up the core (e.g., professors, doctors, and teachers). Mintzberg

(1979) defined the core's function as a "pigeonholing process," whereby the professional offers skills and a standardized program based on a client's diagnosed needs (p. 352).

The professional works with substantial autonomy based on the expertise and diagnosis capability they possess, resulting in a flat, decentralized organizational structure (Mintzberg, 1979). This autonomy is also reflected in the professional's control of the administrative decisions impacting them. The professional bureaucracy needs an environment complex enough to demand unique skills, yet stable enough for those skills to be offered in a standardized manner (Mintzberg, 1979). This sense of autonomy and the coordination with expertise relies on the leadership within the TST and how to essentially get the best out of each individual.

However, problems with the professional bureaucracy include work coordination among the professionals and between support staff and professionals, incompetent professionals, lack of organizational affinity on the professional's behalf, and the potentially slow pace of innovation due to limited professional collaboration or "convergent thinking" (unquestioningly placing unique problems into standardized solutions) (Mintzberg, 1979, p. 375). Without question, it is imperative to recognize the urgency to have effective leadership within the TST in order to be able to guide and direct exceptional professional towards one goal.

Collaboration among the educational setting and the parents, as well as between teachers leads to high levels of quality in the educational setting for all students. This concept of combining initiatives in the school setting, while not neglecting the communication aspect of learning will lead to being able to meet the needs of all children; in particular those in poverty. The leadership within the TST will lead to

autonomous behaviors focused on collaboration. The TST combines all these aspects and the based on research and strategies to be implemented in the classroom, a spirit of the importance of leadership in the TST can be revealed.

Summary

When analyzing a program and its effectiveness, one must consider all the aspects going on in that program. In particular, when looking at the leadership within a program, the aspects of problem solving, identifying needs, and collaborating with peers and other individuals cannot be overlooked. It is, therefore, important to discuss participative leadership which involves attentiveness by a leader to persuade and facilitate participation by others in making key decisions (Yukl, 2006). Additionally, as noted in Leithwood and Duke (1999), participative leadership stresses the decision making process of the group. Thus, schools with functioning TSTs must not only have leaders with instructional expertise, but the ability to have those on the team participate and get the most out of them.

Having a TST functional for all students, in particular those in high needs of poverty can be difficult. The child centered focus of the team is imperative. The challenges lie in the impact poverty has on children. The impact on children in poverty is not only in their homes lives and environmental circumstances, but in the classroom. The general lack of school readiness, many times, is not where educators would like it. As the TST leader, it is their duty to provide the best leadership, focused on expert teacher participation to provide all students with the best educational experience they deserve.

The economic difficulties students of high poverty encounter coincide with the

educational system at times. Being able to respond not only educationally in the school building, but also recognizing and embracing culture within the system is essential. The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (Public Law 107-110) brought a renewed focus and accountability to all schools in the United States. This accountability is a wake-up call for educators to respond to the needs of all children. Schools need to continue to respond to the needs of children in poverty with research based methods. Much learning has been developed from the implementing of different strategies. The continued focus on student achievement and professional expertise is apparent. Initiatives in the past have lead to present accomplishments and the importance of a well defined TST is exceptionally vital. In order to be able to establish instructional strategies which are valuable to the teachers and effective for the students, takes coordination and leadership within the TST.

The effects of leadership in the TST are without comparison. There is a definite importance to having leadership which is focused, culturally sensitive, and addressed all the needs of students. This forward momentum of leadership and excellence in the school needs to always be recognized and it is significant to be able to look at how schools have responded to the past so children can best be educated

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Johnson and Smith (2008) reported that providing effective interventions can pose potential benefits, by responding to individual student's needs as well as supporting each student's progress in the general curriculum. When looking back at Special Education over the past 10 years, differences in the Sunnyside Public School District have been observed within elementary buildings and how they utilize appropriate interventions for struggling students. Consistency within the district appears to be missing, and this lack of consistency has been observed in a particular elementary school this past year.

Johnson and Smith (2008) determined one problem limiting the effective implementation of interventions is a lack of a school-wide process through which to do so. The result is a chaotic approach to intervention, with no coordination across classrooms and limited information on effectiveness. The overall purpose of this study is to explore participant views of overall effectiveness of leadership of the Teacher Support Team (TST) in high poverty elementary schools.

This chapter outlines how the study is designed and the techniques used to gather the data. It describes the process of both the questionnaire and the open-ended informal section. A mixed method of utilizing both qualitative and quantitative approaches was chosen as the most appropriate approach to collect the data. This chapter also describes the participants, the data collection methods used to answer the research questions, and outline the steps used to ensure the validity and credibility of the research instruments and results.

Research Questions

Within the context of this study, the following research questions were addressed:

1. Do the teachers have confidence in the Teacher Support Team coordinator?
 - a. Do the teachers believe the leadership role of the TST coordinator has positive influence on the TST?
 - b. Does the stipend provided to the TST coordinators impact their performance?
2. Do the teachers have confidence in the Teacher Support Team?
 - a. Are teachers more likely to refer students to the TST based on the leadership of the TST coordinator?
 - b. Are the referrals from the TST to the Special Education Team appropriate to meet with the needs of the students?
3. In what manner does the leadership of the Teacher Support Team coordinator within the Teacher Support Teams impact the overall functioning of the Teacher Support Team in high poverty elementary schools?

Design for the Study

The project began by contacting six high poverty elementary schools within the Sunnyside Public Schools and requesting their participation in the research project. The purpose of narrowing the research to schools that serve a high poverty population was to ensure similarities within the students and communities. This allowed the study to develop applicable assumptions to further research and student interventions. Initial contact was made to the building administrator, who then was requested to consult with the Teacher Support Team and the TST coordinator. Each team was made up of the

building administrator, a TST coordinator, and other teachers as noted by the team. Due to building autonomy with organization of the TST, team make-up may be different in each building; however, generally the team will consist of approximately four to five members at each site. Each team will be provided an opportunity to participate in the research activity and it will be noted the data will be considered anonymous and will not be reflective of employment performance or used as an evaluative tool. Information may be shared to the Sunnyside Public Schools upon request.

The approach to the design is a mixed methods research study (Creswell, 2003). Based on the data gathered via a survey, quantitative information was gathered in order to address the research questions. In addition to the quantitative approach, a qualitative aspect was analyzed. This enabled the researcher to be able to provide data that can be transcribed and analyzed further to be able to address the specific research questions (Creswell, 2003).

The mixed methods approach was chosen due to the potential to discover true meaning to the research questions (Creswell, 2003). Many theoretical methods were discussed and entertained; however, it was determined a mixed methods approach would allow the research questions to be answered in a complete manner. It was also anticipated the mixed methods approach would allow for further research designs to come to the forefront.

Furthermore, careful effort will be taken to provide the participants with the opportunity to have a voice. This will guide the research questions towards answers and understanding. The mixed methods approach will allow for the understanding to provide implications in the educational setting (Creswell, 2003).

In turn, the researcher is careful to not allow priorities with qualitative or quantitative methods to dominate the research (Creswell, 2003). The researcher is cognizant of letting the research present itself and attempting to not guide the research in any one direction; thus turning the research design into another theoretical design and going away from the mixed methods approach.

Another concern is to be able to integrate the data collection, the data analysis, and the interpretation (Creswell, 2003). Being able to integrate the data and look for themes and ideas which are significant to the research questions may cause the content to become richer and more insightful. If concern is not taken to be able to integrate the qualitative and quantitative methods, data may become skewed and not represent the intended research questions.

Creswell (2003) mentioned the mixed methods approach will allow for both open- and closed-ended questions with emerging and predetermined approaches; allowing for both quantitative and qualitative data and analysis. This may lend itself to a lack of collecting the participants' meanings in the research due to the lack of depth the questioning may entail. In addition, the profundity of the observation and measuring of the information numerically may be not as deep. However, using a mixed methods approach may lend itself to further research in which qualitative or quantitative data are the priority.

Population and Sample

This study was conducted in at Sunnyside School District. The participants included administrators and certified teachers working in high poverty schools. Each of the six schools received Title I services and had a free and reduced lunch rate of 90% or

higher. Each school consisted of twenty to thirty participants and all of these schools have similar demographics, including family income levels, race, and teacher years of experience. Each school receives Federal Title I funding for being considered Title I schools. One of the concerns each of these schools share is that the Missouri State Department of Education requires schools to show improvement each year in order to meet Adequate Yearly Progress for No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (Public Law 107-110). Despite the possibility of losing funds and having to reorganize schools and districts, the main intent of NCLB is to pressure districts fearful of losing legitimized status in the eyes of constituents when districts are labeled as failing (Fowler, 2009). If schools do not make Adequate Yearly Progress, government policies concerning the applied sanctions for and resources available to Title I and Non-Title I schools not making Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) will be applied. Although this concern is a very minute portion of the legislation, it is, without doubt, a significant issue to administrators, educators, teachers, parents, and ultimately influences the lifelong learning of a child.

Each school utilizes a Teacher Support Team (TST) who plans and assists teachers with interventions to help struggling learners. The TSTs consisted of the building administrator, a TST coordinator, counselor, and various teachers as needed. The entire team has a make-up of approximately four to five members. Within the selected buildings, the percentage of students receiving free and reduced lunches fluctuates, however the amount of fluctuation varies slightly. This is true with the student populations of the buildings. Due to the schools being neighborhood schools, enrollment has remained relatively consistent.

All schools recognized were considered Title I schools based on the percentage of students who qualify for the free or reduced lunch program. The Teacher Support Team coordinator receives a stipend funded through the Sunnyside Public School Special Education Department. It is assumed in each school there is a differing level of leadership being represented within the teams. Administrative leadership as well as teacher leadership within the team is represented. In some buildings, the building principal takes a lead role in the TST and in other buildings the lead role is designated to a teacher leader or the TST coordinator. In schools with students who are higher risk, this is exceptionally vital. The levels of leadership may lead to teacher differentiating of instruction, thus providing appropriate interventions for all students.

Instruments and Data Collection

This study was an evaluation of the leadership within teacher support teams (TST) within schools deemed as high poverty in a large urban school district in Missouri. The goal of the study was to determine the impact of TSTs on elementary students of high poverty. The study concentrated the concept of distributed leadership. Items from the Teacher Support Team Leadership Survey focused on the idea of distributed leadership and the results of these items were compared between schools of high poverty with functioning TSTs.

Data regarding the effectiveness of the leadership in the TST are to be collected utilizing a mixed methods approach. The quantitative method within the study will consist of the Teacher Support Team Leadership Survey presented to each team member and the Teacher Support Team Leadership Survey will be confidential. Data collected will be posted on a seven point Likert Scale – seven being high and one being low. The

instrument was constructed for this study and will measure participant impression of the effectiveness of the leadership of the TST within each building.

The researcher attended afterschool staff meetings in each building once permission from the building principal was granted, thus allowing the research to take place in the natural working environment (Creswell, 2003). An informed consent letter was distributed and signed by each participant prior to participation in the study. Once consent was obtained, each certified teacher and building administrator was presented with the Teacher Support Team Leadership Survey. The Teacher Support Team Leadership Survey was distributed to 150 to 180 participants arranged between six schools and once the participant completed the Teacher Support Team Leadership Survey, they put it in an envelope to guarantee anonymity.

Contained within the Teacher Support Team Leadership Survey questions will be open-ended fields for the participants to comment on their answers and provide qualitative data. Prompts will be provided in order to stimulate the thought process. This information will provide qualitative data to the research project. Teacher Support Team Leadership Surveys will be coded as to identify what particular schools responded. This coding will be kept confidential and data will be reported in only a general manner.

The Teacher Support Team Leadership Survey consists of fourteen quantitative items and provides the participant with three qualitative options. These items will be reviewed by the researcher and grouped to align with both primary research questions. Items one through seven correspond to research question number one and items eight through 14 correspond with the second research question. Each item on the questionnaire

will be directly linked to the research questions previously stated in this paper. The questionnaire will display a total of fourteen items.

Data Analysis

The research questions focused on the role of distributed leadership and the impact of TSTs on elementary students of high poverty. A survey method was used and the quantitative and qualitative data was applied to this descriptive study. The reports were collected confidentially and the data yielded a range, mean, minimum, maximum, and standard deviation. The goal was to study the effectiveness of distributed leadership and the level of impact on the overall functioning of the Teacher Support Teams.

The Teacher Support Team Leadership Survey (Appendix A) consisted of 14 response items and three open-ended response items. The response categories were defined as strongly agree, agree, somewhat agree, neutral, somewhat disagree, disagree, and strongly disagree for questions numbered 1 through 14. Items one through seven addressed the research question studying the teacher confidence of the TST coordinator within the TST and the impact of the overall functioning of the TST in high poverty elementary schools. Items eight through fourteen of the Teacher Support Team Leadership Survey analyzed the level of confidence teachers have in the TST as a whole. The 14 response items were directly tied to the research questions.

The qualitative section of the Teacher Support Team Leadership Survey consisted of three open-ended questions, requiring participants to write their responses. Questions are designed to gain the views of participants on positive, negative, and concerning thoughts towards the distributed leadership within the TST. Each question provided the participant ample room to respond.

The 14 item Likert scale was conducted from 7 to 1; where 1 = no positive perceptions and 7 = complete positive perceptions. Data will analyze the questionnaire responses with software SPSS to categorize the frequency of responses. Research questions require the use of descriptive statistics based on strength of responses. In addition, data collected from the qualitative data will be analyzed and gathered to look for themes corresponding to the quantitative data. This information will be used and reported in the results chapter.

Summary

Chapter Three described the approach to the research design and methodology utilized for this study. A mixed methods design, utilizing quantitative and qualitative approaches was utilized. Qualitative and quantitative research questions were revealed and reasoning for utilizing a mixed methods study was explained. The study's population and sampling techniques were explained, followed by data collection methods for analysis.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to establish a connection between the role of distributed leadership and the impact of Teacher Support Teams on elementary students of high poverty schools. To achieve this, information was gathered from high poverty elementary schools in the Sunnyside Public School District. The study also examined key respondents' perceptions on the leadership within the TST. A mixed method of gathering both qualitative and quantitative approaches was chosen as the most appropriate approach for data collection.

The population utilized in this study consisted of anonymous surveys of certified teachers and administrators working in high poverty elementary schools. Each of the six schools received Title I services and had a free and reduced lunch rate of 90% or higher. Each school had similar demographics, including family income levels, race, and teacher years of experience. Each school received Federal Title I funding for being considered Title I schools.

Every school selected utilized a Teacher Support Team (TST) who planned and assisted teachers with interventions to help struggling learners. The TSTs consisted of the building administrator, a TST coordinator, counselor, and various teachers as needed. The entire team had a make-up of approximately four to five members. Within the selected buildings, the percentage of students receiving free and reduced lunches fluctuated, however the amount of fluctuation varied only slightly. This was true, as well

with the student populations of the buildings. Due to the schools being neighborhood schools, enrollment of 200 – 250 students has remained relatively consistent.

Data Analysis

The research questions focused on the role of distributed leadership and the impact of TSTs on elementary students of high poverty. A survey was used and the quantitative and qualitative data was applied to this descriptive study. The reports were collected confidentially and the data yielded a range, mean, minimum, maximum, and standard deviation for various aspects of TST leadership. The goal was to study the effectiveness of distributed leadership and the level of perceived impact on the overall functioning of the Teacher Support Teams.

The Teacher Support Team Leadership Survey (Appendix A) consisted of 14 Likert response items and 3 open-ended response items. The response categories were defined as strongly agree, agree, somewhat agree, neutral, somewhat disagree, disagree, and strongly disagree for questions numbered 1 through 14. Items one through seven addressed the research question studying the teacher confidence in the TST coordinator within the TST and the impact of the overall functioning of the TST in high poverty elementary schools. Items 8 through 14 of the Teacher Support Team Leadership Survey analyzed the level of confidence teachers have in the TST as a whole. The 14 response items were directly tied to the research questions.

The qualitative section of the Teacher Support Team Leadership Survey consisted of three open-ended questions, requiring participants to write their responses. Questions were designed to gain the views of participants on positive, negative, and concerning thoughts towards the distributed leadership within the TST.

The 14 item Likert scale was conducted from 7 to 1; where 1 = strongly disagree and 7 = strongly agree. Data analyzed the questionnaire responses with software SPSS to categorize the frequency of responses. Research questions required the use of descriptive statistics based on strength of responses. In addition, data collected from the qualitative data was analyzed and gathered to look for themes corresponding to the quantitative data.

The remainder of this chapter is presented in five sub-sections based on each of the three research questions and the additional sub-questions. Items 1-7 on the Teacher Support Team Leadership Survey correspond with the first research question studying teacher confidence in the TST coordinator. Two sub-questions were analyzed to address this question; TST coordinator leadership and its positive influence and the impact of the paid stipend for each TST coordinator. Items 8-14 on the Teacher Support Team Leadership Survey correspond with the second research question studying the teacher's confidence in the Teacher Support Team. Two sub-questions were analyzed as well to address this question; likelihood of teacher referral to the TST based on leadership of TST coordinator and the appropriateness of the referral from the TST to the Special Education Team.

The surveys were distributed to six schools which each supported 20-30 certified teachers. Based on the numbers of surveys received back, there were two schools in which a higher number of surveys were returned. There was one school in particular which returned a very small number (Table 4).

Table 4

Schools Responding to the Teacher Support Team Leadership Survey

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
School A	7	10.6	10.6	10.6
School B	9	13.6	10.6	24.2
School C	7	10.6	10.6	34.8
School D	20	30.3	30.3	65.2
School E	20	30.3	30.3	95.5
School F	3	4.5	4.5	100.0
Total	66	100.0	100.0	

The first research question focused on teacher confidence levels for the TST coordinator and was presented in two different parts. Research question one examined the overall confidence teachers had for the TST coordinator. Within research question one were two subparts. These subparts examined if the leadership of the TST coordinator had positive influence on the TST and if the stipend provided to the TST coordinator impacted their performance.

Research Question One

Do teachers have confidence in the Teacher Support Team coordinator? The descriptive statistics indicated considerable levels of confidence the teachers working in high poverty elementary schools have in their TST coordinator. Table 5 reflected all means were in the range between 6 and 7, in which 6 corresponded with “agree” and 7

corresponded with “strongly agree” regarding the teacher confidence in the TST coordinator in their buildings.

Table 5

Teacher Confidence in Teacher Support Team Coordinator

	<i>N</i>	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Deviation
TST Coordinator Leadership	66	4	7	6.61	.782
Coordinator Positive Impact	66	4	7	6.61	.820
Confidence in Leadership	66	2	7	6.59	.960
Leadership has Positive Impact	66	4	7	6.61	.820
Confidence in Coordinator	66	3	7	6.45	1.055
Coordinator note concerns	66	3	7	6.47	.980
Valid <i>N</i> (list wise)	66				

Note. Likert scale used: 1= strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = somewhat disagree, 4 = neutral, 5 = somewhat agree, 6 = agree, 7 = strongly agree

Within research question one, the question was asked; do teachers believe the role of the TST coordinator had positive influences on the TST? This sub-question examined the perceived influences the TST coordinator had on the TST. Teachers were surveyed and data analyzed to address this sub-question.

Teachers who believed the TST coordinator provided leadership within the TST were considerably more than those who “somewhat agreed” or were “neutral” (Table 6). There were 94.0% of the teachers who believed the TST coordinator provided leadership in the TST.

Table 6

TST Coordinator Provides Leadership within the TST

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Neutral	4	6.1	6.1	6.1
Somewhat Agree	2	3.0	3.0	9.1
Agree	10	15.2	24.2	24.2
Strongly Agree	50	75.8	75.8	100.0
Total	66	100.0	100.0	

The data revealed 95.4% of teachers believed the TST coordinator provided a positive impact on the TST (Table 7). There were no teachers who “disagreed” regarding the positive impact in the TST by the coordinator.

Table 7

TST Coordinator Positive Impact on TST

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Neutral	3	4.5	4.5	4.5
Somewhat Agree	3	4.5	4.5	9.1
Agree	11	16.7	16.7	25.8
Strongly Agree	49	74.2	74.2	100.0
Total	66	100.0	100.0	

Teachers who had confidence in the leadership of the TST coordinator were substantially more noticeable than those who “somewhat agreed” or were “neutral” at 94% (Table 8). However, it was realized that no participant “disagreed” that he/she has confidence in the TST leadership.

Table 8

Confidence in Leadership of the TST coordinator

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Neutral	4	6.1	6.1	6.1
Somewhat Agree	2	3.0	3.0	9.1
Agree	10	15.2	15.2	24.2
Strongly Agree	50	75.8	75.8	100.0
Total	66	100.0	100.0	

Data revealed 93.9% of teachers believed the leadership role of the TST coordinator had a positive impact on the TST (Table 9). There was one teacher who “disagreed” with this statement of the leadership TST coordinator’s positive impact.

Table 9

TST Leadership has Positive Impact

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Disagree	1	1.5	1.5	1.5
Neutral	3	4.5	4.5	6.1
Somewhat Agree	3	4.5	4.5	10.6
Agree	7	10.6	10.6	21.2
Strongly Agree	52	78.8	78.8	100.0
Total	66	100.0	100.0	

Data revealed 90.9% of teachers believed their peers had confidence in the TST coordinator within the TST (Table 10). It was revealed there were more, compared with the other survey items, a higher frequency of those responding “neutral” or “disagree” to having confidence in the TST coordinator.

Table 10

Teacher Confidence in TST Coordinator

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Somewhat Disagree	1	1.5	1.5	1.5
Neutral	5	7.6	7.6	9.1
Somewhat Agree	2	3.0	3.0	12.1
Agree	12	18.2	18.2	30.3
Strongly Agree	46	69.7	69.7	100.0
Total	66	100.0	100.0	

Data revealed 90.9% of teachers believed the TST coordinator takes note of concerns on how the TST is managed (Table 11). It was revealed to have one participant “somewhat disagree” with the coordinator’s ability to take note of concerns on how the TST is managed.

Table 11

TST Coordinator notes Concerns in TST Management

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Disagree	1	1.5	1.5	1.5
Neutral	5	7.6	7.6	9.1
Somewhat Agree	3	4.5	4.5	13.6
Agree	10	15.2	15.2	28.8
Strongly Agree	47	71.2	71.2	100.0
Total	66	100.0	100.0	

Stipend Impact

The second sub-research question to support research question one was: Does the stipend provided to the TST coordinators impact their performance? The descriptive statistics indicated the teachers were between “somewhat agree” and “agree” regarding the stipend the TST coordinators received has a positive impact on their performance (Table 12).

Table 12

TST Coordinator Stipend Provided Positive Impact on Performance

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
Stipend positive impact	66	1	7	5.74	1.532
Valid N (list wise)	66				

Note. Likert scale used: 1= strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = somewhat disagree, 4 = neutral, 5 = somewhat agree, 6 = agree, 7 = strongly agree.

Teachers who believed the stipend the TST coordinator receives positively impacts the coordinating of the TST revealed a much higher percentage of participants taking a “neutral” stance on the item and several more “disagreeing” compared with other items surveyed (Table 13). It remained approximately 68% of the respondents believed the stipend positively impacted the coordinating of the TST, 27.3% were “neutral,” and 4.5% were within the “disagree” continuum.

Table 13

Stipend Positive Impact

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Disagree	1	1.5	1.5	1.5
Disagree	1	1.5	1.5	3.0
Somewhat Disagree	1	1.5	1.5	4.5
Neutral	8	27.3	27.3	31.8
Somewhat Agree	2	3.0	3.0	34.8
Agree	10	15.2	15.2	50.0
Strongly Agree	33	50.0	50.0	100.0
Total	66	100.0	100.0	

Research Question Two

The second research question studied the confidence teachers had for the TST itself and to address this research question, it was divided into two different parts. Research question two examined the overall confidence teachers had for the TST. These subparts examined if the teachers were more likely to refer students to the TST based on

the leadership of the TST coordinator. It was also examined if the referrals from the TST to the special education team were appropriate to meet the needs of the students.

Do teachers have confidence in the Teacher Support Team? It was observed and reported in Table 14 that teachers were confident with the coordinator's expertise and they truly believed the TST coordinator listened to the teachers during intervention discussions. It was also observed the teachers were not necessarily less likely to refer students to the TST based on the leadership of the TST coordinator.

Table 14

Teacher Confidence in the Teacher Support Team

	<i>N</i>	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Deviation
Guides intervention process	64	3	7	6.58	.887
Coordinator Listens	65	3	7	6.57	.901
Coordinator discusses process	65	3	7	6.51	.904
Coordinator Expertise	66	3	7	6.50	.916
Appropriate SPED Referrals	64	1	7	6.39	1.136
Refer to TST based on Leadership	66	1	7	6.02	1.586
Leadership of TST/refer to TST	66	1	7	5.67	1.686
Valid <i>N</i> (list wise)	62				

Note. Likert scale used: 1= strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = somewhat disagree, 4 = neutral, 5 = somewhat agree, 6 = agree, 7 = strongly agree.

Within research question two, the question was asked; are teachers more likely to refer students to the TST based on the leadership of the TST coordinator? This sub-question examined the perceived referral of students to the TST based on the TST coordinator leadership. Teachers were surveyed and data analyzed to address this sub-question.

Teachers who would refer their students to the TST based on the leadership of the TST coordinator were considerably more than those who would not (Table 15). Although it was observed 10.6% of the respondents either “somewhat disagreed,” “disagreed,” or “strongly disagreed.”

Table 15

Refer Students to TST based on Leadership

	<i>Frequency</i>	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Disagree	1	1.5	1.5	1.5
Disagree	4	6.1	6.2	7.7
Somewhat Disagree	2	3.0	3.1	10.8
Neutral	2	3.0	3.1	13.8
Somewhat Agree	7	10.6	10.8	24.6
Agree	10	15.2	15.4	40.0
Strongly Agree	39	59.1	60.0	100.0
Total	65	98.5	100.0	
Missing System	1	1.5		
Total	66	100.0		

Teachers who believed the leadership of the TST coordinator is essential in the decision to refer students to the TST were considerably more than those who would not (Table 16). Although it was observed 12.1% of the respondents “somewhat disagreed,” “disagreed,” or “strongly disagreed.”

Table 16

Leadership of TST Essential in Decision to Refer Students to TST

	<i>Frequency</i>	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Disagree	1	1.5	1.5	1.5
Disagree	5	7.6	7.6	9.1
Somewhat Disagree	2	3.0	3.0	12.1
Neutral	8	12.1	12.1	24.2
Somewhat Agree	6	9.1	9.1	33.3
Agree	13	19.7	19.7	53.0
Strongly Agree	31	47.0	47.0	100.0
Total	66	100.0	100.0	

Data revealed 92.4% of teachers believed the TST coordinator provided expertise to the TST process (Table 17). It was observed one respondent “somewhat disagreed” with TST providing expertise to the TST process.

Table 17

TST Coordinator Provides Expertise to TST Process

	<i>Frequency</i>	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Disagree	1	1.5	1.5	1.5
Neutral	3	4.5	4.6	6.1
Somewhat Agree	3	4.5	4.6	10.8
Agree	13	19.7	20.0	30.8
Strongly Agree	45	68.2	69.2	100.0
Total	65	100.0	100.0	
Missing System	1	1.5		
Total	66	100.0		

Teachers who believed the TST coordinator discussed as opposed to dictates the TST process were 94.0% (Table 18). It was observed one respondent “somewhat disagreed” with this description of the TST coordinator.

Table 18

Coordinator Discussed Process with Teachers

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Disagree	1	1.5	1.5	1.5
Neutral	3	4.5	4.5	6.1
Somewhat Agree	4	6.1	6.1	12.1
Agree	12	18.2	18.2	30.3
Strongly Agree	46	69.7	69.7	100.0
Total	66	100.0	100.0	

Data revealed 90.9% of teachers believed the TST coordinator listened to those “closest to the student” during the intervention discussions (Table 19). It was observed one respondent “somewhat disagreed” with this description of the TST coordinator.

Table 19

Coordinator Listens to Those “Closest to Student”

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Disagree	1	1.5	1.5	1.5
Neutral	4	6.1	6.2	7.7
Agree	12	18.2	18.5	26.2
Strongly Agree	48	72.7	73.8	100.0
Total	65	98.5	100.0	
Missing System	1	1.5		
Total	66	100.0		

Data revealed 90.9% of teachers believed the TST coordinator was instrumental in guiding the intervention process (Table 20). It was observed one respondent “somewhat disagreed” with this approach and two chose not to respond.

Table 20

Guides Intervention Process

	<i>Frequency</i>	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Somewhat Disagree	1	1.5	1.6	1.6
Neutral	3	4.5	4.7	6.3
Somewhat Agree	2	3.0	3.1	9.4
Agree	10	15.2	15.6	25.0
Strongly Agree	48	72.7	75.0	100.0
Total	64	97.0	100.0	
Missing System	2	3.0		
Total	66	100.0		

Within research question two, the question was asked; are referrals from the TST to the Special Education Team appropriate to meet the needs of the students? This sub-question examined the perceived referral of students to the TST based on the TST coordinator leadership. Teachers were surveyed and data analyzed to address this sub-question. It was reported on Table 21 teachers do believe the referral to special education from the TSTs are appropriate.

Table 21

Appropriate Referrals to Special Education

	<i>N</i>	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Deviation
Appropriate SPED Referrals	64	1	7	6.39	1.136
Valid <i>N</i> (list wise)	64				

Note. Likert scale used: 1= strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = somewhat disagree, 4 = neutral, 5 = somewhat agree, 6 = agree, 7 = strongly agree.

Data revealed 77.3% of teachers believed the referrals from the TST to the special education team were appropriate and 13.6% believed they were “somewhat agreed” (Table 22). It was observed one respondent “somewhat disagreed” with this approach and two chose not to respond.

Table 22

Appropriate SPED Referrals

	<i>Frequency</i>	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Somewhat Disagree	1	1.5	1.6	1.6
Neutral	3	4.5	4.7	6.3
Somewhat Agree	9	13.6	14.1	20.3
Agree	6	9.1	9.4	29.7
Strongly Agree	45	68.2	70.3	100.0
Total	64	97.0	100.0	
Missing System	2	3.0		
Total	66	100.0		

Research Question Three

In what manner does the leadership of the Teacher Support Team coordinator with the Teacher Support Team impact the overall functional of the Teacher Support Team in high poverty elementary schools?

Research question three of the Teacher Support Team Leadership Survey was answered using qualitative responses, requiring participants to write their responses. Questions were designed to gain the views of participants on positive, negative, and concerning thoughts towards the distributed leadership within the TST. Each question provided the participant ample room to respond. In addition, data collected from the qualitative data was analyzed and gathered and broken into themes corresponding to the quantitative data. Within research question three were three subparts. These subparts examined if the leadership of the TST coordinator had positive, negative, and concerning thoughts on the coordinator influence on the TST.

Positive Aspects

The first subpart to support this research question was for the participants to share some positive aspects of the leadership within the TST. Data gathered was broken into the following areas: support, expertise, and structure.

Support

Participants consistently responded with the importance of the TST coordinator to be a good listener in which they were able to share concerns during the TST process. One participant specifically mentioned their TST coordinator is “always willing to listen to concerns and help teachers.” Additionally, it was important for the TST coordinator to be caring for the students and have a positive attitude towards the students and peers. The

participants stressed the importance for the TST coordinator to have the child's best interest at heart.

Expertise

The participants looked for guidance and respected the expert voice in the TST process. One participant noted their TST coordinator to be "very helpful in showing what steps to take next." The participants viewed this as being resourceful, with focused and appropriate intervention ideas. The participants viewed the TST coordinators as a mentor and someone they could trust. What they felt worked best was to have a coordinator who was data driven and confident in their abilities and the process.

Structure

The structure and organization of the TST coordinator was a key for the participants. The participants expressed the need for prepared and proactive interventions meeting the needs of teachers and students. The respondents also expressed the importance of maintaining efficient time, so the TST coordinator needed to be able to keep the meetings on task, with established and focused norms.

Negative Aspects

The second sub-part to support this research question was for the participants to share some negative aspects of the leadership within the TST. Data gathered was broken into the themes of wasted time, weak leadership, and frustrated with results. The most common answers provided for negative aspects included the need for effective time management and leadership which was disorganized.

Wasted Time

Time was a consistent theme with the participants. A participant wrote their TST coordinator is “not always consistent with meeting times and continuity of follow-up,” while another mentioned their TST coordinator “can be a time hog.” Many stated the need for consistent time management. They mentioned they believed the meetings were too long or even would like more time to get deeper into the data. They truly did not want to waste time.

Weak Leadership

If there is poor leadership with the coordinator then there is evidence of poor satisfaction in the team. With the amount of paperwork available, there were concerns the leadership of the coordinator “pushed-off” concerns to the special education team and not addressing intervention strategies. There was also a concern with a general lack of being informed with intervention strategies.

Frustrated with Results

Participants were concerned with too much work and not getting the results they wanted. A respondent reported “poor leadership results in staff frustration” as well as frustrations with the “lack of service to students and ineffective results.” Generally, there were concerns with the interventions not being done appropriately, thus causing too many referrals to special education that were not warranted.

Other Concerns

The third sub-part to support this research question was for the participants to share some additional aspects of the leadership within the TST. Many teachers reported it was important to have a stipend due to the extra responsibility of the TST coordinator.

Participants also added the strength of a knowledgeable TST coordinator and one that stays on top of the progress. It is very important to keep the teachers involved and their willingness to implement suggestions plays a big role.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to establish a connection between the role of distributed leadership and the impact of TSTs on elementary students of high poverty. To achieve this, the researcher utilized a mixed methods approach and gathered information from six high poverty elementary schools in the Sunnyside Public School District. The study examined key respondents' perceptions on the leadership within the TST.

The population utilized in this study consisted of anonymous survey results of administrators and certified teachers working in high poverty schools. Each of the six schools received Title I services and had a free and reduced lunch rate of 90% or higher. Each school consisted of twenty to thirty participants and all of these schools have similar demographics, including family income levels, race, and teacher years of experience. Each school utilizes a Teacher Support Team (TST) who plans and assists teachers with interventions to help struggling learners. The TSTs consisted of the building administrator, a TST coordinator, counselor, and various teachers as needed.

Descriptive analyses were performed and to support the research questions and sub-parts to the research questions. Findings of this study displayed both favorable and less favorable confidence in the leadership of the TST coordinator and the TST itself. TST coordinator confidence levels were greater than 90% while there were a small number of participants who responded negatively. While there continued to be positive perceptions of the TST as a whole, it was revealed in upwards of 12% of respondents

reported negative perceptions of the TST concerning the referral process to the TST. Additionally, the concerns of the TST coordinator and the TST itself were focused on time being wasted, weak leadership, and teachers who were frustrated with the results of the TST process.

In Chapter Five, the assumptions first identified as the beginning of this study were reviewed, discussed, and determined to be validated or not. Chapter Five also included discussions and overall results of the research questions.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

Introduction

This study analyzed the effectiveness of distributive leadership within Teacher Support Teams (TST) in high poverty elementary schools. This was accomplished by studying the perceptions of teachers within six elementary school buildings serving students of high poverty that have functioning TSTs. These buildings were chosen based on their level of free and reduced lunch rates and were similar in demographics.

Chapter Five includes a review of the purpose of the study, assumptions of the study, and limitations of the study. Chapter Five contains the discussions of specific findings and their desirable implications toward Teacher Support Teams. Recommendations for further study and for improving a similar study were included along with a summary of the entire study.

Purpose of the Study

The implementation of a highly effective TST with strong leadership has two major implications on a building. First, effective TSTs encourage the development of highly skilled teachers who are able to recognize the need for instruction that meets the needs of all students. Secondly, effective TSTs facilitate the excelling of each student in schools and provide these students with the opportunity to be their best. Evidence supporting the TST impact on student achievement is of the utmost importance.

The overall purpose of this study was to establish a connection between the role of distributed leadership and the impact of TSTs on elementary students of high poverty. To achieve this, information was gathered from high poverty elementary schools in the

Sunnyside Public School District. The study examined key respondents' perceptions on the leadership within the TST. A mixed method of gathering both qualitative and quantitative approaches was chosen as the most appropriate approach to collect the data.

Summary of Findings

When analyzing the data from the Teacher Support Team Leadership Survey, the data indicated similar teacher perceptions among schools surveyed. All of the survey items rendered positive teacher perceptions for the TST coordinator and the overall functioning of the TST. For all quantitative research questions studied, the majority of answers indicated teachers agreed or strongly agreed with the targeted item. This may imply the coordinators in all buildings display leadership that is positive and effective for each building.

Expertise

A comparison of the quantitative and qualitative data displayed common themes. Coordinator expertise was a targeted theme. It was an assumption that this study would provide insight into effective instructional practices for teachers. This assumption was upheld based on the data from the Teacher Support Team Leadership Surveys and the high level of expertise recognized by the participants. The overwhelming majority of teachers responded positively to the level of expertise of the coordinator, representing a high level of confidence. One of the specific strengths noted by the participants was the expert voice the TST coordinator provided.

Further data revealed the expertise recognized by the participants provided for appropriate and effective intervention ideas as well as confidence in the leadership of the TST coordinator. With this high level of confidence in the TST coordinator and TST as

whole, there was a concern that the stipend did not necessarily make a difference in the TST leadership. There was an assumption that the stipend the TST coordinator received for being the TST coordinator influenced the coordinator in any fashion. Some of the respondents believed the stipend positively impacted the coordinating of the TST; however a smaller minority of respondents were neutral on the topic. This lends to the assumption that the stipend generally does not make a difference.

Support

Support was another prominent theme. Comparisons of the quantitative and qualitative data revealed that teachers found the TST coordinators cared for the students and listened to all concerns teachers had for their students. Respondents routinely mentioned the TST coordinator's ability to have the child's best interest and their ability to deal with all situations with a positive attitude.

Teachers consistently wanted more time carved-out for the TST process. They were extremely protective of their own time and the participants praised those who were cognizant of time management. Teachers desired more time to be able to delve deeper into the data.

Structure

The structure and organization of the TST coordinator continued to be a prominent positive aspect for teachers. The participants expressed the need for prepared and proactive interventions meeting the needs of teachers and students. The respondents also expressed the importance of maintaining efficient time, so the TST coordinator needed to be able to keep the meetings on task, with established and focused norms.

Teachers stressed the need for a highly structured coordinator and one that valued time and efficiency in the system.

Assumptions

Creswell (2003) mentioned a mixed methods study can use qualitative and quantitative approaches. Creswell (2003) stressed the combination of the approaches will result in information that provides a deeper and richer understanding of the information. The results of the study were assumed to provide useful information to the Sunnyside Public Schools, especially to district leaders, building administrators, and teachers in which students of high poverty were being served. An underlying assumption of the study was the contribution to the understanding of strong leadership within the TST in elementary schools serving students in high poverty.

Study Limitations

As mentioned previously, the study utilized a mixed methods approach, resulting in quantitative and qualitative data. Approximately 130 surveys were distributed, and 66 surveys were received. It appeared the appropriate number of surveys were received to support assumptions.

The study's reliance on reported information provided no assurance the reporters were given adequate time and thought when completing the questionnaire and answering the interview questions. In order to compensate for this behavior, the researcher took precautions to develop the transitioning in the questioning. Fink (2006) reiterated this included to have the survey follow natural sequences as well as the questions needed to be easy-to-answer. The accuracy of the data depended on the quality of the information

provided by the participants responding to the data collection instruments and the quality of the research tool.

Another limitation related to the researcher's objectivity. The researcher attempted to avoid close relationships with the respondents which could have led them to overlook truths. There was energy taken so each participant would not accept every response without questioning their view of reality. This particular limitation could have been more of a concern based on the relationships developed in the working environments of a school district. However, for this research project to be useful, information needed to be looked at objectively and appropriately leaving out personal assumptions and intuitions.

Finally, information gathered by looking at these particular schools in a district in Missouri could not necessarily be generalized to all school districts. The six schools represented in this study all had free and reduced lunch rates above 90%. The findings in this study may not be reflective of other schools in the state of Missouri and it would be problematic to generalize the findings of this study wider. In addition, the surveyed sample was limited and it might be argued the sample was not representative of each school staff as a whole.

Discussion

The philosophy of the TST emphasizes a sense of distributed leadership, provided by the building administrator. Based on this idea of distributed leadership, instructional leaders present significant roles in implementing effective teams. The leadership of the TSTs is at the forefront of providing effective instructional strategies to teachers to meet the needs of all students in the building (Creese et al., 2000). There is no argument the

leadership of the building administrator is a major factor in developing a successful TST, however the importance of the distributed leadership to the TST coordinator cannot be overlooked.

Previous research focused on the TST's success linked to the building administrator's leadership (Boyer, 2008). There was no research found recognizing the influence of this leadership distributed to one of the teacher's peers. This study found the importance of the distributed leadership in the establishing and maintaining an effective TST.

Subsequently, the impact poverty has on children and the importance of the school's need to respond is exceptionally important. Daily hardships decrease opportunities for children in poverty and harm readiness for starting school. Even if a school communicates their foundational shared values and beliefs, they often present the group in its ideal versus their actual form (Peterson & Spencer, 1990). This study attempted to recognize the TST in its actual form. The form remained true with TSTs which provided distributed leadership and TST coordinators who were structured, good listeners, and have high levels of expertise.

The goal of educators and leaders working with students of high poverty should emphasize growth in children's skills rather than whether children meet specific test score targets (Murnane, 2007). The TSTs study have a focus on student achievement and stress the importance of teachers support with providing appropriate interventions in the classrooms. The expertise stressed by the participants in this study revealed the true desire to meet the needs of the students.

The TSTs recognized in this study noted a desire to meet the needs of all students. As mentioned by Hardy (2008), schools need to take the next step and provide these students with interventions and supports. All schools in this study consistently noted how the TSTs in their buildings were meeting these challenges.

Implications

This study had both theoretical and practical significance. For teachers, it provided insight into the importance of effective instructional practices. This study provided teachers with the benefit of viewing this topic through the perspective of other teachers. This insight is invaluable due to the potential for common thinking and understanding from professionals. Additionally, the study assisted teachers in the understanding and importance of certain attributes within the TST which would make for a more effective team and being able to address the needs of students.

For building administrators, this study provided strategies for assisting the leaders in the TST and helps them recognize leadership growth in the TST. The data clearly revealed the importance of distributing the leadership in the TST to a peer is able to have a high level of expertise, be a supportive party, and one which is highly structured. This study may guide administrators away from distributing the leadership to those who have a tendency to waste time and display weak leadership, so frustrations are minimized. This study should also attempt to assist principals in selecting a TST representative who has these qualities needed to get the most out of teachers.

It is important for building administrators to continue to promote levels of professional development for their TST coordinators. The importance of a high level of

expertise in the coordinator position has been revealed. Continued focus on the key processes and procedures of the TST are important.

Additionally, this study may help building administrators recognize the type of individual who may be appropriate to lead a TST. The characteristics that are important to the participants may lead to a successful TST. Being provided with these characteristics will aid the building administrator in the TST coordinator selection process.

Recommendations for Further Study

The foremost conclusion to this study was the six schools surveyed had positive confidence in the TST coordinators and TST as a whole. The leadership distributed in each building appeared to be appropriate and focused on staff and student needs. Questions were answered with this study, although many more were generated.

Further recommendations would be to study additional demographics within the Sunnyside Public School District. The research was conducted in a very small section of the Sunnyside Public School District. Further information may be needed in other schools with similar and differing demographics to make generalizations for all students. Looking at a multisite case study would add for additional data to be discovered. The assumptions in place can only be assumed for these six schools and further information would warrant data when viewing distributed leadership.

Additionally, this study may be replicated to a broader population outside the Sunnyside Public School System to receive regional or state data. This study was conducted in a specific region and in six elementary school building serving students in

high poverty. Replications of the study could be expanded to secondary schools and gain more information regarding the distributed leadership in TSTs.

Lastly, expansions of the qualitative research to examine perceptions students and parents have concerning the TST coordinator and the TST in general may be explored. Parents and students did not have a voice during this study; however, they are an imperative piece in the TST process. Additionally, further qualitative data focused on the principal's perspective would allow for added significant data. Further qualitative data may reveal data relevant to the leadership in the TST.

An effective TST is one that is aligned to the needs of staff and students. Meeting the needs of all students is at the forefront of all educational systems. The need for further research focused on the distributed leadership within TSTs would not only provide additional insight to school districts and building administrators, but would also provide strategies and guidance into practices that would enhance the educational experience of students.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to establish a connection between the role of distributed leadership and the impact of TSTs on elementary students of high poverty. To achieve this, the researcher utilized a mixed methods approach and gathered information from six high poverty elementary schools in the Sunnyside Public School District. The study examined key respondents' perceptions on the leadership within the TST.

This study had both theoretical and practical significance for teachers and administrators. Understanding these practical and theoretical implications for educators will not only benefit the TST, but will benefit the students who are receiving the

interventions. In a time in which schools are being held more accountable than ever, it is important to make sure the proper interventions are being used. An effective Teacher Support Team which is guided by efficient leadership will meet the needs of struggling students.

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Appendix A

Teacher Support Team Leadership Survey

You have been selected to complete this survey because you are a certified teacher or administrator who participates in the TST in your building. This data is being collected for a research project in partial fulfillment of the requirement for a doctorate degree through University of Missouri, Columbia. This research project is focused on analyzing the leadership of the TST coordinator within your school. Your time and honesty on this survey will be very much appreciated.

Please rate your level of agreement with the following statements by putting a checkmark in the most appropriate level of agreement:

Statements	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neutral	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. The TST coordinator provides leadership within the TST.							
2. I feel the TST coordinator has a positive impact on the TST.							
3. I have confidence in the leadership of my TST coordinator.							
4. The leadership role of the TST coordinator has a positive impact on the TST.							
5. The teachers in my building have confidence in the TST coordinator.							
6. The TST coordinator takes note of concerns on how the TST is managed.							
7. The TST Coordinator stipend positively impacts the coordinating of the TST.							
8. I am more likely to refer students to the TST based on the leadership of the TST coordinator.							
9. The leadership of the TST coordinator is essential in my decision to refer students to the TST.							
10. The TST coordinator provides expertise to the TST process.							
11. The TST coordinator discusses as opposed to dictating the TST process.							
12. The TST coordinator listens to those "closest to the student" during intervention discussions.							
13. The TST coordinator is instrumental in guiding the intervention process.							
14. The referrals from the TST to the SPED team are appropriate.							

Please share some positive aspects of the leadership within the TST:

Please share some negative aspects of the leadership within the TST:

Please add information concerning the leadership of the TST coordinator in your building:

When you have completed your survey, please put it in the envelope provided.

Thank you for participating in this survey.

Appendix B

Informed Consent Form

Dear Research Participant:

Thank you for considering participation in the study "Leadership Influence on Teacher Support Teams in High Poverty Elementary Schools." This study is being conducted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Education degree in Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis at the University of Missouri-Columbia.

The purpose of this study is to determine the effectiveness of distributed leadership within Teacher Support Teams in high poverty elementary schools. This information will be useful to understand how the leadership within TSTs functions and the benefits for students.

Please read the following about how your input will be used and how your rights as a participant will be protected:

- Participation in the study is completely voluntary. You may stop participating at any point without penalty.
- You need not answer all of the questions.
- Your answers will be kept confidential. Results will be presented to others in summary form only, without names or other identifying information.
- Your participation will take approximately 10 minutes. During this time you will complete the Teacher Support Team Leadership Survey.
- The data collected will be held in a locked file cabinet in the researcher's office and disposed of at the conclusion of the study.

This project has been reviewed and approved by the University of Missouri-Columbia Campus Institutional Review Board (IRB). The IRB believes that the research procedures adequately safeguard the subject's privacy, welfare, civil liberties, and rights, and may be contacted at 573.882.9585. The project is being supervised by Dr. Cynthia MacGregor, Professor, CLSE, Missouri State University (417.836.6046).

You can contact me at 417-861-9230 if you have questions or concerns about your participation. Thank you very much for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Jason Steingraber
University of Missouri-Columbia

VITA

Jason Alan Steingraber was born February 24, 1973 in Pullman, Washington to John and Doris (Norman) Steingraber. Jason has an older sister Kristin, who currently resides in Ozark, Missouri. Jason and his family moved to Edwardsville, Illinois in 1984. He graduated from Edwardsville High School in Edwardsville, Illinois in May, 1991 and then completed his Bachelors of Arts Degree in Communication Disorders in 1995 and Master's of Arts Degree in Communication Disorders in 1997; both degrees from Truman State University. He completed a second Master's degree in 2007 with a Master's of Science Degree in Education Administration from Missouri State University. In December, 2010, Jason completed requirements for a Doctorate degree in Education Leadership and Policy Analysis from the University of Missouri-Columbia.

Jason began his career working for National Healthcare Rehabilitation in 1997 in Springfield, Missouri. He left National Healthcare Rehabilitation to begin a career in education in 1998 and was a Speech-Language Pathologist for the Springfield Public Schools in Springfield, Missouri. In 2005, Jason worked as a Special Education Process Coordinator for the Springfield Public Schools; in 2007 as an elementary school principal at Bowerman Elementary School; and in 2010 as an elementary school principal at Wilder Elementary School. At the time of this writing, Jason had completed thirteen years in the field of education all with the Springfield Public Schools.

Jason is happily married to Jennifer Ruth (Head) Steingraber and has been for nearly thirteen years. Jen is also in education and currently works as a Speech-Language Pathologist in the Springfield Public Schools. The Steingraber's have two girls Emma (9) and Kate (6) and their dog of ten years, Rocky.