

THE PERCEPTIONS OF TEACHERS AND PRINCIPALS IN REGARD TO  
TEACHER LEADERSHIP AND SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

#### *Background*

On January 8, 2002, President George W. Bush signed into law the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* (2002). The primary focus of this landmark education act, which is an amendment to the original *Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965* (1965), was to provide a framework by which American public school systems may accurately determine student competency and school effectiveness. Since the mandates of *No Child Left Behind*, considerations of school reform have been dominated by performance-based accountability. School administrators, educators, and learners must maintain improving test results each year or school districts and their schools will undergo sanctions connected to federal funding (U. S. Department of Education, 2004). With the increased attention on educational reform and the added pressures for higher student achievement on mandated tests, effective leadership plays a critical part in the success of the school and has a substantial impact on the lives of the students (Davies, 2005; Yukl, 2006). Therefore, it has been determined that sustained school improvement is dependent upon effective leadership (Barth, 2001; Yukl).

As a result, research on leadership has been done in an effort to create a solid understanding of what it is to be a leader and guidelines as to what it takes to become a leader (Andrews & Crowther, 2002; Davies, 2005; Sergiovanni, 2000; Starratt, 1995; Yukl, 2006). Instead of simplifying the meaning of leadership into one universal model, research has found many different forms and types of leaders (Davies; Sergiovanni; Yukl), thus creating an abundance of definitions surrounding the construct of leadership.

Some definitions are quite lengthy and complicated; however, sometimes the simplest stated can have a greater impact. Barth's (2001) view of leadership as "making happen what you believe in" (p. 85) has such an impact. This definition is not only simplistic for leadership, but it also widens the foundation as to who can become a leader. By removing specific job positions and titles from the picture, this definition implies that anyone can be a leader.

Nevertheless, typically, in the educational setting, it is the principal who is regarded as the key educational leader and the one person in a school who has the most opportunity to exercise leadership (Gurr, Drysdale, & Mulford, 2006). Elmore (2000) contrasted the position of principal leadership to higher-level managers and cautioned the importance of realizing principal leadership does exercise "control" over certain functions, although the position lacks control over the school wide improvement. He contended:

The term "control" applied to school improvement is a dubious concept because one does not "control" improvement processes so much as one guides them and provides direction for them, since most of the knowledge required for improvement must inevitably reside in the people who deliver instruction, not in the people who manage them. (Elmore, 2000, p. 14)

This thought parallels with the idea that the renewed focus upon strong principal leadership has brought to the forefront the importance and the belief in the ability of school leaders as the change agent to create an organization which mobilizes interdependencies of the educational staff, thus creating teacher leadership capacity (Fullan, Hill, & Crevola, 2006).

However, to create such an organization, the school leader must first be aware of the school culture. Barth (2001) went so far as to declare "Ultimately, a school's culture

has far more influence on life and learning in the schoolhouse than the state department of education, the superintendent, the school board, or even the principal can ever have” (p. 7). Wilson (2007) concluded that it is the culture in remarkable schools that inspires students and teachers to accomplish great things. Thus it becomes the responsibility of the principals to recognize the strengths and weaknesses of the existing culture, and proceed from there to create a culture rich in trust and staff involvement. Durrant and Holden (2006) agreed with the importance of culture by stating, “If school culture is an important determinant in how staff and students experience organizational life, then an important determinant of school culture is leadership” (p. 28). Therefore, the responsibility of creating and upholding such a culture lies within the principal. Once such a culture has been established participants feel empowered and realize they are part of the decision making process, thus leading to teacher leadership.

Fostering teacher leadership demands a culture in which the principal understands and values the importance of teacher leadership, and building such a school culture determines the extent to which teachers will be able to acquire and exercise skills of leadership (Danielson, 2006). Schools and the administration team need to recognize the necessity of the teacher leadership if the schools are to improve (Barth, 2001). Davies (2005) suggested student achievement improves in schools where principals encourage teacher leadership to emerge in areas important to individual teachers. Barth also declared that by utilizing teacher leadership a ripple effect is created that radiates throughout the building as teachers enlist student leadership. This ultimately generates a setting where teachers are more involved and influential in establishing discipline, designing curriculum, and ultimately raising school achievement levels (Barth). This step

toward building a workplace where teachers feel empowered to expand on their expertise is important when talking about overall school improvement.

Over the past several years, teacher leadership has become an established feature of educational reform in the United States, and today more than ever, a number of interconnected factors argue for the necessity of teacher leadership in schools (Danielson, 2006). Teacher leaders help direct fellow colleagues and the entire school toward higher standards of achievement and recognition of individual responsibility for school reform. Teacher leaders do not wait to be appointed to a formal role that holds special authority before they offer their expertise, credibility, and influence to others in order to impact the educational experience of all students (Hatch, White, & Faigenbaum, 2005). Teachers continue to undergo significant change as they are expected to show leadership (Anderson, 2004). This change is embraced by some, yet misunderstood by others, leading to confusion and a skewed perception by many as to where the role of teacher leadership fits into the overall school organization.

The unprecedented demands being placed on schools today require leadership at every level. However, this movement toward teacher leadership needs to be done as a collaborative effort of the principal and the teaching staff. Birky, Shelton, and Headley (2006) stated, “Although the importance of teacher leaders is recognized, teacher leaders are seldom effective in their roles without the support and encouragement of their administrator” (p. 89). The concept of teacher leadership and the influence it has on schools is significant, and more information about the nature of the relationship between teacher leaders and the principals and the influences that impact teacher leadership is important.

Teacher leadership is an idea whose time has come, but such leadership cannot reach its fullest capacity without the support and encouragement of the principal. Having a thorough understanding of both teacher and principal leadership appears essential for any educator. The overall concept of teacher leadership is an important facet to school improvement (Andrews & Crowther, 2002; Barth, 2001; Birky, et al.2006; Danielson, 2006), and ultimately the need to understand the perception of teacher leadership from the perspective of the teachers and principals is necessary in order for substantial school reform to take place in more schools.

### *Conceptual Underpinnings of the Study*

With the increased attention on educational reform and the added pressures for higher student achievement on mandated tests primarily brought on by the adoption of the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001*, effective leadership plays a critical part in the success of the school and has a substantial impact on the lives of the students (Davies, 2005; Yukl, 2006). The theoretical foundation for this study is largely based on the need for the expansion of leadership roles throughout the educational setting which will promote lasting school reform.

This study centered on the main idea of educational leadership, but not in the typical manner with the principal being the sole leader. Instead, the focus for the expansive literature review incorporated three main components necessary to promote lasting changes in the school setting. These components consist of: school improvement, teacher leadership, and principal leadership.

*School Improvement.* School improvement, also defined as school reform, encompasses an array of different ideas and concepts. For successful school

improvement, one must consider the importance of careful planning, management, and continuity of behaviors, as well as an emphasis on teaching and learning (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Durrant & Holden, 2006). An important component of school improvement is school culture. Barth (2001) declared “a school’s culture has far more influence on life and learning in the schoolhouse than the state department of education, the superintendent, the school board, or even the principal can ever have” (p.7). Even though the range of school improvement goals includes those related to students, teachers, and school organizations, the ultimate objective of overall school improvement is to enhance student progress, achievement, and development (Bryk & Schneider). Therefore, such improvement efforts are sustained by creating a school environment which fosters teacher leadership (Danielson, 2006).

*Teacher Leadership.* Barth (2001) declared “A school culture hospitable to widespread leadership will be a school culture hospitable to widespread learning” (p. 81). A large portion of the widespread leadership he referred to is the position of teacher leadership. Influence from teacher leaders is not contained within the confines of classrooms, but extends out to include all those impacted by innovative leadership skills recognizing ways to improve schools (Andrews & Crowther, 2002; Childs-Bowen, Moller, & Scrivner, 2000; Danielson, 2006). When teachers step into leadership positions, they become more active learners, students learn by being immersed in a democratic community of learners, and schools benefit from better decisions (Barth). Subsequently, researchers (Andrews & Crowther; Barth; Danielson; Durrant & Holden, 2006) agreed that constructing teacher leadership in schools is vitally important, but

equally significant is the idea that in order for teacher leadership to flourish, principals must be prepared to step into a different type of leadership position (Copland, 2001).

*Principal Leadership.* Schools depend on leadership to improve their academic performance (Davies, 2005; Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2004). Yet, the expanding expectations of the administrative position demand that principals establish a system of shared leadership (Andrews & Crowther, 2002; Marks & Printy, 2003). The principal has to be willing to relinquish power to establish a positive environment for teacher leaders to cultivate and grow. The roles of teacher leaders are seldom effective without the support and encouragement of their administrators (Birky, et al. 2006).

#### *Statement of the Problem*

As a result of *No Child Left Behind* stringent accountability regulations have been forced on all schools. With this current standards-based reform, the accountability for student learning lies specifically within each school and the teachers that work there (Elmore, 2000). To sustain school improvement, it is imperative that schools have effective leadership. This leadership cannot come in the form of a single principal, but instead the principal must create a culture that nurtures and encourages teacher leadership. Yet many administrators, school board members, citizens, and even teachers do not interpret the role of teacher leaders in the same manner. This lack of interpretation leads to more obstacles that teacher leaders must face.

As teachers are urged to assume new roles, a better understanding of the nature of teacher leadership is therefore important. Recent literature (Anderson, 2004; Birky, et al. 2006; Danielson, 2006) has explored the importance of principals and teachers working together to create an atmosphere conducive for student learning. The significance of

teachers taking on leadership roles to create trust in the work place and a bond between the teachers and their colleagues is an important step toward successful school reform (Moller & Pankake, 2006). School improvement is enhanced by leaders who establish collegial structures that facilitate dialogue and the development of the teachers' voice as a means for developing school goals and visions (Anderson; Danielson; Moller & Pankake).

The importance of the interactions between teachers and principals and how they both work in leadership positions moving toward school improvement supports the urgency of further research to gain a deeper understanding of the role of teacher leadership. To gain a better understanding of how the two separate leadership positions are parallel in nature yet significantly interrelated appears noteworthy for both teachers and principals. The period of top-down hierarchical structure of school leadership has long passed, and the literature points to new and expanding roles for teachers and principals working collaboratively to bring about substantial school improvement (Barth, 2001).

#### *Purpose of the Study*

The concepts of both teacher leadership and principal leadership have emerged as important factors for which schools need to further explore as they strive for lasting change and school improvement. The connection and rapport between teacher and principal leadership suggest positive ways in which school improvement can be accomplished (Andrews & Crowther, 2002; Barth, 2001; Danielson, 2006). Lasting school improvement is enhanced by leaders who establish collegial structures that

facilitate dialogue and the expansion of the voices of the teachers as a means for developing a strong school culture striving toward common goals and vision.

Therefore, the purpose of this study was three fold. First the researcher strived to gain a better understanding of perceptions of teacher leadership roles from the point of view of teacher and of principal and any differences that may occur between the two positions. Secondly, the study examined the overall interest of the teachers stepping into a teacher leadership position and ways they are encouraged or discouraged to take on this challenge. Lastly, the researcher studied the extent to which principals and teachers believe the teacher leadership roles lead to overall school improvement.

#### *Definition of Key Terms*

The definitions of key terms used in this investigation were provided to offer clarity and to help the reader comprehend core concepts of the study.

*Classroom teacher.* For the purpose of this study, classroom teachers were defined as full-time, certificated employees who provide direct, daily instruction to district students. A full-time teacher works for the district approximately nine months per school year.

*Formal teacher leadership.* Those teachers who are given familiar titles and positions which are usually appointed and identified by the principal and district administrators. These teachers are generally compensated either by additional salary or in exchange for a lighter teaching load. Some formal teacher leaders no longer teach in the regular classroom (Birky, et al. 2006).

*Informal teacher leadership.* The set of skills demonstrated by teachers who continue to teach students but also have an influence that extends beyond their own classrooms to others within their own school and elsewhere (Danielson, 2006).

*Large school district.* For the purpose of this study, large school district was defined as a school district that had a student enrollment of five thousand or greater.

*Leadership.* Those persons in schools, occupying various faculty positions, who work with others to provide direction and who exert influence on persons and things in order to achieve the school's goals (Barth, 2001).

*Leadership capacity.* Broad-based, skillful participation in the work of leadership that leads to lasting school improvement (Lambert, 2006). Leadership capacity is demonstrated in schools that amplify leadership for all and purposeful learning together in a community.

*Mid-sized school district.* For the purpose of this study, mid-sized school districts were defined as school districts that had a student enrollment greater than one thousand but less than 5,000.

*Principal leadership.* Knowledge and ability to create a school atmosphere of trust and respect, a shared sense of direction, distributed power, and allowance for individual expression (Andrews & Crowther, 2002). This leadership position should value and trust learning from experience for themselves and rigorously and courageously craft school experiences such that those experiences yield important personal learning for adults and students alike (Barth, 2001).

*School improvement.* The results of making the teaching and learning process and conditions within schools better in order to support students in raising student

achievement or steadily improving student achievement. This would include an improvement in the capacity of a school to manage change for the betterment of student achievement (Durrant & Holden, 2006).

*Small school district.* For the purpose of this study, small school districts were defined as school districts that had a student enrollment of one thousand or less.

*Teacher leadership.* Those educators that work with fellow colleagues for the purpose of improving teaching and learning, whether in a formal or an informal capacity (Patterson & Patterson, 2004)

### *Research Questions*

Initial review of literature concluded that teacher leadership is valuable for students, fellow teachers, administrators, and the entire school structure, especially in light of educational reform (Anderson & Crowther, 2002; Barth, 2001; Birky et al., 2006; Danielson, 2006). Schools in the country are evaluating their effectiveness and pursuing ways to make schools more relevant and students more successful (Birky et al.). Such evaluations have made the principals consider their leadership styles and seek ways to increase teacher involvement in taking risks and making changes, thus becoming teacher leaders (Birky et al.). Since teacher leadership plays an important role in school improvement, appropriate principal actions are necessary for encouraging and promoting such leadership (Birky et al.; Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001). Subsequently, it is important to discover how teachers and principals interpret the position of teacher leadership, and to what extent both positions believe teacher leadership plays in lasting school improvement.

Therefore, in an attempt to glean a better understanding of teacher leadership roles from the point of view of the principal and of teachers and the extent to which these roles affect school improvement the following research questions were addressed:

1. Is there a difference in how principals and teachers perceive teachers' involvement in teacher leadership roles?
2. Is there a perceived difference between the ratings of involvement by teachers compared to the rating of how involved they would like to be in teacher leadership roles?
3. What impact do teachers believe teacher leadership has on school improvement?
4. What impact do principals believe teacher leadership has on school improvement?
5. Is there a significant difference between teachers and principals on the perceived impact of teacher leadership roles on school improvement?
6. What encourages and discourages teacher to be leaders?

#### *Null Hypothesis*

The following null hypotheses were tested in an attempt to answer the research questions:

1. There is no statistically significant difference in how principals and teachers perceive teachers' involvement in teacher leadership roles.
2. There is no statistically significant difference in the rating of involvement by teachers compared to the rating of how involved they would like to be in teacher leadership roles.

3. There is no statistically significant difference between teachers and principals on the perceived impact of teacher leadership roles on school improvement.

#### *Limitations and Assumptions*

Heppner and Heppner (2004) pointed out that although all studies have limitations and assumptions; a fine line exists between the two. Whereas an assumption is “something that is thought to be fact but that may have limited evidence to support it” (Heppner & Heppner, p. 48), limitations “always exist about the extent to which you can generalize your findings” (Heppner & Heppner, p. 340). It is imperative that a well designed research study clearly define limitations of the study so that the reader is aware of the potential lack of generalization of findings to other potential studies. The following limitations and assumptions related to this study were identified by the researcher:

1. The study sample was limited to a geographic region within one Midwest state.
2. The validity of the quantitative data was limited by the degree of reliability and validity of the survey instrument.
3. It was assumed that participants were forthright in their responses and interpreted the survey instruments in the way in which they were intended.
4. This study was limited by the extent of experience the researcher possessed in survey and interview skills.
5. The researcher assumed the sample chosen for this study was representative of schools throughout a Midwestern state.

#### *Design Controls*

The mixed design chosen for this study is considered descriptive research. The self-report method of descriptive design, whereby surveys are conducted, was used in

order to collect data (Gay, 1996). A survey was selected as a quantitative measure, the intent of which was to reveal the status of teacher leadership within school settings (Thomas & Brubaker, 2000). Advantages of surveys offer certain characteristics of a group, with inferences drawn from the sampling potentially being applied to larger populations (Thomas & Brubaker). However, the potential of participants not being truthful and diligent in the responses is a risk of surveys (Thomas & Brubaker). The researcher controlled for this by conducting reliability and validity testing on the instrument and using opened ended questions on the survey as a strategy to gather descriptive data in the words of the subjects so that insights on perceptions could be interpreted (Bodgan & Biklen, 2003). While the larger the sample size, the more powerful the analysis (Field, 2005; Shaffer & Serlin, 2004), it is important to obtain a sample that has true representation of the characteristics being studied. Therefore to control for this a representative sample was selected by the researcher to be a true representation of school district populations across Missouri. The researcher categorized school districts according to their 2008-2009 enrollment as reported by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE). The categories were established as follows: large districts had a student population of five thousand or greater, mid-sized districts had greater than one thousand but less than five thousand students, and small districts had one thousand students or less enrolled. Once the categories were established, the researcher, using a number generator, randomly selected seven school districts from each category. A total number of fifteen schools were used in the research, but by randomly choosing two extra schools in each category the researcher was prepared in case a district chose not to participate. The goal of such quantitative data collection

method is to determine whether the effects seen in the sample reflected “true effects” (Shaffer & Serlin, 2004) and not merely chance happenings. If deemed true effects, a generalization could then be made for the larger population.

Since the goal of the researcher was to better understand human behavior and experience, Gay (1996) promoted the use of open-ended questions on the survey. For the purposes of this study, open-ended questions were utilized to support the data gathered from administering the survey. Open-ended questions on the survey thus allowed for the triangulation of data.

### *Summary*

Since the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001*, schools in the United States are feeling increased pressures for educational reform and higher student achievement on standardized tests.

As a result of this increase in accountability, effective leadership plays a critical part in the success of the school and has a substantial impact on the lives of the students (Davies, 2005; Yukl, 2006). In order for school improvement to become embodied throughout the culture of a school, the roles of both the principals and teachers must endure a change.

Accordingly, the focus of this study was to attempt to gain a better understanding of the perceptions of teacher leadership and principal leadership and the affects they have on school improvement. The study focused on the principal’s perception of teacher leadership and ways they can encourage and support teacher leaders in their schools. Additionally the study concentrated on the teacher’s perceptions of teacher leadership and ways they felt encouraged or discouraged by their principals.

In Chapter Two, a synthesis of related literature is presented, focusing on the main components of school improvement, teacher leadership and principal leadership. In Chapter Three, a description of the research design and methodology utilized in this study is provided. Presented in Chapter Four are the research analysis and findings. In Chapter Five, the results of the study, conclusions, implications, and recommendations for further research are presented.

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### *Introduction*

It has been established that in order to meet the expectations of *No Child Left Behind*, school reform requires both restructuring and reculturing (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Durrant & Holden, 2006) during which time the role of the principal is changed (Marks & Printy, 2003; Treslan, 2006; Yukl, 2006) and teacher leaders are developed (Danielson, 2006). Thus when considering the importance of school improvement, it is necessary to explore the numerous ways the two leadership roles simultaneously exist effectively in a school setting. Creating a work environment that promotes interactions between both the principal and teacher leaders is significant for both the teachers and the principal. In fact, Davies (2005) argued that the development of teacher leadership has led to more positive ways in which school improvement can be obtained, and that school improvement is actually enhanced by leaders who establish an organizational culture that facilitates dialogue and the promotion of the teachers' voice as a means for developing school goals and vision (Davies). Therefore to gain a thorough understanding of both teacher and principal leadership one must become knowledgeable both in the way teacher leadership functions best and the role the principal plays in nurturing and encouraging teacher leadership, thus leading educators toward making substantial school improvement.

In the first section of this chapter the researcher focuses on literature related to school improvement since that is the cornerstone by which success in schools is measured. Next discussed is the current research on the topic of teacher leadership. The

importance of teacher leadership and its impact on the concept of school improvement efforts are also discussed. Additionally the development of teacher leaders and the importance of the connection in regard to principal leadership will be explored. Finally the researcher explores the topic of principal leadership and the changes that must occur in order for principals to actively and successfully promote the development of teacher leaders. The blending of the research on these vital issues articulates the importance of exploring the perceptions of teacher leadership and principal leadership from the perspective of both roles.

### *School Improvement*

Since the birth of *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB), school reform has been dominated by performance based accountability which has changed the way the nation views educational challenges. Elmore (2000) declared “standards-based reform has a deceptively simple logic: schools, and school systems, should be held accountable for their contributions to student learning” (p. 12). Therefore it is important to understand the definition of school reform and what it really means for a school to achieve school improvement.

### *Concept of School Improvement*

Given that many researchers have included in their research the topic of school reform (Bolman & Deal, 2003; Bruffee, 1999; Durrant & Holden, 2006; Sergiovanni, 2000), it is important to find a workable definition for school improvement. While some define school improvement quite narrowly in terms of making the teaching and learning process better in order to raise student achievement (Durrant & Holden), others take a broader view to encompass structural changes as well (Bryk & Schneider, 2002). When

considering these definitions, the importance of careful planning, management, and continuity are included, as well as an emphasis on teaching and learning. Even though the range of school improvement goals includes those related to students, teachers and school organizations, the ultimate objective of overall school improvement is to enhance student progress, achievement, and development (Bryk & Schneider).

Elmore (2000) discussed the importance of school based reform and the logic of using standardized tests as the accountability systems that evaluate student performance and school improvement. He explained:

Society should communicate its expectations for what students should know and be able to do in the form of standards; both for what should be taught and for what students should be able to demonstrate about their learning. School administrators and policy makers, at the state, district, and school level, should regularly evaluate whether teachers are teaching what they are expected to teach and whether students can demonstrate what they are expected to learn. The fundamental unit of accountability should be the school, because that is the organizational unit where teaching and learning actually occurs. (p. 4)

Still in measuring the importance of school improvement the measurement tool needs to include more than test scores.

Consequently, school improvement is not a simple technical matter of getting the job done. Durrant and Holden (2006) took a holistic view of school improvement by suggesting that a particular set of ideas existed regarding school improvement. First, they suggested the core purpose of schools is to engage everyone in learning. Researchers have suggested that a valuable characteristic to any successful organization of today is the capacity for change brought on by continual learning (Bruffee, 1999; Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995; Senge, 1990). Learning involves the use of strategies, such as collaborative learning, which Bruffee declared as a movement from group knowledge to

individual knowledge, arguing “collaborative learning . . . it is something people construct interdependently by talking together” (p. 133). Similar in nature is the term learner centered which, like collaboration, puts the learner as the co-creator in the teaching and learning process as well as included in the educational decision-making process (McCombs & Whisler, 1997; Weimer, 2002).

In order for an educational organization to be in a continual mode of learning, the principal or others must understand the importance of the creating a culture where “the followers feel trust, admiration, loyalty, and respect toward the leader, and they are motivated to do more than they originally expected to do” (Yukl, 2006, p. 262). Educational leaders know the importance of establishing such a culture of trust, thus creating opportunities for collaborative learning (Bruffee, 1999). One of the most important facets of collaborative learning is the interaction between individuals and collaborative learning activities. Such collaborative learning activities are opportunities for school improvement.

Second, Durrant and Holden (2006) expounded upon the fact that teachers play a central role in the leadership of learning. Sergiovanni (2000) suggested that “developing a community of practice may be the single best most important way to improve a school” (p. 139). His explanation of a “community of practice” is one where teachers participate in decision making, have a shared sense of purpose, engage in collaborative work, and accept joint responsibility for the outcomes. Teachers are an essential part of school improvement and must assume ownership for the best interests of the students. Teachers must be motivated and interested to make necessary changes that will make school improvement succeed.

Another idea presented by Durrant and Holden (2006) is how principals play a key role in supporting teachers' leadership of learning. Eilers and Camacho (2007) declared "When connections between principal leadership and school conditions are understood, the potential for organization-wide learning and school improvement is enhanced" (p. 635). Research on leadership styles of principals shows the days of principals operating as the foreman with the teachers being the assembly line workers are gone (Yukl, 2006). Today, principals who want to see results in student improvement invest energy in building leadership capacity around key issues regarding student achievement and empowering teachers to be leaders (Childs-Bowen, Moller, & Scrivner, 2000).

A fourth idea suggested by Durrant and Holden (2006) was that the foundation and catalyst for this leadership of learning is school-based enquiry, connecting evidence generated in school with the wider educational discourse. By engaging in the use of research and the evidence it provides, teachers are able to link their own learning with student learning, thus developing their own and others' capacity as leaders of change (Durrant & Holden). Fullan, Hill, and Crevola (2006) theorized that the importance comes by merging instructional practice which is personalized and generalized, formative assessments that plot improvement, and reflection and responses in a timely manner, creating a path where the teacher can make the necessary instructional decisions. Nevertheless, these authors went on to say that this path is relatively new, but it creates a journey that exemplary schools have already traveled to school improvement success.

Finally, Durrant and Holden (2006) presented the idea that through teachers' collaboration, inquiry, and leadership of learning, there is potential to unlock school

cultures in order to build and sustain capacity for school improvement. As shown by a meta-analysis of studies of successful schools, “creating a culture” was identified as first among ten central traits of successful schools (Daggett, 2005). This important fact demands a further exploration of school culture.

### *School Culture*

Every school has a culture (Barth, 2001), and it is the power of this culture and vision that drives the passion for learning found in effective schools (Wilson, 2007). The school’s culture can work for or against improvement and reform (Barth). Therefore, one must consider the culture of a school and the important influence it has on how the school operates and the extent to which it can achieve positive results for its students (Danielson, 2006).

Concrete, planned improvement strategies alone do not ensure improvement. Instead, it is the responsibility of a leader to establish a successful culture of learning in the school setting. Schein (2000) defined culture by stating “culture usually refers to how people feel about the organization, the authority system, and the degree of employee involvement and commitment” (p xxiii). Yukl (2006) purported that “A major function of culture is to help us understand the environment and determine how to respond to it” (p. 291). In addition, Sergiovanni (2000) declared:

Changing a culture requires that people, both individually and collectively, move from something familiar and important into an empty space. And then, once they are in this empty space, they are obliged to build a new set of meanings and norms and a new cultural order to fill up the space. (p. 148)

Furthermore, Tierney (1988) suggested “An organization’s culture is reflected in what is done, how it is done, and who is involved in doing it” (p. 3). Ultimately, fostering teacher leadership demands a culture in which teacher leadership is valued, and building such a school culture determines the extent to which teachers will be able to acquire and exercise skills of leadership (Danielson, 2006).

### *Teacher Leadership*

With the standards now being raised for students to achieve proficiency at ninety percent and above (Fullan, Hill, & Crevola, 2006), an important focus of education is educational improvement at all grade levels. In response to the raising of the standards, policy makers have recognized the need to place teachers as the focal point of the school improvement agenda (Berry, Johnson, & Montgomery, 2005). Starratt (1995) indicated there is growing evidence that involvement by teachers in educational reform is critical in order to move education toward excellence. Barth (2001) declared “Schools badly need the leadership of teachers if they are to improve” (p. 84). Furthermore, research in the area of teacher leadership has progressively concentrated on the value that teacher leaders have for students, fellow teachers, and administrators (Andrews & Crowther, 2002; Birky, Shelton, & Headley, 2006; Danielson, 2006). Therefore the significance of the role teacher leaders participate in toward school improvement needs to be further researched.

### *Concept of Teacher Leadership*

Early studies showed that teacher networks, cooperation among teachers, and expanded professional roles served to increase teachers’ efficacy and effectiveness in the classroom (Durrant & Holden, 2006). In the 1980s and early 1990s, the educational field focused on a movement toward decentralized decision making and professionalization of

teaching (Mangin, 2007). Nevertheless, while the idea is not new, it has been linked significantly in the literature of school reform and thus to school improvement, particularly in light of its connection to broader school reform efforts (Danielson, 2006). Furthermore, teachers continue to undergo significant change as schools experience reform and restructuring (Anderson, 2004).

The concept of *teacher as leader* and *leader as teacher* (Birky, Shelton, & Headley, 2006) has gained new recognition, but with some disagreement as to the definition of a teacher leader. Patterson and Patterson (2004) defined a teacher leader as “someone who works with colleagues for the purpose of improving teaching and learning, whether in a formal or an informal capacity” (p. 74), whereas Danielson (2006) referred to it as a “set of skills demonstrated by teachers who continue to teach students but also have an influence that extends beyond their own classrooms to others within their own school and elsewhere” (p. 12). Andrews and Crowther (2002) simplified the meaning by describing teacher leadership as “the power of teaching to shape meaning for children, youth, and adults” (p. 154). Childs-Bowen, Moller, and Scrivner’s (2000) conception of teacher leadership stated “We believe teachers are leaders when they function in professional learning communities to affect student learning; contribute to school improvement; inspire excellence in practice; and empower stakeholders to participate in educational improvement” (p.28). Although differing slightly in their definitions, all agree that influence from teacher leaders is not strictly contained within the confines of classrooms, but extends out to include all those impacted by innovative leadership skills recognizing ways to improve schools (Andrew & Crowther, 2002; Childs-Bowen, et al., 2000; Danielson, 2006).

Additionally, teacher leadership is conceptually closely linked to distributive leadership (Muijs & Harris, 2006). In so much as distributive leadership indicates multiple sources of guidance and direction (Harris, 2005), it is also a collection of activities from various individuals in a school who work at guiding other teachers in the process of instructional change (Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2004). At the core of distributed leadership is the attempt to engage many people in leadership activities to not only enhance collegiality but also develop school effectiveness and improvement (Harris).

However, the total idea of teacher leadership is narrower than distributive leadership due to the fact that it deals solely with leadership roles of the teaching staff, yet broader than distributive leadership for it does not focus exclusively on the formal positional roles (Harris, 2005). Taking the stance that distributed leadership is constructed from collaboratively working together and it is fluid and emergent rather than a fixed phenomenon, Gronn (2000) suggested three implications: initially, it implies a different power relationship within the school where the distinctions between followers and leaders tend to blur; secondly, it has implications for the division of labor within a school, particularly when the tasks facing the organization are shared more widely; and thirdly, it opens up the possibility of all teachers becoming leaders at various times (p. 333). It is this third aspect that has most influence and potential for school improvement because it is structured upon collaborative forms of working among teachers and the idea that those teachers will assume leadership roles at different times.

### *Development of Teacher Leadership*

Just as the overall concept of teacher leadership has changed, the ways of thinking about teacher leadership have also evolved over time. Silva, Gimbert, and Nolan (2000) described three waves of teacher leadership roles that emerged during recent school reform efforts. In the first wave, teachers served in formal roles such as department chairperson, union representatives, master teacher, or a similar position which focused on the “effectiveness and efficiency of the system rather than on instructional leadership” (p. 780).

Limitations from the first wave lead to what Silva, Gimbert, and Nolan (2000) referred to as the second wave. In the second wave the teacher leaders acknowledged the importance of teachers as instructional leaders and created positions that utilized this instructional knowledge. These leadership positions were intended to capitalize more fully on responsibilities more closely aligned with teaching and learning, such as curriculum developer or staff developer, but were primarily based outside of the classroom. The third wave recognized the importance of teachers as leaders within the day-to-day work of teaching. These classroom-based teachers did not have special titles, but they were focusing on collaboration and continuous learning with their colleagues to improve student learning (Silva, et al., 2000).

In their study of teacher leadership, Muijs and Harris (2006) found that there were five dimensions of teacher leadership as a form of professional initiative and learning:

1. Shared decision-making where teachers are given responsibility to make decisions on behalf of the school on important developmental work.

2. Collaboration in which they operate collegially for the prime purpose of securing certain outcomes linked to improving teaching and learning.
3. Active participation where teachers understand teacher leadership in terms of being actively involved in core developmental tasks and being participants in the process of school improvement.
4. Professional learning in which teachers are learning individually and with colleagues.
5. Leadership as activism where teachers engage with issues on behalf of the school in order to directly affect change and development (p. 964-965).

Although the presences of all five dimensions are not found in all successful school settings, it was found that principal leadership should strive to include as many dimensions as possible thus generating teacher interactions and partnerships (Muijs & Harris, 2006). These authors went on to declare such interactions and partnerships lead to teacher leadership which has been found to be the vehicle for successful school improvement.

#### *Importance of Teacher Leadership*

Moller and Pankake (2006) identified three important reasons for the development of teacher leadership; first, advantages specifically connected to individual teachers and teaching, second, advantages for the school as a whole, and finally advantages to the role of principal.

*Individual teachers and their teaching.* For the first time in American history, the number of teachers leaving the profession exceeds those who are entering, which creates pressure to recruit, retain, and support new teachers (Lieberman & Miller, 2005).

Research points to the importance of teacher leadership as a positive lever for teacher retention and recruitment (Moller & Pankake, 2006; Muijs & Harris, 2006). The factors associated with feelings of empowerment and greater job satisfaction not only helps retain seasoned teachers, but also with the recruiting of new staff members (Muijs & Harris).

Furthermore, York-Barr and Duke (2004) argued teacher leadership develops greater participation by interested teachers which leads to ownership and commitment to the established school goals. By allowing teacher leaders the power of shared decision making they become committed to decisions that emerge. Webb, Neumann, and Jones (2004) acknowledged that since teachers provide such a powerful input into the changes and conditions in the classroom “teachers need to see themselves as leaders or having the potential and responsibility for leadership” (p. 254). The positive effect is that teachers’ morale and sense of self-efficacy heighten. As teachers collaborate and develop professional networks with others, they enjoy ownership in their special projects, thus motivating them intrinsically (Muijs & Harris, 2006).

Also, teacher leadership has been portrayed as a means to move teaching toward a higher level of professionalism (Moller & Pankake, 2006). By taking this step forward toward teacher leadership, teachers feel empowered thus motivating themselves to have improved performance in the classrooms (Muijs & Harris, 2006). Childs-Bowen, Moller, and Scrivner (2000) insisted that “Teacher leadership contributions are critical to improving teacher quality and ensuring that education reform efforts work” (p.33). For some teachers this might include stepping out of their comfort zone to take on more

responsibilities and agreeing to share successful teaching techniques with their colleagues.

*The school.* Teachers are more likely to stay in those individual schools where a culture of teacher collaboration and leadership exists (Muijs & Harris, 2006). This allows them time to cultivate stronger teams based on trust where initiatives are easier to start because of the strong safety net of supporters already established. As teacher leadership grows within a school system, it allows the system to be more self-monitoring and self-improving, thus allowing the improvement programs of the school a better chance of surviving changes in formal leadership (Moller & Pankake, 2006).

Moller and Pankake (2006) declared power struggles can arise in schools when the goals of the principals and the teachers are not aligned. Therefore, these researchers went on to detail three ways for which building teacher leadership will reduce power struggles. First, teachers will have more information on which to base decisions and will understand why decisions are made. Second, teacher leaders are usually those teachers who can communicate collective decisions effectively with others both within and outside the school. Finally, teachers who take on leadership roles and are more informed can move away from their dependence on the principal and assume responsibility for collective decisions rather than blaming unpopular ideas on the principal (p. 34).

*The role of the principal.* Research shows that the expectations and responsibilities of the present-day principals have mushroomed (Copland, 2001; Elmore, 2000; Fullan, Hill, & Crevola, 2006), thus creating expectations too complex for any one leader to be successful as an individual. If principals are to meet these ever expanding demands, it becomes necessary for them to enlist help from teacher leaders (Moller &

Pankake, 2006). The “superprincipal myth” (Copland, p. 531) must surrender to engaging teachers in varying levels of leadership so that principals can survive. Whether those levels of leadership are focused on individual classroom instructional responsibilities, close collaboration with colleagues, or school wide issues, the assurance of the success as a whole, including the principal, relies on these leadership teams (Moller & Pankake).

In as much as it is important for those in teacher leadership roles to aid in relieving the burden of the principal, it is also important for the principal to encourage and inspire teachers to become leaders. Anderson (2004) discussed the importance of “leadership reciprocity” (p. 106) when it was discovered that there is a mutual and interactive influence of teacher leadership on principals as well as a reciprocal influence of principal leadership on teachers. It is important for principals to nurture these leadership tendencies in teachers even when these excellent teacher leaders may eventually be chosen to take on larger leadership roles in other schools (Moller & Pankake, 2006). Principals are perceived to be true leaders of leaders and have more to gain professionally when they encourage teachers to move into more challenging roles, even at the expense of losing those teachers’ special skills and abilities (Moller & Pankake).

#### *Challenges of Teacher Leadership*

As the venture of the changing expectations of schools continues, teachers must adapt and be ready to tackle new expectations that are imposed on them each year. This requires them to lead change, share ideas, be risk takers, learn from each other . . . become teacher leaders. However, research reveals that very few teachers seem able to put a specific definition on the term “teacher leadership” (Anderson, 2004; Muijs &

Harris, 2006). Many people in the education field still believe that a formal title is required for one to be a teacher leader. Although many teachers with the formal titles do have important leadership positions, these are not the only teacher leaders. Birky et al. (2006) declared “formal teacher leaders are those given familiar titles, and the positions are generally identified by the principal and compensated either by additional salary or in exchange for a lighter teaching load” (p. 88). Although such roles provided teachers with leadership opportunities, they were often viewed by fellow colleagues as “quasi-administrators” (Danielson, 2006, p. 19), thus losing their credibility with other instructional team members. In a study conducted by Anderson (2004) it was concluded that “formal teacher leadership roles actually impeded some forms of teacher leadership” (p. 110).

In contrast, Hatch, White, and Faigenbaum (2005) found in their case study, as teachers brought expertise, credibility, and influence to their classroom activities and shared with their fellow colleagues, they emerged as teacher leaders. They earned this distinction not due to their formal positions or titles, but as informal teacher leaders. These authors concluded, to continue having teachers emerge as leaders, it is important for teachers to develop inquiry skills, have opportunities to use their own expertise, and establish various avenues for the teacher to share with others. With informal teacher leaders “the focus is more on the learning and improvement of school and student performance than on leading” (Birky et al. 2006, p. 88). Moller and Pankake (2006), when describing the importance of the informal teacher leader, stated:

We believe that the most powerful influence for improved teaching and learning often comes from informal teacher leadership. In fact, when teachers are asked to

identify teacher leaders based on who is *competent, credible, and approachable*, they frequently name those teachers in the school who do not have formal roles or titles. (p. 28)

These researchers went on to argue that informal teacher leaders have a variety of undefined roles and are available for other teachers when they most need help for both professional and personal issues.

The research (Andrews & Crowther, 2002; Barth, 2001; Danielson, 2006; Durrant & Holden, 2006) addresses the importance of building teacher leadership in schools and the impact this can and will have on the individual teachers, student achievement and the schools. Although the research on teacher leadership is extensive, the aspect of the teachers' perceptions on such a leadership role bears further investigation. Equally important is the idea that in order for teacher leadership to flourish, principals must be prepared to accept a different role and type of leadership position (Copland, 2001).

### *Principal Leadership*

The principal's role in relation to teacher leadership and school improvement is crucial (Andrews & Crowther, 2002). However, like all of the changing conceptions of teacher leadership, principal leadership has also undergone a change in perspective.

### *Changes to Expectations of Principal Leadership*

Schools depend on leadership to improve their academic performance (Davies, 2005; Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2004). Historically this leadership role was held solely by the principal with challenging expectations being placed on this position (Durrant & Holden, 2006; Elmore, 2000; Moller & Pankake, 2006). As leader, the principal was to be wiser and more courageous than anyone else in the organization, with

duties for this position ranging from managerial to curriculum instructor to community leader (Bolman & Deal, 2003; Moller & Pankake). Elmore (2000) described the tasks of principals by articulating:

Reading the literature on the principalship can be overwhelming, because it suggests that principals should embody all the traits and skills that remedy all the defects of the schools in which they work. They should be in close touch with their communities, inside and outside the school; they should, above all, be masters of human relations, attending to all the conflicts and disagreements that might arise among students, among teachers, and among anyone else who chooses to create a conflict in the school; they should be both respectful of the authority of district administrators and crafty at deflecting administrative intrusions that disrupt the autonomy of teachers; they should keep an orderly school; and so on. Somewhere on the list one usually finds a reference to instruction. (p. 14)

Since most principals struggle to meet these expanding expectations of the position, the importance of shared leadership has been explored by many researchers (Andrews & Crowther, 2002; Marks & Printy, 2003; Treslan, 2006; Yukl, 2006). Childs-Bowen, Moller, and Scrivner (2000) declared “before principals become leaders of leaders, they must invest time in reflecting on their personal beliefs about leadership and the empowerment of others” (p. 30). In light of such research the significance of principals modifying the school culture to encourage teachers to take on leadership roles is an important step toward successful school reform (Childs-Bowen, et al.).

In support of this, Ash and Persall (2000) contended “creating an organizational culture and infrastructure that supports leadership opportunities for everyone requires principals to have an altogether different set of leadership skills than have previously been necessary” (p. 15). If a determining factor of how staff and students experience organizational life is school culture, then an important determinate of school culture is leadership (Lambert, 2006). This view on leading requires intentional actions on the part

of the principals to establish mutual trust and respect, a sense of shared directionality, distributed power, and allowance for individual expression (Andrews & Crowther, 2002; Moller & Pankake, 2006). Moreover, Childs-Bowen, Moller, and Scrivner (2000) pointed out the importance of today's principals having the knowledge and ability to create an atmosphere of trust to allow teachers to expand on their leadership abilities. Therefore, the role of principal is paramount in intentionally creating internal structures and conditions that promote teacher leadership (Youngs & King, 2002).

Additionally, Childs-Bowen, Moller, and Scrivner (2000) detailed four important strategies for principals to follow to help transform leadership in their schools: create opportunities for teachers to lead, build professional learning communities, provide quality professional development, and celebrate innovation and teacher expertise. It appears that teacher leadership contributions are critical to improving teacher quality and ensuring that education reform efforts work and it is important for the principal to understand how to cultivate the teacher leaders (Danielson, 2006).

### *Concept of Principal Leadership*

During the development and implementation of teacher leadership, the role which the principal takes must assume a different look than past forms of school-based leadership, which have centered on the principalship (Childs-Bowen, Moller, & Scrivner, 2000; Lambert, 2006). The principal must be willing to relinquish power to establish a positive environment for teacher leaders to cultivate and grow. Principals need to be prepared to hold fast to their values while letting go of power and authority (Lambert), thus empowering teachers to explore their new leadership roles, allowing leadership to be distributed throughout the school rather than vested in one position.

Although several different forms of shared or collaborative school leaderships (Marks & Printy, 2003) have been researched, teacher leadership is reasonably situated within two constructs of leadership that are inclusive of both formal and informal leaders: formative (Ash & Persall, 2000) and distributed (Harris, 2005). These styles of leadership work toward establishing a culture which builds capacity and drives high expectations for better performance for the teacher leaders within those cultures (Eilers & Camacho, 2007). These forms of collaborative leadership emphasize an equal partnership in the process of leadership, while replacing hierarchical notions of traditional leadership (Eilers & Camacho).

*Formative leadership.* In their research Ash and Persall (2000) developed the formative leadership theory. This theory is based on the belief that “there are numerous leadership possibilities and many leaders within the school” (p.16). They went on to develop ten formative leadership principles to support a new paradigm for quality leadership:

1. Team learning, productive thinking, and collaborative problem solving should replace control mechanisms, top-down decision making, and enforcement of conformity.
2. Teachers should be viewed as leaders and school principals as leaders of leaders.
3. Trust should drive working relationships.
4. Leaders should move from demanding conformity and compliance to encouraging and supporting innovation and creativity.
5. Leaders should focus on people and processes, rather than on paper work and administrative minutiae.

6. Leaders should be customer-focused and servant-based. Faculty and staff members are the direct customers of the principal, and the most important function of the principal is to serve his or her customers.
7. Leaders should create networks that foster two-way communication rather than channels that direct the flow of information in only one direction.
8. Formative leadership requires proximity, visibility, and being close to the customer.
9. Formative leadership should empower the people within the school to do the work and protect them from unwarranted outside interference.
10. Formative leadership requires the ability to operate in an environment of uncertainty, constantly learning how to exploit system wide change, rather than maintaining the status quo. (p. 16-17)

By using the formative leadership theory the principal establishes the belief that the teacher is leader and the principal is the leader of leaders (Ash & Persall). Although formative and distributed leadership styles are similar, subtle differences do arise.

*Distributed leadership.* Attempts to define distributed leadership are many, and seem to center on the discussion about who can exert influence over colleagues and in what domains (Harris, 2005). Leithwood et al. (2004) suggested that “it entails the exercise of influence over the beliefs, actions and values of others . . . as is the case with leadership from any source” (p. 60). Still in contrast to traditional leadership norms, distributed leadership is characterized as a form of collective leadership in which teachers develop expertise by working together (Harris) and are provided greater opportunities to learn from one another (Leithwood et al.).

In his work, Elmore (2000) declared the call for distributed leadership is often a response to principals' rapidly escalating responsibilities. However, distributed leadership goes beyond simply reshuffling assignments, but instead calls for a fundamental shift in the organizational thinking that redefines leadership as the responsibility of everyone in the school (Chirichello, 2004; Elmore; Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2004). Moreover, in their work, Spillane et al. viewed distributed learning as an example of "distributed cognition" (p. 23) which views learning as a social rather than an individual activity. All authors agreed on the point that distributed leadership plays a role in generating reform and instructional improvement.

Additionally, distributed leadership implies a social distribution of leadership where the leadership function is stretched over the work of a number of individuals and where the leadership task is accomplished through the interaction of multiple leaders (Spillane et al., 2004). Essentially, distributed leadership is an emergent property of a group or a network of interacting individuals (Gronn, 2000). The concept behind distributed leadership implies interdependency, rather than dependency, embracing how leaders of various kinds and in various roles share responsibility (Harris, 2005).

#### *Connections between teacher leadership and principal leadership*

The principal has the important role of establishing a vision leading toward the common purpose of cultivating a culture ready to handle successful school improvement through the facilitation of teacher leaders (Lambert, 2003). To succeed in this vision, principals and teachers need to work together, creating a full rich culture of trust and collaboration between the two leadership positions (Andrews & Crowther, 2002). In

support of this belief, using research from their study of nine schools, Andrews and Crowther concluded:

In exploring the dynamics of teachers' leadership roles in successful school projects in phase two of the research, it became evident that the relationship in question could not be fully understood or appreciated in isolation from the work of principals. Indeed, in none of our phase two case studies was teacher leadership found to flourish independently of the principal. (pg. 154)

These researchers went on to declare the necessity of three distinct qualities between the teachers and principal; mutual trust and respect, a sense of shared directionality, and allowance for individual expression. Furthermore, Andrews and Crowther (2002) affirmed that this new educational concept, known as parallelism, placed equivalent value on teacher leadership and principal leadership (p. 155).

As Katzenmeyer and Moller (2001) stated, "Although progress has been made in recognizing that the principal's job is about creating a culture in which principals and teachers lead together, our experience is that this perspective is not widespread" (p. 84). Nevertheless, the roles of teacher leaders are seldom effective without the support and encouragement of their administrators (Birky, Shelton, & Headley, 2006). Since teacher leadership plays an important role in school improvement, appropriate principal actions are necessary for encouraging and promoting such leadership (Birky et al.; Katzenmeyer & Moller). And because teacher leaders are influenced by their principal's actions, it is important for principals to understand what motivates and what discourages teachers to become leaders. Danielson (2006) declared:

The strict bureaucratic hierarchy is not sufficient, nor are other approaches that place teachers in the role of receiver of accepted wisdom. Rather, to bring the best

to bear on the challenges of education, the engagement of teacher leaders in the enterprise is an important component of any improvement strategy. (p. 27)

Thus, the framework for teacher leadership represents a movement of skilled administrator leadership teaming with educators who have the desire to remain in the classroom yet extend their expertise and knowledge to others in the profession (Danielson).

As the research suggests, the importance of principals willing to utilize different leadership skills in order to promote teacher leadership is paramount in creating a school culture that enhances collaboration and collegiality among the school's members. School leaders must foster this leadership in their teachers in order for successful school improvement.

### *Summary*

The expectation for all schools to create an environment of learning for all students weighs heavily on the shoulders of professionals in the education field. In order for school improvement to become embodied throughout the culture of a school, the roles of both the principals and teachers must change. Embracing teachers as leaders is an important step toward success, but it will require changes for both the teachers as well as the principals. The responsibilities and behaviors of principals supporting the idea of teacher leaders and finding new ways to encourage teachers to step into those leadership roles is of utmost importance when considering the goal of student achievement.

This review of current literature clearly articulates the importance of teachers and principals working collaboratively to not only build upon leadership positions that are currently established in schools, but also institute new leadership roles. By working

together these two leaderships positions will establish a learning environment for the students that encourage and promote the importance of continuous learning. This continuous learning atmosphere will pave the way for school improvement.

Therefore, the purpose of this research was to add to current knowledge by focusing on the perceptions of teachers and principals regarding teacher leadership as they lead together for school improvement. Specifically, the researcher sought to discover the principal's perception of ways to encourage and guide teachers to step into leadership positions. Furthermore, the researcher focused on the perceptions of teachers to find ways they felt the principal encouraged and discouraged them from stepping into leadership positions.

Discussed in Chapter Three is a description of the research design and methodology. This discussion includes research questions, population and sample, methods of data collection, and data analysis. The rationale for selecting the design of the study, a mixed design, is described. Presentation of the data findings and analysis of these findings are presented in Chapter Four. Findings, conclusions, and recommendations for future research are described in Chapter Five.

CHAPTER THREE  
RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

*Introduction*

As the research indicated, schools depend on leadership to improve their academic performance (Davies, 2005; Spillane et al. 2004). However, the days of the principal being the sole leader, meeting all the imposed expectations, have passed. When considering leadership as “making happen what you believe in” (Barth, 2001, p. 85), the conceptualization widens as to who can become a leader. Never before has the need been so great for principals to become leaders of leaders (Ash & Persall, 2000), allowing classroom teachers to step up into leadership positions and become agents of change by positioning themselves as problem solvers at the school building level.

Nevertheless, the principal has the important role of establishing a vision leading toward the common purpose of cultivating a culture ready to handle successful school improvement through the facilitation of teacher leaders (Lambert, 2003). To succeed in this vision, principals and teachers need to work together creating a full rich culture of trust and collaboration between the two leadership positions (Andrews & Crowther, 2002). In order for such changes to occur and for a truly collaborative working relationship to exist between the two roles, a better understanding of the perceptions of the principals and teachers is necessary.

In Chapter Three the research questions and rationale for using a mixed-method design is discussed. In addition, the study population and sampling procedures are described and grounded in established research techniques. Furthermore, data collection

procedures, instrumentation, and data analysis are described in ample detail to support understanding and facilitate replication.

### *Problem and Purpose Overview*

The ability or inability of a school organization to sustain lasting school improvement is dependent upon effective leadership (Barth, 2001; Yukl, 2006). This leadership cannot come in the form of a single principal, but instead the principal has the important role of establishing a vision leading toward the common purpose of cultivating a culture ready to handle successful school improvement through the facilitation of teacher leaders (Lambert, 2003). As teachers are urged to assume this new role, a better understanding of the nature of teacher leadership is important. Although varying schools of thought exist concerning effective leadership of both the principal and teachers, this study was based upon the premise that successful school improvement may be more effectively obtained when teachers and principals work together to create a workplace which supports the importance of teacher leadership. Specifically, this study attempted to glean a better understanding of teacher leadership roles from the point of view of the principal and of teachers and the extent to which these roles affect school improvement.

Therefore, the purpose of this study was three fold. First the researcher strived to gain a better understanding of perceptions of teacher leadership roles from the point of view of teacher and of principal and any differences that may occur between the two positions. Secondly, the study examined the overall interest of the teachers stepping into a teacher leadership position and ways they are encouraged or discouraged to take on this challenge. Lastly, the researcher studied the extent to which principals and teachers believe the teacher leadership roles lead to overall school improvement. Research

questions were formulated to gather data concerning the value of teacher leadership for school structures, administrators, fellow teachers, and students (Anderson & Crowther, 2002; Barth, 2001; Birky et al. 2006; Danielson, 2006).

### *Research Questions*

The research questions critical to this study focused on possible differences between the perceptions of teachers and principals when it comes to teacher leadership and the extent to which such leadership positions lead to school improvement. Research questions also focused on whether teachers are involved in leadership positions as much as they would like to be. The researcher attempted to answer the following six questions:

1. Is there a difference in how principals and teachers perceive teachers' involvement in teacher leadership roles?
2. Is there a perceived difference between the ratings of involvement by teachers compared to the rating of how involved they would like to be in teacher leadership roles?
3. What impact do teachers believe teacher leadership has on school improvement?
4. What impact do principals believe teacher leadership has on school improvement?
5. Is there a significant difference between teachers and principals on the perceived impact of teacher leadership roles on school improvement?
6. What encourages and discourages teacher to be leaders?

### *Null Hypotheses*

The following null hypotheses were tested in an attempt to answer the research questions:

1. There is no statistically significant difference in how principals and teachers perceive teachers' involvement in teacher leadership roles.

2. There is no statistically significant difference in the rating of involvement by teachers compared to the rating of how involved they would like to be in teacher leadership roles.
3. There is no statistically significant difference between teachers and principals on the perceived impact of teacher leadership roles on school improvement.

#### *Rationale for Using Mixed-Method Design*

A mixed-method design, which combined qualitative and quantitative research methods, was selected for the purpose of this study, which was to investigate the perceptions of teachers and principals in regard to teacher leadership. The movement to use mixed-method designs, which began in the 1950s, promoted the integration of different types of research methods (Maxwell, 2004; Onwuegbuzie, 2002; Yukl, 2006). The combination of qualitative research, where the main goal of the researcher is developing and discovering theory to explain their data (Maxwell), and quantitative research, where the researcher uses statistical procedures to discover correlations and relationships that may offer theories (Maxwell), enable the data to be examined in various ways.

The choice to use a mixed-method design was due to the recognition that each method presents an important facet to the research problem. The use of surveys allowed the researcher the opportunity to analyze data to determine whether the effects seen in the sample reflect “true effects” (Shaffer & Serlin, 2004) and not merely chance happenings. Open ended questions included in the surveys added the qualitative dimension and allowed the researcher the chance to explain how and why events unfold (Seidman, 2006).

### *Population and Sample*

The population for this study consisted of 2000 principals and 66,255 teachers in Missouri (DESE, 2006). From this population a sample size established by the researcher was a total of fifteen schools. The sample size of fifteen school sites was chosen because it was large enough to allow for diversification and representativeness and also to meet the requirements of statistical procedures appropriate for this study (Cherry, 2000; Gay, 1996). According to Cherry (2000), "A sample between 90 and 150 participants who are representative of the larger population is an adequate sample size for most studies where parametric statistical procedures are included" (p. 89, 163). The resultant participants of principals (n=15) and the teachers (n=90-150) would allow for the statistical procedures appropriate for this study.

To achieve a representative sample all school districts in Missouri were categorized according to their 2008-2009 enrollment as reported by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE). The categories were established as follows: large districts had a student population of five thousand or greater, mid-sized districts had greater than one thousand but less than five thousand students, and small districts had one thousand students or less enrolled. For the purpose of this study, five schools from each of the three district size categories were used.

Next district sites were randomly selected. This random sampling of the districts was achieved by using a random number generator to select the schools. To be prepared in case a district chose not to participate in the study, the researcher selected seven districts within each category. Once the districts were selected, letters were sent to the superintendents of the first five selected school districts from each category, briefly

describing the research plan and asking permission to include a school from their district in the research project. Included in the permission was a request for superintendents to recommend a principal within their district who encourages and promotes teacher leadership within their building. Merriam (1998) determined that “purposeful sampling is based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned” (p. 61). Having the superintendent identify a principal with some understanding of teacher leadership enhanced the data collection of this inquiry. Therefore, once the district administrators gave their approval (see Appendix A), electronic consent forms and surveys were sent to the suggested principal. If the principals did not respond to the survey within a five day time period, the survey was resent, along with a follow-up phone call to answer any additional questions that principal may have about the survey. To insure a sample size of fifteen schools, surveys were not sent out to teachers until the principals replied and consented to the investigation (see Appendix A).

Once the survey was collected from the principal, a link to the electronic consent forms (see Appendix A) and surveys for the teachers was sent to the principal with the request for them to forward the link to all classroom teachers within their building. By sending the electronic survey to the principal, the researcher was able to bypass district technology filtration systems that may have halted outside surveys from reaching the teachers. A minimum of ninety surveys were collected to insure a teacher sample size large enough to show true effects.

### *Data Collection and Instrumentation*

This study utilized an electronic survey for data collection. The *Teacher Leadership Roles Survey* was administered to both principals and teachers, although slight variations existed in the surveys for the specific roles. The perceptions of both the principals and teachers as measured in the surveys provided the primary data for this study.

For the survey administered to the principals (see Appendix B), the first part of the *Teacher Leadership Roles Survey*, adapted with permission from Birky et al. (2006), contained ten items that assessed perceptions of the principals regarding teacher involvement in various teacher leadership opportunities (see Appendix B for permission). This portion of the survey used a four point scale allowing the principals to rate perceived involvement as always, often, seldom, or never. The second portion of the principal survey also used a four point scale ranging from strongly agree to disagree. This portion of the survey instrument was created for this study to assess beliefs of the principal in regard to the importance of teacher leadership roles on overall student achievement. The ten survey statements were based on important attributes of school improvement identified within the literature review. This portion of the survey was pilot tested and retested for validity and reliability by a group of administrators familiar with the concept of teacher leadership. The participants of the pilot test were provided with instructions on how to complete the survey and asked to provide feedback regarding the general appearance of the survey, clarity of directions, ease of comprehension, and length of survey. Participants were asked to complete the survey a second time within a period of two weeks to establish reliability of scores. Additionally, feedback was used to revise the

surveys and help determine a time frame for completion of the surveys. The survey was analyzed for test-retest reliability.

The final part of the survey included the two open-ended questions that allowed the principals the opportunity to share their opinions as to what encourages and what discourages teachers to step into teacher leadership positions. A final opportunity was given for the principals to provide other important information they wished to share on this subject.

Although the survey administered to the teachers was similar (see Appendix B), the wording was adjusted to represent the perspective of the teacher. The first part of the teacher survey, adapted with permission from Birky et al.(2006), contained ten items that assessed perceptions of the teachers related to teacher involvement in various teacher leadership opportunities (see Appendix B for permission). This part of the teacher survey included the same four point scale with ratings of always, often, seldom, and never and allowed the teachers to rate their involvement in the ten listed teacher leadership roles. However, it also included another column which allowed the teachers to share information as to how involved they wished to be in those roles listed. A blank area also afforded the teachers the opportunity to add in additional leadership roles they were active in or a role in which they wished to be involved. The second portion of the survey assessed the beliefs of the teachers related to their own influence over the academic successes and failures of their students. The ten survey statements mirrored the survey given to the principals. This portion of the survey was pilot tested and retested for validity and reliability by a group of teachers chosen randomly. The participants of the pilot test were provided with instructions on how to complete the survey and asked to

provide feedback regarding the general appearance of the survey, clarity of directions, ease of comprehension, and length of survey. Participants were asked to complete the survey a second time within a period of two weeks to establish reliability of scores. Additionally, feedback was used to revise the surveys and help determine a time frame for completion of the surveys. The survey was analyzed for test-retest reliability.

Again, two open-ended questions followed allowing the teachers the opportunity to share their opinions as to what encourages and what discourages teachers to step into leadership positions. Also, the teachers were given the opportunity to share additional information regarding the subject of teacher leadership.

#### *Data Analysis*

The purpose of this mixed-method design study was to examine the perceptions of both principals and teachers in regard to teacher leadership positions to discover if the two perceptions differed and also to determine if both positions agreed on the impact of teacher leadership on school improvement. Although research (Andrews & Crowther, 2002; Barth, 2001; Childs-Bowen, Moller, & Scrivner, 2000; Danielson, 2006; Elmore, 2000; Moller & Pankake, 2006) supported the importance of teacher leadership on overall school improvement, little research was found directly relating to how these two important positions view teacher leadership and its importance for lasting school improvement. Two phases of data analysis were chosen to describe numerical findings and descriptive information.

The data from the *Teacher Leadership Roles Survey* derived from selected principals and teachers were collected, tabulated, and analyzed using the *Statistical*

*Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 16.0.* The following statistical methods of data analysis were chosen to describe numerical findings and descriptive information.

*Research Question 1.* To determine if there were significant differences between perceptions of principals and teachers in regard to teacher leadership roles, *t*-tests for independent means were conducted. Mean scores for each of the ten statements were determined by averaging the scores given by principals and also by teachers. For each statement, *t*-tests were calculated to determine if significant differences existed between the ratings given by principals and ratings given by teachers. This allowed the researcher to determine “whether the means of the two samples were significant’ (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003, p. 241). A .05 level of significance was used in order to reject or accept the null hypothesis for this research question.

*Research Question 2.* A paired *t*-test was used to determine if there were significant differences between the ratings of involvement of the teachers in teacher leadership roles compared to the ratings of how involved they would like to be. Again mean scores for each of the ten statements were determined by averaging the score given by the teachers in the column for how involved they are and also for how involved they would like to be. The mean scores for each of the ten statements were then compared between the two columns. Again this allowed “whether the means of the two samples were significant’ (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003, p. 241). A .05 level of significance was used in order to reject or accept the null hypothesis for research question two.

*Research Questions 3 and 4.* Data from questions three and four were collected and a mean score was determined for each of the ten statements. The mean scores were then listed from highest to lowest for each category (teacher and principal).

*Research Question 5.* To determine if there were significant differences between teachers and principals on the perceived impact of teacher leadership roles on school improvement, *t*-tests for independent means were again conducted. Mean scores for each of the ten statements were determined by averaging the scores given by principals and also by teachers. For each statement, *t*-tests were calculated to determine if significant differences existed between the ratings given by principals and ratings given by teachers. This further determined “whether the means of the two samples were significant” (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003, p. 241). A .05 level of significance was used in order to reject or accept the null hypothesis for research question five.

*Research Question 6.* The open ended questions used on the surveys were analyzed for content and qualitative themes concerning encouraging and discouraging teachers to become teacher leaders. The data provided by the open ended survey questions allowed the researcher to analyze participant responses and scrutinize the data for common themes or insights. Merriam (1998) referred to this as coding and categorizing the data in order to help with analysis. The use of such qualitative data contributed to the triangulation of the data and the rich description contained within this study. Such descriptions offered by principals and teachers assisted in the development of an in-depth understanding of the intricacies of teacher leadership. Moreover, data triangulation was achieved with quantitative and qualitative data analysis.

#### *Researcher’s Biases and Assumptions*

One underlying assumption made by this researcher was that both principals and teachers understood the meaning of informal teacher leadership. It is assumed that the principals chosen by the superintendents realized the role of teacher leader comes from

initiatives taken by the teacher to help not only their students, but share their wealth of knowledge and abilities with their colleagues. This was based upon research and personal experience of working within a building that promoted such teacher leadership.

A second underlying assumption, based on research and personal experiences, was that principals and teachers want to work together to create an atmosphere that promotes the importance of student learning and academic achievement. More importantly, the researcher assumed that both principals and teachers understood this meant more than just high scores on statewide standardized tests, but instead a school culture that promoted trust and high expectations for students and teachers. The research supported the notion of building a strong school culture. Again, this assumption was derived from personal experience

#### *Summary*

Presented in Chapter Three was the information related to the design and methodology used to carry out this investigation of the perceptions of principals and teachers in regard to teacher leadership roles and school improvement. A rationale was provided for the use of a mixed-method research design. The population and sample were described, along with data collection and instrumentation. The two-phased data analysis was articulated, as well as the researcher's biases and assumptions. Data analysis and research findings are presented in Chapter Four. Information in Chapter Five concludes with a discussion of the research findings, conclusions drawn from the data, implications for practices, and recommendations for future research.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF DATA

#### *Introduction*

The intent of this study was to gain a better understanding of perceptions of teacher leadership roles from the point of view of both teachers and principals, and to what extent both positions believe teacher leadership plays in sustaining school improvement. The study also examined the overall interest of teachers stepping into teacher leadership positions and ways they are encouraged or discouraged to take on this challenge. Research in the area of teacher leadership has progressively concentrated on the value that teacher leaders have for students, fellow teachers, and administrators (Andrews & Crowther, 2002; Barth, 2001; Birky, et al. 2006; Childs-Bowen, et al., 2000; Danielson, 2006; Moller & Pankake, 2006; Patterson & Patterson, 2004). There is also a growing pool of evidence that indicates involvement by teachers in educational reform is critical in order to move education toward excellence (Barth; Danielson; Durrant & Holden, 2006; Muijs & Harris, 2006; Starrat, 1995). Past research indicated that very few teachers seem able to put a specific definition on the term “teacher leadership” (Anderson, 2004; Muijs & Harris), thus creating ambiguity between formal and informal teacher leadership roles. Since understanding the value of informal teacher leaders, with their variety of undefined roles, is imperative (Barth; Birky, et al.; Hatch, et al, 2005; Moller & Pankake), research to help uncover what encourages and discourages teachers from stepping into such roles is valuable.

Therefore, the purpose of this study was three fold. First the researcher strived to gain a better understanding of perceptions of teacher leadership roles from the point of

view of teacher and of principal and any differences that may occur between the two positions. Secondly, the study examined the overall interest of the teachers stepping into a teacher leadership position and ways they are encouraged or discouraged to take on this challenge. Lastly, the researcher studied the extent to which principals and teachers believe the teacher leadership roles lead to overall school improvement.

Data for this investigation were gathered through the researcher-created *Teacher Leadership Roles Survey*, which measured the perceptions of both the principals and teachers in regard to teacher leadership roles and the beliefs in the importance of teacher leadership roles on overall student achievement. Seven school districts within each enrollment category, established by the researcher, were randomly chosen. Consent forms were then sent to superintendents of the districts, asking for consent to participate in the study and a recommendation of a principal within their district that promoted teacher leadership. Once consent was received, electronic surveys were then sent to fifteen principals, five from each enrollment category. Once the principal surveys were returned, a link to the electronic surveys and consent forms were sent to the principals with the request that they forward the link on to the classroom teachers in their buildings.

Statistical differences between perceptions of principals and teachers in regard to teacher leadership roles were analyzed by conducting *t*-tests for independent means. The mean scores for each of ten statements concerning the impact of teacher leadership on school improvement were collected and identified for both the principals and the teachers. The mean scores for each of the ten statements were also analyzed by conducting *t*-tests for independent means. A paired *t*-test was used to determine if there were significant

differences between the ratings of teachers' involvement in teacher leadership roles compared to the ratings of how involved they would like to be.

The open-ended questions used on the *Teacher Leadership Roles Survey* allowed the researcher to analyze participant responses and scrutinize the data for common themes or insights, thus allowing for further triangulation of data. The data gathered from the principals and teachers helped the researcher develop an understanding of the intricacies of teacher leadership and provided additional substance to the quantitative statistical analyses.

The research questions critical to this study focused on possible differences between the perceptions of teachers and principals when it comes to teacher leadership and the extent to which such leadership positions lead to school improvement. Research questions also focused on whether teachers are involved in leadership positions as much as they would like to be. The data were used to answer the following research questions guiding this study:

1. Is there a difference in how principals and teachers perceive teachers' involvement in teacher leadership roles?
2. Is there a perceived difference between the ratings of involvement by teachers compared to the rating of how involved they would like to be in teacher leadership roles?
3. What impact do teachers believe teacher leadership has on school improvement?
4. What impact do principals believe teacher leadership has on school improvement?
5. Is there a significant difference between teachers and principals on the perceived impact of teacher leadership roles on school improvement?

6. What encourages and discourages teacher to be leaders?

Presented in this chapter are a description of the sample population, including demographic data, and a description of the data collection instrument. Additionally, analysis of the research questions and hypotheses are included, followed by a summary of the findings.

*Data Analysis*

*Population*

The population involved in this study consisted of principals and teachers throughout a Midwestern state. A representative sample of principals (n=15) was chosen by first categorizing school districts into three size categories, large, mid-sized, and small, then randomly choosing five districts within each category. Fifteen electronic surveys were sent out and returned by the principals, yielding a return rate of 100%. Table 1 shows the demographics for the principals that participated in the survey.

Table 1

*Demographic Information of Principals Responding to Survey*

Demographic	Characteristic	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	8	53%
	Female	7	47%
Level of Education	BS. Ed.	1	6%
	M.Ed.	6	40%
	Ed.S.	4	27%
	Ed.D.	4	27%
Years of Experience	First year	1	7%
	2 to 5 years	6	40%
	6 to 9 years	3	20%
	10 to 14 years	4	27%
	More than 14 years	1	7%
In Current Building	First year	2	13%
	2 to 5 years	8	53%
	6 to 9 years	1	7%
	10 – 14 years	3	20%
	More than 14 years	1	7%

*Note:* N = 15

An electronic link to the teachers' surveys was then sent out electronically to the principals, who in turn forwarded it to all of the classroom teachers within their building.

A total of 214 surveys were sent out to classroom teachers, with ninety-six surveys

(n=96) being returned, yielding a return rate of 45%. The demographics of the teacher participants are revealed in Table 2.

Table 2

*Demographic Information of Teachers Responding to Survey*

Demographic	Characteristic	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	16	17%
	Female	80	83%
Level of Education	BS. Ed.	29	30%
	M.Ed.	58	60%
	Ed.S.	7	7%
	Ed.D.	2	2%
Years of Experience	1 to 4 years	33	34%
	5 to 8 years	19	20%
	9 to 12 years	19	20%
	13 to 16 years	5	5%
	More than 16 years	20	21%
In Current Building	First year	30	31%
	2 to 5 years	31	31%
	6 to 9 years	17	18%
	10 – 14 years	10	10%
	More than 14 years	8	9%
Grade Level	Elementary	59	62%
	Middle School	12	12%
	High School	25	26%

*Note:* N = 96

*Survey*

The *Teacher Leadership Roles Survey* was used to measure the perceptions of principals and teachers regarding the concept of teacher leadership and school improvement. A portion of the survey was adapted with permission from Birky et al. (see Appendix B), with the remainder of the survey being created by the researcher based on

information gleaned from the extensive review of the related literature (Andrews & Crowther, 2002; Barth, 2001; Childs-Bowen, et al., 2000; Danielson, 2006; Durrant & Holden, 2006; Moller & Pankake, 2006; Muijs & Harris, 2006; Patterson & Patterson, 2004; Starrat, 1995). For the first portion of the survey, principals and teachers used a four-point Likert-type scale to describe teacher involvement in various leadership roles. The teachers had an additional portion on their survey, using the same four-point Likert-type scale, to describe how involved they would like to be in the same leadership roles. The second portion of the survey used a similar four-point scale allowing the participants to rate their beliefs in the importance of teacher leadership roles on overall student achievement. These ten survey statements were based on important attributes of school improvement identified within the literature review (Bolman & Deal, 2003; Bruffee, 1999; Durrant & Holden, 2006; Elmore, 2000; Sergiovanni, 2000).

The survey was pilot tested and retested for validity and reliability by a group of administrators and teachers familiar with the concept of teacher leadership. The participants of the pilot test were provided with instructions on how to complete the survey and asked to provide feedback regarding the general appearance of the survey, clarity of directions, ease of comprehension, and length of survey. Participants were asked to complete the survey a second time within a period of two weeks to establish reliability of scores. Reliability of the items was determined by comparing the responses of the survey as administered on the two separate occasions. To check test-retest reliability, correlations of subscale totals on the two administrations of the test were calculated. These correlations were Pearson product moment correlations between the two sets of scores. The test-retest correlations for the twenty statements range from a low

of  $r = .902$  to a high of  $r = 1.0$ . Results were reported in Table 3. All correlations in the test-retest were significant at the .01 level.

Table 3

*Test-Retest Reliability of Survey Instrument by Question*

Question for Part A – Leadership Roles	<i>r</i>	Sig. (2-tailed)
Question 1	.903	.01
Question 2	1.0	.01
Question 3	1.0	.01
Question 4	.951	.01
Question 5	.926	.01
Question 6	.951	.01
Question 7	.956	.01
Question 8	1.0	.01
Question 9	.969	.01
Question 10	1.0	.01
Question for Part B – School Improvement	<i>r</i>	Sig. (2-tailed)
Question 1	.906	.01
Question 2	.903	.01
Question 3	.934	.01
Question 4	.906	.01
Question 5	.941	.01
Question 6	.914	.01
Question 7	.964	.01
Question 8	.915	.01
Question 9	1.0	.01
Question 10	.917	.01

The two open ended questions used to gather qualitative data from the participants allowed the opportunity to share opinions as to what encourages and what discourages teachers to step into teacher leadership positions. These questions added a qualitative dimension to the study, and allowed the researcher the opportunity to explain how and why events unfold (Seidman, 2006).

*Research Questions: Analysis of Data*

Responses from the *Teacher Leadership Roles Survey* were entered into SPSS 11.0. Data were analyzed using independent *t*-tests, paired *t*-tests, and mean scores. Statistical significance was determined at the .05 level of confidence. The statistical significance was used to answer the following research questions.

*Research Question 1. Is there a difference in how principals and teachers perceive teachers' involvement in teacher leadership roles?*

An independent-samples *t*-test was conducted to evaluate differences between the ratings from principals and teachers when it pertains to teacher involvement in teacher leadership roles. The mean score for principals was 2.8060 (SD = .57087) while the mean score for teachers was 2.1940 (SD = .67183). Equal variances were assumed for each test. The test showed a significant difference between the mean score of principals and teachers,  $t(18) = 2.195$ ,  $p = .042$ . The *t*-test comparison chart is outlined in Table 4.

Table 4

*Comparison of Teachers' Involvement in Teacher Leadership Roles*

Group	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	Std. Error of Mean	<i>t</i>	df	Sig. (2- tailed)
Principal	15	2.8060	.57087	.18053	2.195	18	.042
Teacher	96	2.1940	.67183	.21245	2.195	17.543	.042

Further analysis of the mean scores yielded information of interest relating to the perceptions of the role of teacher leadership in each specific area surveyed. A comparison of the mean score of each individual statement, as shown in Table 5, illustrated the perceptions of the principals are higher than the perceptions of the teachers in regard to teacher leadership roles within their schools in all areas. The largest difference in the mean scores was in the area of setting promotion and retention policies. The mean scores for the principals fell within the range of Often (2.50 to 3.49) whereas the mean scores for the teachers fell within the range of Seldom (1.50 to 2.49). There were four areas where the mean scores for both the principals and the teachers fell within the same range: setting standards for student behavior, often; deciding school budgets, seldom; evaluating teacher performance, seldom; selecting new teachers, seldom. Data indicated, when comparing the overall mean scores for principals compared to those of the teachers, the

principals perceived teachers within the range of Often (2.50 to 3.49) participating in the stated teacher roles, whereas the teachers perceived themselves within the range of Seldom (1.50 to 2.49) participating in the roles.

Table 5

*Mean Scores for Statements Concerning Participation in Teacher Leadership Roles*

Statement	Principal Mean	Teacher Mean	Mean Difference
Choosing textbooks and instructional materials	3.73	2.89	0.84
Shaping the curriculum	3.53	2.97	0.56
Setting standards for student behavior	3.40	3.25	0.15
Tracking students into special classes	2.80	2.37	0.43
Designing staff development/in-services	2.80	2.39	0.41
Setting promotion and retention policies	2.73	1.68	1.05
Deciding school budgets	2.27	1.81	0.46
Evaluating teacher performance	2.13	1.58	0.55
Selecting new teachers	2.40	1.64	0.76
Selecting new administrators	2.27	1.36	0.91
Overall Mean Score	2.81	2.19	0.62

*Research Question 2. Is there a perceived difference between the ratings of involvement by teachers compared to the ratings of how involved they would like to be in teacher leadership roles?*

The mean score for the teacher’s perceived involvement in the leadership role was 2.1940 (SD = .67183), while the mean score for how involved teachers wanted to be in leadership roles was 2.9540 (SD = .40001), as shown in Table 6.

Table 6

*Comparison of Actual Teacher Involvement to How Involved They Want to Be*

Teacher Involvement	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	Std. Error of Mean
Actual	96	2.1940	.67183	.21245
Wish to be	96	2.9540	.40001	.12649

The dependent samples *t*-test indicated that there was significant difference,  $t(9) = 7.485$ ,  $p < .001$  as reported in Table 7, between the ratings of involvement of teachers in leadership roles when compared to the ratings of how involved they would like to be in those same roles.

Table 7

*Differences Between Actual Teacher Involvement and How Involved They Wish to Be*

Teacher Involvement	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	Std. Error of Mean	<i>t</i>	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Involvement	96	.7600	.32107	.10153	7.485	9	.000

Further analysis of the mean scores, as recorded in Table 8, revealed that teachers in the study did not feel they were as involved in teacher leadership roles as they would like to be. This held true for all of the ten statements, although several of the mean scores fell within the same range. The mean scores for choosing textbooks and instructional materials and shaping the curriculum all fell within the often range (2.50 to 3.49) yet the higher mean in the wish to be involved column suggests the teachers would like to be more involved than they are currently. The greatest difference in the mean scores was for the statement concerning selecting new administrators. The range indicates teachers felt they actually were never a part of this (1.00 to 1.49), but indicated they would often like to be (2.50 to 3.49).

Table 8

*Mean Scores for Comparison of Teacher Involvement to Wish to be Involved*

Statement	Actual Involvement Mean	Wish to be Involved Mean
Choosing textbooks and instructional materials	2.89	3.45
Shaping the curriculum	2.97	3.45
Setting standards for student behavior	3.25	3.53
Tracking students into special classes	2.37	2.85
Designing staff development/in-services	2.39	3.11
Setting promotion and retention policies	1.68	2.61
Deciding school budgets	1.81	2.61
Evaluating teacher performance	1.58	2.47
Selecting new teachers	1.64	2.80
Selecting new administrators	1.36	2.66

*Research Question 3 and 4. What impact do teachers believe teacher leadership has on school improvement? What impact do principals believe teacher leadership has on school improvement?*

The mean scores were determined and analyzed for each of the ten statements pertaining to impact of teacher leadership on school improvement through the perceptions of both principals and teachers. Scores produced information of interest when comparing the two groups. Reported in Table 9 are the mean scores listed from highest to lowest for principals and teachers for their ratings of the impact of the ten major concepts in regard to school improvement. The mean scores for the first eight concepts of importance to school improvement for the principals fell within the range of Strongly Agree (3.50 to 4.00), whereas only the first five concepts listed for the teachers fell within that same range. The final five mean scores of the teachers fell within the range of Somewhat Agree (2.50 to 3.49). Overall, when comparing the mean scores, the principals averaged in the Strongly Agree (3.50 to 4.00) range, whereas the teachers averaged within the Somewhat Agree (2.50 to 3.49) range.

Table 9

*Mean Scores for Impact of Teacher Leadership on School Improvement*

Principals		Teachers	
Statement	Mean	Statement	Mean
Collaboration of teachers	4.00	Modeling leadership skills	3.69
Modeling leadership skills	3.93	Collaboration of teachers	3.68
Attending to the learning of the entire school community	3.80	Atmosphere provided in classroom	3.59
Atmosphere provided in classroom	3.73	Stepping outside of traditional roles	3.57
View themselves as leaders	3.73	View themselves as leaders	3.50
Stepping outside of traditional roles	3.71	Attending to the learning of the entire school community	3.40
Networking with other schools and programs	3.71	Clear vision and established goals	3.31
Clear vision and established goals	3.53	Networking with other schools and programs	3.31
Establish and implement expectations and standards	3.47	Establish and implement expectations and standards	3.26
Working with staff to establish a feeling of trust not only in the individual classrooms but in the entire building	3.40	Working with staff to establish a feeling of trust not only in the individual classrooms but in the entire building	3.22
Overall Mean Score	3.70	Overall Mean Score	3.45

*Research Question 5. Is there a significant difference between teachers and principals on the perceived impact of leadership roles on school improvement?*

Independent samples *t*-tests indicated there was a significant difference between the overall mean score of the principals and the overall mean score of the teachers on the perceived impact of teacher leadership roles on school improvement. The mean scores for the principals was 3.7010 (SD = .19052), while the mean score for the teachers was 3.4530 (SD = .17563). Equal variances were assumed for each test. The test showed significant difference between the two groups,  $t(18) = 3.027$ ,  $p = .007$ , as reported in Table 10.

Table 10

*Comparison of Perceived Impact of Teacher Leadership Roles on School Improvement*

Group	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	Std. Error of Mean	<i>t</i>	df	Sig. (2- tailed)
Principal	10	3.7010	.19052	.06025	3.027	18	.007
Teacher	10	3.4530	.17563	.05554	3.027	17.882	.007

*Research Question 6. What encourages and discourages teacher to be leaders?*

Data provided by the open ended survey questions allowed the researcher to analyze responses as to what encourages and discourages teacher to be teacher leaders. Of the fifteen principals who responded to the survey, thirteen of them (87%) took the

time to answer the open ended questions. Four of the thirteen principals indicated a type of intrinsic value as what encourages teacher leadership. “Pride in sharing new and innovative ideas with fellow colleagues” was a comment from one principal. Another principal responded with “Desire to help students and the entire building”. Of the remaining nine principals who responded to the question, six believed the main source of encouragement came from the administration of the district. “Administrative teams that recognize and praise the teachers for going above and beyond their regular duties, and establishing special collaboration time for teachers” was a statement from one principal. Encouragement from other colleagues and students and families were also noted in the responses.

When responding to what discourages teachers from being teacher leaders, the general consensus of the principals was time issues. One principal declared:

I believe that most teachers want to be leaders, but the time commitment involved for a teacher to be a true teacher leader is overwhelming. Not only do they have to prepare and teach their regular classes, but they have to be allowed extra time to collaborate with their colleagues also.

Another principal noted “some teachers hesitate to be gone from their classrooms for special collaboration time”. Still another principal answered “Lack of time and resources” as the reason for discouragement of teachers stepping into the leadership role.

Although responses from the teachers varied, a common theme was detected in the answers. A total of 93% of the teachers surveyed answered the open ended questions. Of those responses, the theme in the answers of 54% was encouragement to step into the role of teacher leader comes from intrinsic values. The responses ranged from as simple

as “inner desire” from one teacher, to “their inner desire to be the best instructor for all students, not just the students in their classroom, and a desire to share” from another teacher. Similar feelings were expressed by another teacher who responded with “inner pride in their work and the great things they can do to help students’ achieve”. The remaining 46% of the teachers believed it was extrinsic means, ranging from administration to stipends, which motivate teachers to be leaders. One answered “Teacher leaders are encouraged by the principal. When the principal allows time and opportunity for the teacher to share, and gives recognition to that leader, that is when teachers feel encouraged”.

Similar to the responses of the principals, the majority of the teachers believed that the time commitment involved in being a teacher leader was the main hindrance of the role. Several of these teachers mentioned not only the time commitment involved with collaborating with fellow colleagues, but also the time this would take away from their family. Also mentioned was the attitude of fellow colleagues. One teacher reflected that what discourages teacher from stepping into teacher leadership positions is “the view of other teachers if there is not a title involved”. Yet another teacher stated “disinterest and negativity from other teachers”. Principals and district administrators were also mentioned as things that discourage teacher leadership.

#### *Statement of Research Hypotheses*

*Research Hypothesis 1. There is no statistically significant difference in how principals and teachers perceive teachers’ involvement in teacher leadership roles.*

Based on the analysis and the data presented in Table 4, this hypothesis is rejected at the .05 level of significance. Significant differences were found in how principals and teachers perceive teachers' involvement in teacher leadership roles.

*Research Hypothesis 2. There is no statistically significant difference in the rating of involvement by teachers compared to the rating of how involved they would like to be in teacher leadership roles.*

Based on the analysis and data presented in Tables 6 and 7, this hypothesis is rejected at the .05 level of significance. Statistical differences were found in the mean statistics for the rating of involvement compared to the rating of how involved teachers would like to be in teacher leadership roles.

*Research Hypothesis 3. There is no statistically significant difference between teachers and principals on the perceived impact of teacher leadership roles on school improvement.*

Based on the analysis and data presented in Table 10, this hypothesis is rejected at the .05 level of significance. Statistical differences were found in the mean statistics for the perceived impact of teacher leadership roles on school improvement.

### *Summary*

Analysis of the data collected from the *Teacher Leadership Roles Survey* provided findings for the research questions. From the data, significant differences between perceptions of teachers and principals in regard to teacher leadership roles and the impact of those roles on school improvement were noted. Mean scores from the teachers indicated statistical differences between the involvement levels of the teachers compared to how involved they wished to be. In the final chapter, an overview of the

design and procedures employed for this study are described. A discussion of the findings of the study with limitations and design control are included. In addition, implications for practice and recommendations for further research are presented.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### FINDINGS, RECOMMENDATIONS, CONCLUSIONS

#### *Introduction*

The researcher investigated the perceptions of teachers and principals in regard to teacher leadership roles and the impact these roles have on school improvement. Differences between the points of view of the principals and of the teachers were examined. The overall interest of the teachers stepping into leadership positions was identified, along with ways teachers are encouraged or discouraged from taking on this challenge. In addition, the extent to which principals and teachers believe teacher leaders impact overall school improvement was explored. Provided in this chapter are the purpose of the study and the design and procedures employed throughout the study. Findings and limitations are also discussed, along with implications for practice and recommendations for future research.

#### *Purpose of the Study*

The purpose of this study was three fold. First the researcher strived to gain a better understanding of perceptions of teacher leadership roles from the point of view of teacher and of principal and any differences that may occur between the two positions. Secondly, the study examined the overall interest of the teachers stepping into a teacher leadership position and ways they are encouraged or discouraged to take on this challenge. Lastly, the researcher studied the extent to which principals and teachers believe the teacher leadership roles lead to overall school improvement. Research questions were formulated to gather data concerning the value of teacher leadership for

school structures, administrators, fellow teachers, and students (Anderson & Crowther, 2002; Barth, 2001; Birky et al. 2006; Danielson, 2006).

The rationale of the study emerged from an examination of the research literature on teacher leadership and school improvement. A review of relevant literature revealed the importance of the interactions between teachers and principals and how they both work in leadership positions moving toward school improvement. Influence from teacher leaders is not contained within the confines of classrooms, but extends to include all those impacted by innovative leadership skills recognizing ways to improve schools (Andrews & Crowther, 2002; Childs-Bowen, et al., 2000; Danielson, 2006). By promoting teacher leadership roles, teachers themselves become more active learners, students learn by being dynamic participants of a community of learners, and schools benefit from better decisions (Barth, 2001). However, the role of teacher leaders is seldom effective without the support and encouragement of administrators (Birky, et al., 2006). Subsequently, researchers (Andrews & Crowther; Barth; Danielson; Durrant & Holden, 2006) agreed that constructing teacher leadership in schools is vitally important, but equally significant is the idea that in order for teacher leadership to flourish, principals must be prepared to step into a different type of leadership position (Copland, 2001). Although research supported the use of teacher leadership to promote lasting school improvement, little research has been conducted to gain a better understanding of the overall concept of teacher leaders from the perspective of the principals and teachers.

The major focus of this study was to gain a better understanding of the perceptions of teacher leadership roles from the point of view of the principals and teachers and the perceived impact such roles have on lasting school improvement. The

researcher also sought to discover overall interest of teachers stepping into leadership positions and ways they are encouraged or discouraged from taking on this challenge.

The research questions guiding this study were as follows:

1. Is there a difference in how principals and teachers perceive teachers' involvement in teacher leadership roles?
2. Is there a perceived difference between the ratings of involvement by teachers compared to the ratings of how involved they would like to be in teacher leadership roles?
3. What impact do teachers believe teacher leadership has on school improvement?
4. What impact do principals believe teacher leadership has on school improvement?
5. Is there a significant difference between teachers and principals on the perceived impact of teacher leadership roles on school improvement?
6. What encourages and discourages teacher to be leaders?

The following null hypotheses were evaluated in an effort to answer the aforementioned research questions:

1. There is no statistically significant difference in how principals and teachers perceive teachers' involvement in teacher leadership roles.
2. There is no statistically significant difference in the rating of involvement by teachers compared to the rating of how involved they would like to be in teacher leadership roles.
3. There is no statistically significant difference between teachers and principals on the perceived impact of teacher leadership roles on school improvement.

### *Design and Procedures*

A mixed-methods research design was chosen for this study to combine qualitative research, where the main goal of the researcher is developing and discovering theory to explain their data (Maxwell, 2004); and quantitative research, where the researcher uses statistical procedures to discover correlations and relationships that may offer theories (Maxwell), thus enabling the data to be examined in various ways. The data collection method employed was a survey, administered to principals (n=15) and teachers (n=96). The survey questionnaire was developed by the researcher and pilot tested and retested by a group of administrators and teachers familiar with teacher leadership. Results were used to analyze individual survey questions for reliability as well as the test as a whole. The survey contained two sections for principals and three sections for the teachers. A four-point Likert-type scale was used ranging from Always (4) to Never (1) on the first sections and Strongly Agree (4) to Disagree (1) on the last section. Two open-ended questions were included in the surveys, which added the qualitative dimension. One optional open-ended question was included at the end of the survey to allow respondents to add any addition comments. Each survey took less than ten minutes to complete. Data were analyzed using SPSS 11.0. To determine if there were significant differences between perceptions of principals and teachers in regard to teacher leadership roles or impact of such roles on school improvement, *t*-tests for independents means were conducted. A paired *t*-test was used to determine if there were significant differences between the ratings of teachers' involvement in teacher leadership roles compared to the ratings of how involved they would like to be. Mean scores for each of the statements were examined to determine the strength of the beliefs.

### *Findings of the Study*

Fifteen principals and ninety-six teachers participated in the study by completing and returning useable *Teacher Leadership Roles Surveys*. The data from the surveys identified significant differences in three separate areas: perceptions in how principals and teachers perceive teachers' involvement in teacher leadership roles, rating of involvement by teachers compared to the rating of how involved they would like to be in teacher leadership roles, and differences between principals and teachers in the perceived impact of teacher leadership roles on school improvement. Data gathered through the open-ended questions added insight as to what encourages and what discourages teachers from stepping into the role of teacher leader.

Research questions one through six each addressed aspects of teacher leadership roles, from the point of view of the principals and teachers. Research question one focused on the perceptions of principals and teachers in regard to teacher leadership roles. Principals and teachers rated the involvement levels of ten statements pertaining to roles of teacher leaders. Data indicated overall the principals' perceived participation of teacher leadership within their building as more active than the perceptions of the teachers. Mean scores of the principals averaged within the Often (3) range while the mean scores of the teachers averaged within the Seldom (2) range. Although given the opportunity to write in any additional roles within their building, no one took the opportunity to do so.

Research question two revolved around comparing how active the teachers would like to be in those same ten statements regarding teacher leadership roles. Survey data indicated the teachers participating in the study would like to have more responsibility in

all ten areas when it comes to teacher leadership roles. In two areas, selecting new teachers and selecting new administrators, teachers indicated they Never (1) were part of this, but they would Often (3) like to be. When it came to setting promotion and retention policies, the teachers perceived they Seldom (2) were involved in this role, but Often (3) would like to be. Although the mean scores on some of the statements fell within a comparable range, overall the mean scores suggested teachers would like to be more involved.

Research question three and four concentrated on the perceived impact the principals and the teachers believe teacher leadership has on school improvement. Mean scores enabled the researcher to list the statements in order of highest to lowest for both principals and teachers, thus comparing how the statements ranked on each list. Principals ranked eight of the ten concepts listed as Strongly Agree (3) as compared to teachers rankings of only five concepts in that same range. Overall, principals rated the impact of the ten statements regarding school improvement as Strongly Agree (3) whereas the impact rating of the teachers was Somewhat Agree (2).

Research question five was directed toward comparing the perceptions of the principals and the teachers in regard to impact of teacher leadership roles on school improvement. Data supported the fact that there was a significant difference.

Research question six allowed the researcher the opportunity to analyze responses to the open-ended questions posed to principals and teachers as to what encourages and discourages teachers to be leaders. These responses varied, but a common theme was found within the answers. When it comes to encouragement, both groups mentioned varieties of reasons, but the researcher developed two categories for which all answers

were categorized: intrinsic or extrinsic motivators. Data indicated that the majority of principals expressed extrinsic reasons as the motivation behind teacher leaders, while the majority of the teachers expressed it was intrinsic values that motivated teachers to step into the leadership role. Time commitment was found to be the main issue from both principals and teachers that discouraged teachers from taking on the role of teacher leader.

### *Discussion of the Findings*

One purpose of research employing mixed-method design was to promote the integration of qualitative research, where the researcher's main goal is developing and discovering theory to explain their data (Maxwell, 2004) with quantitative research, where the researcher uses statistical procedures to discover correlations and relationships that may offer theories (Maxwell). The quantitative portions of the survey allowed the researcher the opportunity to analyze data to determine whether the findings reflect "true effects" (Shaffer & Serlin, 2004) whereas the qualitative portion allowed the researcher the chance to explain how and why (Seidman, 2006). The data described in this research provided insight into the perceptions of principals and teachers in regard to teacher leadership roles and the impact such roles have on school improvement. In this section, links between the findings of the study and pertinent research were made to explicitly help the reader understand the importance of teacher leadership.

The perceptions of the principals within the Midwestern state included in this study rate higher than the perceptions of the teachers when it comes to teacher leadership roles, according to data collected throughout this investigation. Additionally, the data indicated that principals place more emphasis on the role of teacher leaders and the

impact it has on school improvement than the teachers. Researchers (Andrews & Crowther, 2002; Barth, 2001; Danielson, 2006; Durrant & Holden, 2006) agreed that constructing teacher leadership in schools is vitally important, but equally significant is the idea that in order for teacher leadership to flourish, principals must be prepared to step into a different type of leadership position (Copland, 2001). Data from this investigation indicated the principals believed their leadership position was allowing teachers to be active in leadership roles. Subsequently the responses from the teachers, when compared to responses of principals, showed they did not believe they were as active as the principals perceived them to be. Teacher leadership is enhanced by leaders who establish collegial structures that facilitate dialogue and the development of the teachers' voice as a means for developing school goals and visions (Anderson, 2004; Danielson; Moller & Pankake, 2006). Teachers are an essential part of school improvement and must assume ownership for the success of the students. For teacher leadership to be successful, both the principals and the teachers must understand and value the importance of the position, and continually strive to communicate the needs of both positions to make them equally successful.

One of the keys to successful implementation of teacher leadership was the principal must understand the importance of creating a culture where “the followers feel trust, admiration, loyalty, and respect toward the leader, and they are motivated to do more than they originally expected to do” (Yukl, 2006, p. 262). The quantitative data from this research demonstrated the importance of the principals creating such a culture. The responses from the teachers indicated a desire and willingness to be more active in teacher leadership positions. In all the areas listed, the teachers expressed they could be

and would like to be more involved in decisions and various activities within the building. Teachers must be motivated and interested to make necessary changes that will foster school improvement.

Intrinsic values of the teachers were identified as key aspects for encouraging teachers to step into the role of teacher leader. Teachers reported they were motivated by their inner desire and sense of gratification when they shared their talents and abilities with their colleagues and their students. By allowing teachers the power of becoming a teacher leader on their own, their morale and sense of self value is heightened, thus motivating them intrinsically. True teacher leaders do not wait to be appointed before they offer their expertise, credibility, and influence to others in order to impact the educational experience of all (Hatch, et al., 2005). Although similar ideas were mirrored by the principals, the intrinsic motivators appeared more important to the teachers.

The lack of necessary time to successfully implement the position of teacher leader was evident through the information gleaned from the data. This lack of time was noted as a reason teachers are discouraged from stepping into leadership positions. Responses varied in details, but overall the teachers were discouraged from becoming teacher leaders because of the time commitment that takes them from their classroom and families. Although one principal cited the time commitment as a positive, more statements were made reflecting the negative aspect of the time commitment.

Data from this study indicated that teachers recognized principals and district administration as factors that either encouraged or discouraged teachers from stepping into the role of teacher leadership. Research from the literature review supported the critical importance of the role of the principal in relation to teacher leadership and school

improvement (Andrews & Crowther, 2002). Various times teachers specifically mentioned principals as a discouraging factor, while other times district administration was mentioned. It was not clear to the researcher whether the two positions mentioned were referring to the same position or a different one. Interestingly, none of the principals that participated in the study mentioned principals or district administration as a reason for teachers to be discouraged from the role of teacher leader.

#### *Limitations and Design Control*

As with other research investigations, there were several limitations to the study, however, steps were taken to minimize the effects of the limitations. The researcher received guidance and supervision from experienced researchers throughout the study and integrated their feedback into the study design. The following limitations were recognized by the researcher for this study:

1. The study sample was limited to a geographic region within one Midwest state. The researcher assumed the sample chosen for this study was representative of schools throughout that state.
2. The validity of the quantitative data was limited by the degree of reliability and validity of the survey instrument.
3. It was assumed that participants were forthright in their responses and interpreted the survey instruments in the way in which they were intended.
4. This study was limited by the extent of experience the researcher possessed in survey and interview skills.

To minimize the limitations of the study being geographically limited to one Midwest state, all public school districts were first categorized according to their 2008-

2009 student enrollment as reported by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE). The categories used were large districts, mid-sized districts, and small districts. Seven districts were then randomly chosen within each category. Letters of consent were mailed to the superintendents of the randomly chosen districts, soliciting permission for participation in the study.

In the attempt to gain permission from a total of five districts within each category, emails and letters were sent to superintendents requesting permission for a principal and teachers within that building of the principal to participate in the investigation. The correspondence also requested a recommendation from the superintendent of a principal within their district who encourages and promotes teacher leadership within their building. This provided purposeful sampling (Merriam, 1998) for the study, thus enhancing the data collection. Additional information was requested from one large district, and two other superintendents declined involvement in the study. Additional permission letters were sent to the other superintendents until a total of fifteen principals and their schools were established. Once the district administrators gave their approval, electronic consent forms and surveys were sent to the suggested principals. If the principals did not respond to the survey within a five day time period, the survey was resent, along with a follow-up phone call to answer any additional questions. Once the survey was collected from the principal, a link to the electronic consent forms and surveys for the teachers was sent to the principal, requesting them to forward the link to all classroom teachers within their building. By sending the electronic survey to the principal, the researcher was able to bypass district technology filtration systems. A total

of fifteen principal surveys and ninety-six teacher surveys were thus available for use in the data analysis phase of the study.

To improve the reliability and validity of the researcher-created survey, a pilot test and retest was taken by a small population of administrators and teachers familiar with the concept of teacher leadership. No modifications were deemed necessary based on the feedback provided from the pilot participants and results of the statistical analysis.

Assurances of confidentiality and anonymity were included in the consent forms, along with the guarantee that participants could stop their participation at any point in the study. The purpose of this practice was to encourage honest and accurate answers from the participants.

#### *Implications for Practice*

The findings have direct implications as identified and described for school districts, district administration, building principals, and teachers. Implications for practice were identified and described in the paragraphs below.

One of the most critical aspects of increasing teacher leadership is communication between the principals and the teachers. The differences in the perceptions between the principals and the teachers revealed in the data indicated a necessity for both positions to have opportunities to collaborate and design ways they could move toward a common goal. Principals need to understand how to cultivate teacher leaders and teachers need to discover how to step into informal teacher leadership roles. By opening lines of dialogues, expectations could be established from both points of view, enabling teachers and principals alike to understand the role of teacher leader and work toward successful implementation of the position.

Teachers willing to become teacher leaders need opportunities to build networks, collaborate with fellow teachers, and focus on continuous learning to enhance student achievement. Such opportunities could be facilitated through principals at building levels, administrators at district levels, or even regional settings, but careful planning needs to be done to limit the time such activities take away from the classroom time of the teacher. By establishing such opportunities for participation, teachers move forward in their teacher leadership roles, developing commitments toward common goals, and motivating themselves to have improved performance in their classrooms.

According to the data analyzed for this research, it is important for principals to understand how to cultivate teacher leaders. Principals need to be aware of the desires and efforts of teachers to move into the role of teacher leadership and be ready to help transform such leadership opportunities in their schools. The managerial-style leadership of the past is often ineffective in bringing about such important and necessary changes. Instead principals need to be ready to embrace, encourage, and support innovation and creativity from the part of their teachers and be prepared to celebrate innovation and teacher expertise.

Universities need to make changes in their programs to reflect the needs of the various leadership positions of today. Principals must have the instructional background to enable them to establish a system of shared leadership within their building. Many university programs have not adapted to the changing needs of future administrators.

#### *Recommendations for Future Research*

Gaining a better understanding about the role of teacher leaders is key to effectively leading schools of tomorrow through the reform efforts necessary to meet

state and federal accountability standards. Research pointed to the concepts of both principal leadership and teacher leadership as important factors in creating lasting change and school improvement. Questions should be raised to determine how higher education is preparing both of these positions to move forward with this important concept. Are principals being trained to foster teacher leadership positions? Does the instruction for new teachers include information as to what it takes to become a successful leader? Research should be conducted to determine the preparedness of these two leadership positions as they emerge from formal training programs.

Effective leadership that promotes teacher leadership communities is currently in place within school districts across the state. Research should be conducted to analyze such programs that have realized positive results. Questions should be raised to determine the characteristics of such effective leadership. Identification of effective communities should then lead to research regarding how these programs could be replicated on a larger scale across the state.

This research was restricted to building level principals and teachers within those individual buildings. Would research conducted involving an entire school district with multiple buildings have the same results? Does the capacity for leadership opportunities of district administration have an effect on the ability of individual principals as they strive to promote a building culture conducive to teacher leadership? Research should be conducted to determine if leadership styles of district administration have an effect on the leadership styles of individual principals.

Further research should also be conducted to compare actual student achievement data from schools where active participation in teacher leadership is in place. Would

comparisons of actual student achievement data lead us to determine the effectiveness teacher leadership? How many years of active teacher leadership should a building have prior to data being impacted by such leadership? Does the number of active teacher leaders play a part in the overall effectiveness of teacher leadership?

### *Summary*

The purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of perceptions of teacher leadership roles from the point of view of principals and teachers, and to examine the perceived impact such roles have on overall school improvement. The study also examined the overall interest of the teachers stepping into a teacher leadership positions and ways they are encouraged or discouraged to take on this challenge. Significant differences were found between the perceptions of the principals and the teachers in all areas. The perceptions of the principals included in this study rate higher than the perceptions of the teachers when it comes to teacher leadership roles, according to data collected throughout this investigation. Additionally, the data indicated that principals place more emphasis on the role of teacher leaders and the impact the role has on school improvement than the teachers. Survey data indicated the teachers participating in the study wish to have more responsibility when it comes to teacher leadership roles. Data from the open-ended questions concerning what encourages or discourages teachers from becoming teacher leaders provided a deeper insight into challenges of the position.

The findings of the study raise concern that communication between the principals and the teachers is not fully implemented. If both positions are to be successful in their leadership capabilities, a mutual understanding as to the expectations for both positions need to be established. Effective teacher leadership should include opportunities

for collaboration and networking to sustain lasting school improvement. Therefore, it is imperative that the principals understand how to cultivate such teacher leaders.

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## Appendix A

### *Permission Forms/Informed Consent*

1. Superintendent Permission for District Participation Form
2. Informed Consent Form – Principal
3. Informed Consent Form – Teacher

## Superintendent Permission for District Participation Form

Dear Superintendent,

As part of my dissertation research for a doctoral degree in Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis from the University of Missouri-Columbia, I am conducting a research study titled, *Perceptions of Teachers and Principals in Regard to Teacher Leadership and School Improvement*. The focus of this study is on teacher leadership and its role in successful school improvement. The research gathered should be helpful in providing insight into the role of the principals in promoting teacher leadership within their building.

For the study, a representative sample was developed by categorizing all school districts in Missouri according to their 2008-2009 enrollment as reported by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE). Within each representative sample, school sites were randomly selected. If you choose to participate, I am requesting that you recommend just one principal within your district that you recognize as a leader that encourages teacher leadership. I am seeking your permission as the superintendent of the <Name Here> School District to contact that principal and the teachers within that building for the purpose of inviting them to participate in this study.

The principal whom you recommend and the teachers within that building will be invited to complete an on-line survey. Each survey consists of 21 items for the participant to rate and three open-ended questions to answer. The survey should take no more than 10 minutes.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. Participants may withdraw at any time without penalty. Confidentiality of the schools, teachers and principals will be protected throughout the study. Individual responses to the survey are kept confidential. Only aggregate data will be reported in the study results. Your signature on the attached form indicates your informed consent for your district employees to participate in the study.

If you have any questions about this research project, please feel free to contact me at home (816) 224-9905, my office (660) 885-3620, or akert@shawnee.k12.mo.us or nia424@mizzou.edu. You may also contact my Faculty Advisor, Dr. Barbara N. Martin, at 660-543-8823 or bmartin@ucm.edu. Thank you in advance for your assistance with this project.

Sincerely,

Nancy Akert  
Doctoral Candidate  
University of Missouri-Columbia  
**FAX** (816) 224-3590

For the purpose of this study, **teacher leadership** is defined as those teachers who continue to teach students, but also have an influence that extends beyond their own classrooms to others within their own school and elsewhere.

### Superintendent Permission for District Participation

I, \_\_\_\_\_, grant permission for the principal recommended below and his/her staff to be contacted regarding participation in the study, conducted by Nancy I. Akert, to gain a better understanding of the importance of teacher leadership and the role it plays in school improvement.

By signing this permission form, I understand that the following safeguards are in place to protect teaching staff choosing to participate:

- All responses will be used for dissertation research and potential future publications.
- All participation is voluntary, and may be withdrawn at any point in the study prior to submission of the survey.
- All identities will be protected in all reports of the research.
- Any consent or refusal to participate in this study will not affect the employment of participants in any way.

Please keep the letter and a copy of the signed permission form for your records. If you choose to grant permission for your district employees to participate in this study, please complete this Superintendent Permission for District Participation Form and fax it to Nancy I. Akert at 816-224-3590 as soon as possible.

Thank you

I have read the material above and any questions that I have posed have been answered to my satisfaction. I grant permission for the principal listed below to be contacted and invited to participate in this study.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Superintendent's Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

Recommended Principal to participate in the teacher leadership study is:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Building

**(Return only this page. Keep the others for your records)**

## Informed Consent Form – Principal

Dear Participant,

As part of my dissertation research for a doctoral degree in Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis from the University of Missouri-Columbia, I would like to extend a personal invitation to you to participate in a research study entitled, *Perceptions of Teachers and Principals in Regard to Teacher Leadership and School Improvement*. You were recommended to me by the superintendent of your district as a true leader in your building.

**PROJECT BACKGROUND:** This project involves gathering data through a survey investigating understanding and perception of teacher leadership positions and the effect such positions have on school improvement. The data will be collected for analysis and may be published. You must be at least 21 years of age to participate.

**PURPOSE:** The purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of the perceptions of principals and teachers on the role of teacher leadership and the role it plays in school improvement.

**VOLUNTARY:** The survey is voluntary. Participants may refuse to answer any question or choose to withdraw from participation at any time without any penalty or loss of benefits to which they are otherwise entitled.

**BENEFITS:** Your participation in this research project will enrich the information base. A clearer understanding of the role of teacher leadership is important to principals as they encourage teachers to step into such a position. It is also important for teachers to understand the role of teacher leader and how it affects school improvement.

**RISKS:** This project does not involve any risks greater than those encountered in everyday life.

**CONFIDENTIALITY:** Your confidentiality will be maintained in that a participant's name will not appear on the survey or in the published study itself. A code number may be assigned so that responses may be grouped for statistical analysis. The data will only be reported in aggregate form.

**INJURY:** It is not the policy of the University of Missouri to compensate human subjects in the event the research results in injury. The University of Missouri does have medical, professional and general liability self-insurance coverage for any injury caused by the negligence of its faculty and staff. Within the limitations of the laws of the State of Missouri, the University of Missouri will also provide facilities and medical attention to subjects who suffer injuries while participating in the research projects of the University of Missouri. In the event you suffered injury as the result of participating in this research project, you are to immediately contact the Campus Institutional Review Board

Compliance Officer at (573) 882-9585 and the Risk Management Officer at (573) 882-3735 to review the matter and provide you further information. This statement is not to be construed as an admission of liability.

**WHAT DO YOU DO?** If your decision is to participate in this study, please complete the survey. By completing the on-line survey informed consent is given

Your efforts are greatly appreciated. If you have any questions regarding the study, please contact me at home (816) 224-9905, work (660) 885-3650, or akert@shawnee.k12.mo.us or nia424@mizzou.edu . You may also contact my Faculty Advisor, Dr. Barbara N. Martin, at 660-543-8823 or bmartin@ucmo.edu. If you have questions regarding your rights as a participant in research, please feel free to contact the Campus Institutional Review Board at (573) 882-9585. Thank you in advance for your assistance with this project.

Sincerely,

Nancy Akert

Doctoral Candidate, University of Missouri-Columbia

**FAX** (816) 224-3590

## Informed Consent Form – Teacher

Dear Participant,

As part of my dissertation research for a doctoral degree in Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis from the University of Missouri-Columbia, I would like to extend a personal invitation to you to participate in a research study entitled, *Perceptions of Teachers and Principals in Regard to Teacher Leadership and School Improvement*. The focus on this study is on the role of teacher leadership and how it effects school improvement.

**PROJECT BACKGROUND:** This project involves gathering data through a survey investigating understanding and perception of teacher leadership positions and the effect such positions have on school improvement. The data will be collected for analysis and may be published. You must be at least 21 years of age to participate.

**PURPOSE:** The purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of the perceptions of principals and teachers on the role of teacher leadership and the role it plays in school improvement.

**VOLUNTARY:** The survey is voluntary. Participants may refuse to answer any question or choose to withdraw from participation at any time without any penalty or loss of benefits to which they are otherwise entitled.

**BENEFITS:** Your participation in this research project will enrich the information base. A clearer understanding of the role of teacher leadership is important to principals as they encourage teachers to step into such a position. It is also important for teachers to understand the role of teacher leader and how it affects school improvement.

**RISKS:** This project does not involve any risks greater than those encountered in everyday life.

**CONFIDENTIALITY:** Your confidentiality will be maintained in that a participant's name will not appear on the survey or in the published study itself. A code number may be assigned so that responses may be grouped for statistical analysis. The data will only be reported in aggregate form.

**INJURY:** It is not the policy of the University of Missouri to compensate human subjects in the event the research results in injury. The University of Missouri does have medical, professional and general liability self-insurance coverage for any injury caused by the negligence of its faculty and staff. Within the limitations of the laws of the State of Missouri, the University of Missouri will also provide facilities and medical attention to subjects who suffer injuries while participating in the research projects of the University of Missouri. In the event you suffered injury as the result of participating in this research project, you are to immediately contact the Campus Institutional Review Board

Compliance Officer at (573) 882-9585 and the Risk Management Officer at (573) 882-3735 to review the matter and provide you further information. This statement is not to be construed as an admission of liability.

**WHAT DO YOU DO?** If your decision is to participate in this study, please complete the survey. By completing the on-line survey informed consent is given

Your efforts are greatly appreciated. If you have any questions regarding the study, please contact me at home (816) 224-9905, work (660) 885-3650, or [akert@shawnee.k12.mo.us](mailto:akert@shawnee.k12.mo.us) or [nia424@mizzou.edu](mailto:nia424@mizzou.edu) . You may also contact my Faculty Advisor, Dr. Barbara N. Martin, at 660-543-8823 or [bmartin@ucmo.edu](mailto:bmartin@ucmo.edu). If you have questions regarding your rights as a participant in research, please feel free to contact the Campus Institutional Review Board at (573) 882-9585. Thank you in advance for your assistance with this project.

Sincerely,

Nancy Akert

Doctoral Candidate, University of Missouri-Columbia

**FAX** (816) 224-3590

## Appendix B

### *Survey Instruments*

1. *Teacher Leadership Roles* – Teacher Survey
2. *Teacher Leadership Roles* – Principal Survey
3. Survey Permission Given

## Teacher Leadership Roles Teacher Survey

Demographics:

Gender: \_\_\_\_\_ Level of Education: \_\_\_\_\_

Years of Experience: \_\_\_\_\_ Years in Current Building: \_\_\_\_\_

Current Grade Level Teaching: \_\_\_\_\_

**Instructions:**

Each item below describes possible teacher leadership roles. In the left column, circle the number which describes how often you are actually *involved* in the leadership situation. Then, on the right, circle the number which describes how frequently you *wish to be involved* in the role. A blank space has been provided for you to write in other roles you may have, or wish you had.

Use the following 4-point scale to rate your involvement:

4	3	2	1
Always	Often	Seldom	Never

I am involved	Leadership role:				I wish to be involved			
4   3   2   1	1. Choosing textbooks and instructional materials				4	3	2	1
4   3   2   1	2. Shaping the curriculum				4	3	2	1
4   3   2   1	3. Setting standards for student behavior				4	3	2	1
4   3   2   1	4. Tracking students into special classes				4	3	2	1
4   3   2   1	5. Designing staff development/in-service				4	3	2	1
4   3   2   1	6. Setting promotion and retention policies				4	3	2	1
4   3   2   1	7. Deciding school budgets				4	3	2	1
4   3   2   1	8. Evaluating teacher performance				4	3	2	1
4   3   2   1	9. Selecting new teachers				4	3	2	1
4   3   2   1	10. Selecting new administrators				4	3	2	1
4   3   2   1	11. Other:				4	3	2	1

Using the following 4-point scale please rate your beliefs in the following statements:

4	3	2	1
Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neutral	Disagree

4	3	2	1	1. Students do better in my class because I see myself as a leader.
4	3	2	1	2. Collaboration with other teachers is important to my students' overall achievement.
4	3	2	1	3. Modeling leadership skills is important for my students.
4	3	2	1	4. Lasting school improvement depends on teachers stepping outside of their traditional roles.
4	3	2	1	5. It is important for me to join with networks of other schools and programs, both inside and outside the district, to secure feedback on my work.
4	3	2	1	6. It is important that I express my leadership by attending to the learning of the entire school community.
4	3	2	1	7. I work with members of the school community to establish and implement expectations and standards
4	3	2	1	8. Our school has a clear vision and established goals.
4	3	2	1	9. Our staff works together to establish a feeling of trust not only in our individual classrooms but in the entire building.
4	3	2	1	10. The outcomes of my students depend mainly on the atmosphere I provide for them in the classroom.

1. What encourages teachers to be teacher leaders?
  
2. What discourages teachers from stepping into teacher leadership positions?
  
3. Is there anything else that you would like to add?

Adapted with permission from Birky, V. D., Shelton, M., & Headley, W. S. (2006). An administrator's challenge: Encouraging teachers to be leaders. *NASSP Bulletin*, 90, 87-101. (p. 98)

## Teacher Leadership Roles Principal Survey

Demographics:

Gender: \_\_\_\_\_

Level of Education: \_\_\_\_\_

Years of Experience: \_\_\_\_\_

Years in Current Building: \_\_\_\_\_

Instructions:

Each item below describes a leadership role within your school. Circle the number which describes how often teachers in your building participate in the described leadership situation. A blank space has been provided for you to write in other teacher leadership roles you promote in your school building.

Using the following 4-point scale to rate the involvement of your teachers:

4	3	2	1
Always	Often	Seldom	Never

They are involved				Leadership role:
4	3	2	1	1. Choosing textbooks and instructional materials
4	3	2	1	2. Shaping the curriculum
4	3	2	1	3. Setting standards for student behavior
4	3	2	1	4. Tracking students into special classes
4	3	2	1	5. Designing staff development/in-service
4	3	2	1	6. Setting promotion and retention policies
4	3	2	1	7. Deciding school budgets
4	3	2	1	8. Evaluating teacher performance
4	3	2	1	9. Selecting new teachers
4	3	2	1	10. Selecting new administrators
4	3	2	1	11. Other:

Using the following 4-point scale please rate your beliefs in the following statements:

4	3	2	1
Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neutral	Disagree

4	3	2	1	1. Students do better in classrooms that have teachers that view themselves as leaders.
4	3	2	1	2. Teachers collaborating together is important to students' overall achievement.
4	3	2	1	3. Teachers which model leadership skills are important for students.
4	3	2	1	4. Lasting school improvement depends on teachers stepping outside of their traditional roles.
4	3	2	1	5. It is important for teachers to join with networks of other schools and programs, both inside and outside the district, to secure feedback on their work.
4	3	2	1	6. It is important that teachers express their leadership by attending to the learning of the entire school community.
4	3	2	1	7. Teachers should work with members of the school community to establish and implement expectations and standards
4	3	2	1	8. Our school has a clear vision and established goals.
4	3	2	1	9. Our staff works together to establish a feeling of trust not only in the individual classrooms but in the entire building.
4	3	2	1	10. The outcomes of students depend mainly on the atmosphere provided for them in the classroom.

1. What encourages teachers to be teacher leaders?
  
2. What discourages teachers from stepping into teacher leadership positions?
  
3. Is there anything else that you would like to add?

Adapted with permission from Birky, V. D., Shelton, M., & Headley, W. S. (2006). An administrator's challenge: Encouraging teachers to be leaders. *NASSP Bulletin*, 90, 87-101. (p. 98)

## Survey Permission

Shawnee R-III Mail - Thanks for your email

Page 1 of 3



Nancy Akert <akert@shawnee.k12.mo.us>

### Thanks for your email

5 messages

Marc Shelton <mshelton@georgefox.edu>  
To: akert@shawnee.k12.mo.us

Thu, Sep 11, 2008 at 9:15 PM

Hi Nancy,

Ginny Birky forwarded your email regarding the NASSP *Bulletin* article. I have attached a copy of the table in Word format for you to adapt to your local leadership interests & initiatives. Use as you will and we have found it to be helpful discussion starters with principals & teachers and with supt. & prin. - to identify areas of willingness and ability for roles of leadership.

Would be happy to chat with you if you prefer. Let me know and we can arrange some time to talk via phone or Skype. Thank you.

Take care,  
Marc

Marc Shelton, EdD  
George Fox University, School of Education  
Educational Foundations and Leadership  
503-554-2869

**From:** Nancy Akert [<mailto:akert@shawnee.k12.mo.us>]  
**Sent:** Thu 9/4/2008 17:48  
**To:** Ginny Birky  
**Subject:** Teacher Leadership

Dr. Birky,

I am a student in the University of Missouri's Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis program. My research for my dissertation focuses on Teacher Leadership. I found your article published in the NASSP Bulletin titled "An Administrator's Challenge: Encouraging Teachers to Be Leaders" very helpful. I am interested in using the survey from the article listed as Table 1. Can you send me information concerning this survey and others you may have used in your research? Also, if you have any other suggestions that you have found would be helpful to this topic I would appreciate your wisdom.

Thank you,

--  
Nancy Akert  
Shawnee R-III School District  
Superintendent/Principal  
660-885-3620

 **NASSP Table 1.doc**  
42K

## VITA

Nancy I. Akert was born on December 30, 1959, in Benkelman, Nebraska, the daughter of Earl and Ilene Erdman. She attended Haigler Public School, graduating in May, 1978. She received a B.S. in Elementary Education (1998) and an M.S. Ed in Educational Administration (2002) both from University of Central Missouri (then known as Central Missouri State University). As part of the University of Missouri-Columbia statewide cohort program, she completed the Ed.E. in Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis (2009). She is married to J. R. Akert of Alliance, Nebraska and they have two children, Robby and Megan. Dr. Akert is presently the Superintendent at Shawnee R-III School District.