

Building Teacher Leadership Capacity Through School-Level Supports and  
Professional Development: Teachers' and Principals' Perspectives

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**ABSTRACT**

The job of principals is demanding and evolving; consequently, they cannot lead alone. Teacher leaders can be a valuable resource if principals know how to build leadership capacity in teachers and practice distributive leadership. Understanding principals' and teachers' perceptions of their needs and how to best meet these needs can aid principals in building, and sustaining teacher leadership capacity. Therefore, the purpose of this qualitative study was to identify principals' and teachers' perceptions of their need and efforts to build teacher leadership capacity through school-level supports and professional development as well as principals' and teachers' perceptions of their ability to act as teacher leaders having participated in school-level professional development. Existing literature on building teacher leadership and sharing leadership responsibilities as it relates to the role of the principal, professional development, and sustainability was reviewed. Qualitative data were collected from 18 teachers and six principals in teacher focus groups and individual principal interviews in six high schools in one division in southeastern Virginia. At the conclusion of the data collection process, the researcher examined the perceptions of the teachers and the principals. The analysis revealed principals' and teachers' perceptions about the following areas: formal and informal leadership roles; professional development opportunities, teacher leadership structures in schools, strategic plans for building teacher leadership, mentor relationships between principals and teachers, barriers to teacher leadership, and recommendations for improved professional development opportunities. The study reinforced the notion that school-level supports and professional development need to be systematic and strategic.

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**GENERAL AUDIENCE ABSTRACT**

In the past forty years, significant pressure has been placed on school principals to manage schools, provide quality instruction, and raise student achievement. One person cannot accomplish this alone. Rather, school leadership succeeds when teachers take on leadership roles to assist the principal. In order for teachers to become teacher leaders, they need to receive professional development and opportunities to lead at the school level. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of principals and teachers as they relate to teacher leadership, leadership opportunities provided by the principal, and professional development. Six high school principals were interviewed individually and eighteen high school teachers, three per focus group, were interviewed in one school division in southeastern Virginia. The interviews revealed principals' and teachers' perceptions about the types leadership roles offered, the quality of the professional development opportunities available, the teacher leadership structures in the school, the types of mentor relationships between principals and teachers, the barriers to teacher leadership, and the recommendations for improved professional development opportunities. The study reinforced the notion that school-level supports and professional development need to be systematic and strategic.

## DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my three children—Tristin, Jude and Michaela—who tolerated my constant need to read, study and research to reach this milestone. Your sacrifices have afforded me an opportunity to move from ordinary to extraordinary, and for that, I will be forever grateful. It is my hope that my example inspires you to never stop learning, to set lofty goals for yourself, and to persevere despite every obstacle. Thank you for your support, encouragement, and understanding. I am so blessed to be your mom.

To my husband, John, who always says yes to my big ideas and what ifs. You have supported every dream, project, and request I have ever had. Thank you for your support; thank you for minimizing my distractions, and thank you for waiting so patiently. I love you.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

High school graduation rates have increased over the past forty years (Stillwell & Sable, 2013); however, students are still underprepared to meet the 21<sup>st</sup> Century global demand for high level thinking skills (Darling-Hammond & Gandara, 2015). According to a report released by ACT, Inc., more than 25% of the 2012 high school graduates “fell short of the college readiness benchmarks that ACT sets for all four subjects, and 60% of students tested missed the mark in at least two of the four subjects” (Sheehy, 2012, p. 1). Moreover, the nation’s business leaders, college professors, and high school graduates report that graduating high school students are unprepared for college and the workforce, citing weaknesses in mathematics, English, reading comprehension, and writing (ACT, 2011; Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2011; Rothman, 2012; Sheehy, 2012). “Far too many students are not receiving an education that adequately prepares them for life following high school, especially at-risk, special education, and minority students” (Kline & Williams, 2007, p. 1). What can be done to increase student achievement and school level outcomes?

In an effort to address academic deficiencies in public schools, reform movements and increased accountability have become staples in public education. The National Defense Education Act required an emphasis on mathematics and science after the launch of Sputnik in 1957 by the Soviet Union (National Defense Education Act of 1958, Public Law 85-864; 72 Stat. 1580). The publication of *A Nation at Risk* (1983) brought additional reforms with its recommendations for increased graduation requirements, raised college admission standards, and increased time in school. Later, the Standards Based Reform movement in the 1990’s challenged states to develop and monitor core standards in subject areas (Wirt, Choy, Provasnik, Rooney, Sen, & Tobin, 2003), followed by the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) in 2001 and the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Schools Act (ESEA). Both shifted the focus from students to schools, requiring public schools to increase student achievement for all students (ESEA, 2008).

While these reforms have had some positive impact on public education, overall, they have been ineffective (Dufour & Eaker, 1998; DuFour & Mattos, 2013; Good, 2011). An increase in the achievement gap between majority and minority as well as affluent and

impoverished students and a decrease in academic performance on international assessments provided evidence of their ineffectiveness (Darling-Hammond, 2011). Rather, Patterson and Patterson (2004) and Mullen (2008) assert that the principal's knowledge, ability, and confidence to build teacher leadership capacity at the school level are essential to improving teaching and learning and raising student achievement. Leithwood, Anderson, Mascall, Strauss and Moore (2010) likewise maintained that principals play a key role in strengthening teaching and schools often proving to be the "most potent factor in determining school climate" and influencing student achievement (Leithwood et al., 2010, p. 4).

## **Background**

The increase in reforms, accountability, and expectations over the past sixty years have implored principals to share the responsibilities of leadership, but research has revealed that principals struggle to define, identify, and cultivate teacher leadership (DuFour & Marzano, 2011). As the role and demands of the principal have evolved there has been an increased need for principals to create a culture that fosters collegial collaboration in a supportive environment (Fullan, 2003; Krovetz & Arriaza, 2006), including clear communication of the school goals and the responsibilities teacher leaders are expected to carry out (Short, 1998). Current research has addressed principals' perspectives of the need for teacher leadership in schools and how to utilize teacher leaders; however, there was a lack of research documenting principals' perspectives of professional development as a tool to build and sustain teacher leadership capacity at the school level.

Likewise, no research literature has fully explored teachers' perspectives on the quality and quantity of professional development opportunities offered at the school level to encourage and enhance teacher leadership capacity of the faculty. Research has indicated a strong relationship between teacher leadership and positive educational outcomes (Lambert, 2003; Muijs & Harris, 2003). Muijs and Harris (2003), who explored the benefits of teacher leadership, found that teacher leadership could have beneficial effects on school improvement, school and teacher effectiveness, and teacher motivation. As a result, teacher leaders have played an essential role in extending and strengthening reform and improvement efforts in schools (Muijs & Harris, 2003) as well as sharing experience and expertise in the design and

operation of educational programs, activities, and curricula (Barth, 2001; Heck & Hallinger, 2009; Muijs & Harris, 2003; York-Barr & Duke, 2004).

In order to continuously raise student achievement, teachers must act as instructional teacher leaders alongside their principals, so principals are charged with the responsibility of providing professional development that advances instructional and classroom management expertise as well as leadership capacity. In fact, Lindstrom & Speck (2004) established that “professional development is a powerful means to improving schools and student achievement” (p. 136). Furthermore, the Virginia Department of Education (2004) stated that professional development should be concise, relevant, and of high quality. While much agreement among researchers has been reached to the type of instructional professional development educators should receive (Ball & Cohen, 1999; Crawford, Roberts & Hickmann, 2010; Guskey, 2003; Newmann, King & Youngs, 2000), very little research has been done concerning the type and effects of professional development at the school level to build and sustain teacher leadership capacity.

### **Statement of the Problem**

In the past seven decades, the expectations and responsibilities of the school principal have vastly changed (Ediger, 2014; Goodwin, Cunningham & Childress, 2003). The once building leader has become an instructional leader, manager, facilitator, and instructor who is responsible for increasing student achievement, facilitating reform, navigating the political arena, and managing day-to-day tasks (Danielson, 2007; Fullan, 2007; Giles & Hargreaves, 2006). As a result, few principals can successfully lead schools independently (Fullan, 2007; Marzano, 2003), requiring leadership at every level (Danielson, 2007).

In addition, teacher leadership roles have not been clearly defined or supported in a consistent, meaningful manner (Anderson, 2004; Mangin & Stoelinga, 2010). As a result, little research documentation has been done about professional development that focuses on leadership knowledge and skills that teachers need to successfully participate in school leadership opportunities (Ackerman & Mackenzie, 2006; Scribner & Bradley-Levine, 2010). Increased research in this area can provide principals with a framework to make decisions concerning professional development offerings and improved organizational structures in schools that support student achievement.

Understanding principals' and teachers' perceptions of teacher leadership training and opportunities can improve the type and quality of professional development offered as well as the amount and level of teacher participation in leadership roles. The problem investigated in this study related to the types, quantity, and quality of professional development offered to teachers to build and sustain teacher leadership capacity in schools. The researcher explored principals' and teachers' perceptions of building teacher leadership capacity and its effectiveness through school-level supports and professional development opportunities at the high school level.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to identify principals' perceptions of their need and efforts to build teacher leadership capacity through school-level supports and professional development at the high school level as well as teachers' perceptions of their ability to act as teacher leaders having participated in school-level leadership opportunities and professional development. The results of this study may be able to inform schools and divisions regarding the types, quality, and breadth of professional development offered to build and sustain teacher leadership capacity that positively impacts school level outcomes.

### **Research Questions**

This study answers the following questions:

1. How do principals and teachers perceive school-based leadership's ability to develop teacher leadership capacity in high schools through supports and professional development?
2. How do principals and teachers perceive teachers' ability to serve as teacher leaders in high schools?
3. What do principals and teachers perceive are the additional supports needed to develop teacher leadership in high schools?

### **Summary of Methods**

Based on a review of the literature, the researcher chose a qualitative research approach and used an interpretative methodology for this study. According to Merriam (2009), this research approach was most appropriate because the overall purpose of an interpretative qualitative design is "to understand how people make sense of their lives and their experiences"

(p. 23). Principals and teachers from six high schools within a school division in southeastern Virginia were interviewed. Once the interviews were completed, the researcher transcribed them using a coding method and outlined the data and themes to facilitate efficient retrieval of information. The researcher followed procedures to validate the study and protect the confidentiality of the participants.

### Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this study (see Figure 1) was developed from the research examining the role of the principal and teacher, teacher leadership, and professional development and their effects on student achievement outcomes. According to Lambert (1998), “leadership needs to be a broad concept that is separated from person, role, and a discrete set of individual behaviors. It needs to be embedded in the school community as a whole” (p. 5). Research asserts that leadership is about learning collectively and collaboratively (DuFour & Marzano, 2007; Lambert, 1998), so this study sought to understand principals’ perspectives of their ability to develop and enhance teacher leadership capacity through professional development opportunities and experiences. It also sought to understand teacher perspectives of their abilities to lead based on the professional development opportunities and experiences available to them at the school level.

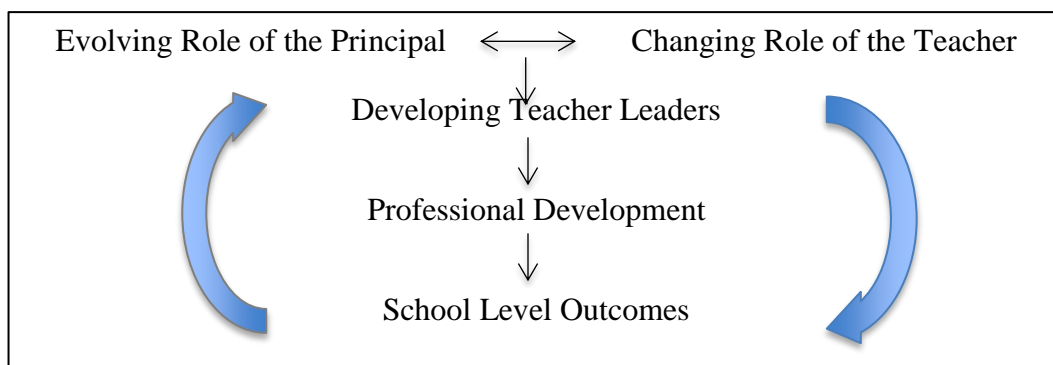


Figure 1. Conceptual framework.



## **Scope and Limitation**

This research study focused on the experiences of high school teachers and principals. There were limitations in this study beyond the researcher's control that may have affected the outcome of this study. These limitations included:

1. The candidness of the principals' and teachers' responses may have limited and influenced the interview data.
2. The responses to the interview questions may have been skewed based on the positive or negative experiences of the interviewee(s) in the current school setting. Their general satisfaction or dissatisfaction related to the setting may have influenced their perceptions on the specific topic.
3. The types and frequency of professional development varied in schools.
4. The responses of teachers regarding teacher leadership development may have been influenced by their willingness to become teacher leaders.

## **Delimitations**

The delimitations were factors in which the researcher had control. These delimitations included:

1. The study was conducted at six high schools in one southeastern Virginia school division. Results from this study have limited generalizability.
2. The study considered the perspectives of the school principal, not the perspectives of the combined administrative team.
3. The teachers who participated in the focus group discussions were limited to teachers within the identified schools who volunteered to participate in the study.

## **Definition of Key Terms**

The following key terms are used throughout the study.

**Distributive leadership.** This type of leadership focuses on leadership that is disseminated and performed by several people, including the formal leader (Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2001).

**Instructional leadership.** Instructional leadership is a “broad set of principal roles and responsibilities designed to address the workplace needs of successful teachers and to foster improved achievement among students” (Di Paola & Tschannen-Moran, 2003, p. 44).

**Mentor.** Mentoring is “a personal, helping relationship between a mentor and a mentee/protege that includes professional development and growth and varying degrees of support (Hansford, Tennent, & Ehrich, 2003, 44).

**Professional development.** Professional development is defined as focused and continuous learning through inquiry, data analysis, dialogue, and reflection to increase capacity and improve practice (Hirsh, 2009).

**Teacher leadership.** Teacher leadership is the action of taking on leadership roles and additional professional responsibilities that transform teaching and learning (Crowther, Kaagan, Ferguson, & Hann, 2002).

**Teacher leadership capacity.** Teacher leadership capacity is the “broad-based, skillful involvement in the work of leadership” (Lambert, 1998, p. 3).

## **Organization of the Study**

This research study contains five chapters. The information in Chapter One includes background information for the study as well as the statement of the research problem, purpose for the study, research questions, a summary of the methods to be used, conceptual framework, limitations and delimitations of the study, and key terms. Chapter Two outlines the relevant research literature related to this study to include the following topics: the evolving role of the principal and teacher, teacher leadership, the development of teacher leaders, professional development, and school level outcomes. A detailed description of the methodology used to conduct this study is included in Chapter Three, followed by the presentation of data collected from this study in Chapter Four. Finally, Chapter Five presents the findings of the research, the implications of the study, and recommendations for future studies.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **Search Process**

A comprehensive search of scholarly literature related to building teacher leadership capacity in schools was conducted utilizing the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University online library Summons search engine. Over 1,397,000 journal articles, books, dissertations, and other resources were identified as possible sources when the term “teacher leadership” was entered into the search engine. The number decreased with a refined search that included limits on publication dates—2000 or later—to 754,037 sources. With the use of the following keywords “building teacher leadership capacity,” “leadership capacity,” “teacher leadership and professional development,” and “principals and teacher leadership,” the search yielded approximately 200 sources in each subcategory. Finally, deleting irrelevant titles and carefully analyzing abstracts further narrowed the search. Reference pages from other researchers were also examined for viability to include in this literature review.

#### **Purpose of the Literature Review**

The quality of school leadership, including teacher leadership, is directly linked to student achievement and school outcomes (Eyal & Roth, 2011; Lambert, 2003; Marzano, 2003; Richardson, 2003). Moreover, research confirmed that school leadership is second only to teachers’ instructional influence in the classroom (The Wallace Foundation, 2008) as described in school-related factors that affect student achievement (Marzano, 2003). Hence, building teacher leadership capacity is essential for school improvement, raising student academic achievement, maintaining sustainability, and building school-level capacity. Thus, the burden of responsibility falls to the school principal to build teacher leadership capacity (Daley, 2002) through effective professional development opportunities.

This chapter reviews the literature related to building teacher leadership capacity. The first section focuses on principal leadership, specifically the roles and responsibilities of the instructional leader and the importance of mentoring aspiring teacher leaders as well as building strong teacher-administrator relationships. The second section defines teacher leadership, lists the characteristics of teacher leaders, and discusses the roles of teacher leaders. The third section

addresses teacher leadership readiness and perceptions, teacher leadership roles, and the practices of developing teacher leaders, including the barriers and challenges teacher leaders face. Section four examines the need for building leadership capacity through ongoing professional development and the Virginia standards for effective professional development. Finally, the last section focuses on the outcomes of building teacher leadership capacity as it relates to school improvement, student achievement, sustainability, and building school capacity.

### **The Evolving Role of the Principal**

Historically, the principal has been the primary leader of the school, focusing on the “bricks, buses, budgets, as well as managing the staff and creating rules and regulations to ensure the smooth operation of the school” (Adkins, 2010, p. 105). In the 1960s and 1970s, the principal was viewed as the manager, specifically a manager of federally sponsored and funded programs—compensatory, bilingual, and special education programs (Hallinger, 1992). However, by the early 1980s, the role of the principal began to evolve. With the publication of *A Nation at Risk* (1983), Americans became made aware of students’ poor academic performance and mediocre international standing. In response to this report, the Carnegie Forum on Education published *A Nation Prepared: Teachers for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (1983), calling for sweeping changes in educational policy that would “depend on achieving far more demanding educational standards than have ever been attempted before” (p. 1). No longer were principals expected to be managers or supervisors; instead, they were and are expected to be effective instructional leaders who consistently raise student achievement, maintain accreditation, provide meaningful professional development, and inspire teacher leadership “in order to create transformative change in schools” (Devaney, 2014, p.1). Moreover, they are responsible for empowering teachers and creating learning environments that are centers for shared inquiry and decision-making (Blasé & Blasé, 1999).

In an empirical study conducted by Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom, and Anderson (2010), the researchers asserted that there is a link between school leadership and student achievement because school leaders can affect student achievement “through their influence on teachers’ motivation” (p. 19). Principals’ influence can be discerned in their vision, instructional leadership, assessment expertise, disciplinary policies, and capacity building skills (Davis, Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, & Meyerson, 2005). Subsequently, the changing role of the

principal demands not only managerial expertise, but also strong instructional leadership that cultivates teacher leadership and learning (Msila & Mtshali, 2013) through continuous professional development.

**Instructional leader.** Ron Edmonds published a seminal article in 1979 in which he stated, “unequivocally that *strong administrative leadership* was characteristic of instructionally-effective schools” (Hallinger, 1992, p. 37). This theory prompted educational theorists and practitioners to focus more closely on instructional concerns and student outcomes. By the mid-1980s, researchers and policy-makers shifted emphasis from principals being building managers and disciplinarians to instructional leaders (Hallinger, 1992). Today, principals are expected to be visionaries, managers, and instructional leaders (Danielson, 2007).

Di Paola and Tschannen-Moran (2003) defined instructional leadership as a “broad set of principal roles and responsibilities designed to address the workplace needs of successful teachers and to foster improved achievement among students” (p. 44). Similarly, Blasé and Blasé (1999) defined it as a “blend of several tasks, such as the supervision of classroom instruction, staff development, and curriculum development” (p. 350). Based on the research of Brieve (1972) and their own, Di Paola and Tschannen-Moran (2003) extrapolated that instructional leaders support teachers, maintain focus on tasks critical to the success of the school, communicate well with stakeholders, and coordinate instructional programs. In addition, The Wallace Foundation (2012) found that effective principals also model through continual professional learning. “They emphasize research-based strategies to improve teaching and learning and initiate discussions about instructional approaches, both in teams and with individual teachers” (p. 10). Even though multiple studies have found that instructional leadership is a key factor for improving student achievement (Hallinger, 2003; Hallinger & Murphy, 1985; Sergiovanno, 1984), it is tabled to address day-to-day managerial needs (Gentilucci & Muto, 2007). Incidentally, one way to further enhance instructional leadership is through mentorship.

**Mentor.** Mentorship provides principals an opportunity to develop leadership skills, clarify organizational structures, and provide professional development opportunities for teachers seeking leadership positions within the school or at the district level (Hansford & Ehrich, 2006). Hansford et al. (2003) defined mentoring as “a personal, helping relationship between a mentor and a mentee/protege that includes professional development and growth and varying degrees of

support (44). Hansford and Ehrich (2006) later refined the definition as an agreement between mentees and more experienced persons to “engage in a personal and confidential relationship that aims to provide professional development, growth and varying degrees of personal support” (p. 39). In addition, they concluded that whether the mentee-mentor roles were assigned formally or informally, principal mentors influenced the knowledge, skills, and dispositions of their mentees. Likewise, their supportive relationships contributed to the improvement of the school culture and the teaching practices of their mentees (Barth, 2001; Danielson, 2006; Kurtz, 2009).

In a more recent study conducted by Shillingstad, McGlamery, Davis, and Gilles (2015), they found that “relationship-building is absolutely essential if mentors are to garner the trust of their mentees and other teachers” (p. 20). While Hansford et al. (2003) found many benefits to mentoring in their meta-analysis, they also reported on negative outcomes as well, including a lack of time, incompatible personalities, lack of training, and extra burden. However, their review of 159 studies revealed that mentoring has the capacity to enhance teaching and learning. Therefore, an established mentoring relationship between principals and teacher leaders contributes to the process of developing leadership capacity because aspiring leaders benefit from being nurtured in a learning environment where “authentic dialogue, trusting relationships and self-reflection flourish” (Hansford & Ehrich, 2006, p. 39).

**Leadership capacity builder.** In an era of standards-based improvement and increased accountability, “the ability of a principal to encourage and motivate leadership capacities in the building is critical for educational reform and collaboration” (Birky, Shelton, & Headley, 2006, p. 87). However, school leaders cannot effectuate large-scale change alone (Crowther et al. 2002; Danielson, 2007; Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001; Lambert, 1998). Part of their success lies in their ability to identify teacher strengths, build on those strengths, and empower educators to embrace leadership roles. “A central part of being a great leader is cultivating leadership in others” (The Wallace Foundation, 2012, p. 11). According to Giles and Hargreaves (2006) and Hargreaves and Fink (2006), it is this type of leadership that cultivates sustainability, collaboration, and motivation.

According to Lambert’s (2003) seminal research, principals must communicate and collaborate with school stakeholders regarding the roles and responsibilities of school leaders in order to build leadership capacity. In her book titled *Leadership Capacity for Lasting School*

*Improvement*, Lambert (2003) outlined the behaviors principals should exhibit to develop, build, and sustain teacher leadership capacity:

- 1.) Know oneself and clarify one's values. This understanding becomes a mental model from which decisions and behaviors can emerge and is the basis for action.
- 2.) Extend understandings to the school and staff. Present the history, strengths, needs of the school, and staff leadership qualities to the staff.
- 3.) Formally and informally assess the leadership capacity of the school.
- 4.) Make a commitment to work on the school's current state and walk side-by-side with the school staff for continued improvement.
- 5.) Build trust. As a result of honesty, respect will follow.
- 6.) Develop norms. This is accomplished by establishing professional boundaries of mutual respect and working agreements.
- 7.) Establish mutual understanding with staff and decision roles. These roles clarify which decisions are made through consultation, achievement, consensus, individual choice, or not at all. The principal still has the responsibility to make certain personnel, legal, and emergency decisions.
- 8.) Develop a shared vision. The vision is the shared tombstone for all other actions. This evokes questions and conversations from staff members.
- 9.) Develop leadership capacity in others. As leadership is developed, participants will develop their own theories of leadership.
- 10.) Establish the leadership team as a design team. A major task of the leadership team is to design the conversations. This includes the design of faculty meetings, study groups, teams, and other patterns of participation.
- 11.) Establish a cycle of inquiry. A cycle of inquiry continues conversations based on questions, evidence, reflection, and action.
- 12.) Create goals and plans of action for student learning. The inquiry process establishes an internal accountability system that enables staff members to continually monitor and evaluate their actions.
- 13.) Have communication processes. By questioning, coaching, breaking dependencies, being open, confronting conflict, and challenging norms, the process is designed to

build trust, relationships, and leadership, provide quality performance, implement community decisions, and ensure student learning.

- 14.) Develop a reciprocal relationship with district personnel. Both support and pressure is mutual (Lambert, 2003, p. 51-52).

Lambert's list of principals' behaviors is consistent with the research of Birky, et al., 2006; Berry & Ginsberg (1990), Darling-Hammond (1993), and Muijs & Harris (2003) who suggested that for teachers to accept and maintain leadership roles, they must feel empowered to do so by their principals.

### **The Changing Role of the Teacher**

The role of the teacher has changed over the past century to meet the social, political and economic demands of a globalized country and world. In Zilvermit's (1993) qualitative research on teachers' instructional role in the 1950s and 1960s, he found the teacher's role was one of knowledge dissemination rather than the facilitation of learning activities and student-centered work. While some schools were moving to a more progressive approach, Zilvermit asserted that most teachers remained traditional in their teaching practices. Furthermore, Silberman (1970) described the teacher's role during this time period as a disciplinarian, moral coach, role model, and evaluator. Later, Cuban's (1993) research found very little change occurred since the 1970s other than a slight increase in teachers' progressive approach to instruction, specifically in the change from whole group instruction to a more student-centered approach.

In the 1980s, education was influenced by globalization, economics, and technology. Accordingly, teachers were held to higher expectations in the classroom and in the community. While the classroom atmosphere was still mostly teacher-centered (Cuban, 1993), Hargreaves (1994) found increased teacher focus on improved communication with students, classroom management skills, and assessment of student work. Professionally, teachers were still working in isolation as a result of departmentalization.

The 1990s brought performance-based standards, accountability, and an emphasis on standardized testing (Finley, 2000). During this time period, Gardner (1991) described the role of a teacher as transformative and inventive, and Finley (2000) reported "new programs and policies have focused on the teacher's role as a school staff member, with the responsibility to participate in collective problem solving, decision making, and program implementation" (p. 12).



A focus on teacher leadership began to emerge with reform efforts that emphasized collaboration, collegiality, and professional learning communities (DuFour & Eaker, 1998).

## **Teacher Leadership**

For the last 30 years, teacher leadership has been researched and recognized as a “central component in securing and sustaining school improvement” (Mujis & Harris, 2003, p. 443). Specifically, the research of Harris and Lambert (2003) found that teacher leadership promotes a shared sense of purpose, engagement, and collaboration when teachers serve as productive leaders. Furthermore, York-Barr and Duke (2004) reviewed 140 sources on teacher leadership, shared decision-making, teacher professionalism, and teacher leaders roles and responsibilities. They found that more teachers are taking on leadership roles; however, little is known about how teacher leadership develops and its effects.

In contrast, Barth (2001) suggested, “something deep and powerful with our school cultures seems to work against teacher leadership” (p. 444). In a four-year study of ten schools within the Coalition of Essential Schools, Hampel (1995) found that different subgroups of teachers emerge: the “cynics,” the “sleepy people,” the yes-but” people and the teacher leaders; incidentally, teacher leaders never comprised more than 25% of the faculty. Regardless of the conflicting opinions concerning teacher leadership, research clearly indicates that the quality of teacher leadership matters (Fullan, 2001; Sergiovanni, 1999).

**Defining teacher leadership.** Due to competing and overlapping definitions of teacher leadership, it is difficult to define. Wasley (1991) defined teacher leadership as the “ability to encourage colleagues to change, to do things they won’t ordinarily consider without the influence of the leader” (p. 23). In contrast, Lambert (1998) focused on teacher leadership as broad-based—involving many stakeholders in the leadership process—and skill involvement—understanding and demonstrating aptitude in leadership dispositions, knowledge and skills. Katzenmeyer and Moller (2001) refined the definition to “teachers are leaders lead within and beyond the classroom, identify with and contribute to a community of teacher learners and leaders, and influence others toward improved instructional practice” (p. 17). More recently, Patterson and Patterson (2004) defined teacher leadership as a teacher who works collaboratively with colleagues to improve teaching and learning. “Ultimately, teacher leadership is about action that transforms teaching and learning in school” (Crowther et al., 2002, p. xvii).

**Characteristics of teacher leadership.** The characteristics of teacher leadership have evolved over the past 30 years. Devaney (1987) found that teacher leaders have certain characteristics in common: analyzing school processes and practices, reflecting on their teaching abilities, sharing curriculum knowledge, participating in school level decision making, and facilitating in-service trainings. Likewise, Holmes and Neilson (1988) found that teacher leaders sought out focused professional development and mentoring programs, which increased their knowledge and practice of school-based management skills, collaboration, and inquiry methods. Moreover, Darling-Hammond (1993) identified teacher leadership characteristics as planning and improving curriculum, developing instructional skills strategies, conducting action research, and seeking collaborative leadership opportunities. More recently, Crowther et al. (2002) found that teacher leaders convey conviction about a better world, strive for authenticity, facilitate learning communities, confront barriers, translate ideas in action, and nurture a culture of success. Teachers who demonstrate these leadership characteristics are well suited to assume the role of a teacher leader.

**Roles of teacher leaders.** Teacher leaders lead within and beyond the classroom. Based on their research of teacher leadership and its importance to improving outcomes in schools, Katzenmeyer and Moller (2001) identified three teacher leadership roles: (1) teachers assume leadership roles with colleagues and students, impacting teaching and learning; (2) they become involved in operational duties, influencing parents and the community, and (3) they participate in the decision-making process, enhancing their coordination and management skills. Likewise, York-Barr & Duke (2004) recognized the following roles of teacher leadership: coordination and management of systems and structures, involvement in school or district curriculum work, facilitation of professional development, participation in school change and improvement, involvement with stakeholders, contributions to the profession, and commitment to pre-service teacher education.

Teacher leadership roles continue to emerge and evolve as educators and policymakers strive to reform and improve student achievement (Sherrill, 1999). However, Barth (2001) stated that few opportunities for “schoolwide leadership are offered to teachers—and precious few are accepted” (p. 444). Furthermore, in a recent study conducted by The Wallace Foundation (2012), the researchers reported that teacher leaders are often underutilized. “The problem is that those who are in a position to offer instructional leadership—department chairs—often are not called

on to do so” (p. 11). Therefore, if schools are going to improve, “principals must focus their efforts not only on student achievement, but also on facilitating the development of teachers” (Mullen & Jones, 2008, p. 329) through formal and informal leadership opportunities.

**Formal and informal leadership.** Historically, teacher leadership was described as any teacher who accepted leadership responsibilities inside or outside of the classroom. However, researchers are now differentiating between formal and informal leadership roles. Birky et al. (2006) described formal teacher leaders as “those given familiar titles, and the positions are generally identified by the principal and compensated either by additional salary or in exchange for lighter teaching loads” (p. 88). Additionally, formal leadership opportunities include department heads, grade-level chairpersons, curriculum specialists, mentors, leadership team members, and union representatives (Muijs & Harris, 2003; Patterson & Patterson, 2004; York-Barr & Duke, 2004).

In contrast, informal teacher leaders “emerge spontaneously and organically from the teacher ranks...[and] have no positional authority; their influence stems from the respect they command from their colleagues through their expertise and practice” (Danielson, 2007, p. 16). Additionally, they are recognized for “volunteering to head new projects, mentoring and supporting other teachers, accepting responsibilities for their professional growth, introducing new ideas, and promoting the mission of the school” (Wasley, 1991, p. 112). Informal roles may include lesson planners, activities coordinators, peer coaches, parent liaisons, and team leaders (Muijs & Harris, 2003; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Equally, each leadership role fosters the development of new skills and growth while developing personal capacity, interpersonal capacity, and organizational capacity (Daley, 2002).

### **Developing Teacher Leaders**

Policy changes and mandates that emphasize increased coverage in content areas and improved test scores challenge school leaders’ abilities to raise student achievement and meet the individual needs of students without the help of others (Thorton, 2010). Consequently, with the increased demands placed on principals, school leaders benefit from developing teacher leaders to influence policy at the school level, assist in improving instructional practice, and encouraging peers (Thorton, 2010). As teachers embrace leadership roles at the instructional and

organizational level, the school, principal, and faculty benefit from their participation, expertise, and knowledge (York-Barr & Duke, 2004).

Despite a number of researchers who support developing teacher leadership (Barth, 2001; Blasé & Blasé, 1999; Danielson, 2006; Lambert, 2003), there has been some resistance in the field. Increasing leadership capacity has the potential to remove exceptional teachers from the classroom—a deterrent considering teachers are the most influential factor to a student’s success (Haycock, 1998; Marzano, 2003; The Wallace Foundation, 2012). However, teacher leadership has the capacity to move beyond the classroom and impact the school and district. Teachers extend their reach to exercise leadership with schoolwide policies and programs, teaching and learning, and communication and community relations (Danielson, 2007). “By inviting expert teachers to assist in improving learning conditions throughout the school, we aren’t removing our best teachers from the classroom. We are extending their reach” (Scherer, 2007, p. 7).

**Teacher readiness.** Katzenmeyer and Moller (2001) suggested the following influences affect a teacher’s readiness to assume leadership responsibilities: 1) excellent professional teaching skills; 2) a clear and well-developed personal philosophy of education; 3) being in a career stage that enables one to give to others; 4) having an interest in adult development, and 5) being in a personal life stage that allows one the time and energy to assume a position of leadership. Additionally, school leadership opportunities seem to manifest due to success in the classroom because teachers who are successful in the classroom tend to have the respect and trust of their colleagues as well as their administrators (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Conversely, Thornton (2010) argued that “teacher leadership allows excellent teachers to impact their colleagues and students in their classrooms, and this serves as an incentive for them to remain in the classroom” (p. 36).

**Barriers and challenges.** While teacher leadership appears to be the natural progression following success in the classroom, the data and literature suggest too many barriers and challenges exist (Crawford et al., 2010; Muth, Browne-Ferrigno, Bellamy, Fulmer, & Silver, 2013; Taylor, Goeke, Klein, Onore, & Geist, 2011); consequently, “a predominance of teachers who are highly skilled in leadership” (Thornton, 2010, p. 39) has low participation in leadership roles and activities. Furthermore, Wilson (1993) also found that “the very capabilities that

distinguish teacher leaders from others in the high school environment—risk-taking, collaboration, and role modeling—produce tension between them and colleagues” (p. 26).

Additional barriers include time, formal leadership structures, and principal leadership style. High demands on teachers’ time—planning, collaboration, paperwork, committee involvement, and accountability requirements—keep highly qualified teachers from acting as teacher leaders (Crawford et al., 2010). Additionally, many teachers view “leadership roles” on committees and school improvement plans to be obligatory—a placeholder position rather than a position to effectuate change—because these positions often times are assigned to the same individuals (Thornton, 2010). Furthermore, while principal leadership can be instrumental in developing teacher leaders, it can also be a barrier to the principal’s primary role as an instructional leader who inspires teachers and supports the leadership of others; however, authoritative or laissez-faire leadership inhibits leadership growth. “Principals who were reported as engaging in collaborative leadership were seen as better equipped to both understand and support the leadership of others in the school” (Thornton, 2010, p. 41).

**Principal’s role.** The principal’s role is continuously evolving, requiring the assistance and resources of the whole school, not the finite time and energy of the principal. According to Barth (2001), “School leadership that must be managed by the principal constitutes only a fraction of the leadership available” (p. 448). It is surprising, then, despite the literature supporting building leadership capacity, that teacher leadership practices are not more prevalent in schools. Katzenmeyer & Moller (2001) wrote that “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 yet widespread” (p. 84).

Because teacher leadership contributes to the improvement of school culture and student outcomes (Richardson, 2003; Taylor et al., 2011), enhances communication and collaboration, and prepares teachers to become effective leaders, highly qualified teachers benefit from “empowerment through knowledge and skill acquisition” (Richardson, 2003, p. 202). Knowledge and skill acquisition enhances leadership by expanding the existing, and somewhat limited, knowledge base, seeing the bigger picture, and improving teaching and communication skills. Furthermore, it enables teachers to act beyond their classrooms and build new relationships (Taylor et al., 2011). However, principals cannot expect teachers to assume leadership roles without preparation or mentoring (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Hart (1994) stated

that aspiring teacher leaders “need to be prepared for collaboration and interactive leadership, dynamic leadership, and career-long professional development” (p. 277). The principal’s function in facilitating and actively participating in teacher leadership, although thoroughly covered in the body of literature, rarely receives careful study and examination. Furthermore, very limited knowledge about the “ processes principals enact to initiate teacher leadership roles and build or strengthen culture in this respect” (Mullen & Jones, 2008, p. 329). Undoubtedly, principals must foster an environment that promotes teacher leadership in the school setting.

**Conditions that promote teacher leadership.** Not all schools embrace the development of teacher leaders, especially informal teacher leadership, so the principal is instrumental in providing a welcoming environment and fostering the conditions that promote teacher leadership. This includes: (1) providing a safe environment for risk taking; (2) encouraging teacher leaders; (3) eliminating obstacles, specifically obstinate teachers, and (4) offering meaningful, ongoing professional development (Danielson, 2007).

Encouraging risk taking in a safe environment builds teacher confidence for expressing creative ideas to solve difficult problems (Danielson, 2007). School administrators facilitate this process by providing a safe environment and encouraging teachers to take purposeful, professional risks. In addition, administrators need to make a commitment to cultivating teacher leaders by being proactive in assisting teachers to acquire leadership skills in the areas of data analysis, meeting facilitation, and supervision (Danielson, 2007; Patterson & Patterson, 2004; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Moreover, principals benefit from creating a culture that celebrates teacher leaders who “create a culture that honors teachers who step outside their traditional roles and take on leadership projects” (Danielson, 2007, p. 19). Finally, if teachers are to emerge as leaders and fully contribute to their schools, they need opportunities to learn leadership skills through professional development (Darling-Hammond, Bullmaster & Cobb, 1995; Danielson, 2007; Guskey, 2003; Sparks, 2009).

## **Professional Development**

Hirsh (2009) defines professional development as focused and continuous learning through inquiry, data analysis, dialogue, and reflection to increase capacity and improve practice. Likewise, Crawford et al. (2010) define professional development as an opportunity for teachers to “take responsibility for contributing to the ongoing dialogue and work through which school

communities are envisioned, formed, and nurtured” (p. 32). York-Barr and Duke (2004) asserted that professional development provides teachers with authentic collaboration, inquiry, and decision-making experiences. Not only does this type of professional development increase teacher leadership pedagogy, but also enhances their confidence, courage, and collaboration, thus empowering them to seek leadership positions and find their professional voices (Crawford et al, 2010).

Historically, professional development has supported teachers by emphasizing teacher learning (Blasé & Blasé, 1999) and focusing on professional growth (Fullan, 2001). Sparks (2009) found that professional development occurs through collaboration and is effective because relevant information is shared, diverse perspectives are provided, and reflective practices are promoted (Blasé & Blasé, 1999). Furthermore, Zepeda (1999) recommended three areas of focus: (1) research-based professional development that is time-appropriate, (2) systematic professional development that engages teachers in collaborative activities, and (3) effective professional development that improves teachers’ learning of content and leadership knowledge. Moreover, in a nationwide study, Drago-Severson (2007) found four initiatives that school leaders use to foster teacher learning and leadership: teaming/partnering, providing leadership roles, engaging in collegial inquiry, and mentoring. While Sparks (2009), Zepeda (1999), and Drago-Severson (2007) discussed effective approaches to professional development, Guskey (2003) “analyzed 13 different lists of the characteristics of effective staff development” (p. 748) from professional organizations and found they varied widely, were inconsistent, and sometimes contradictory.

Moreover, in a review of 1,300 studies, Yoon, Duncan, Lee, Scarloss and Shaply (2007) found that despite the need for high quality professional development, “there remains a shortage of such programs—[that are] characterized by coherence, active learning, sufficient duration, [and] collective participation (p. 1). Additionally, Yoon et al. (2007) asserted that single-shot, one-day workshops are a “particular target for criticism” (p. 1) as these workshops tend to be “intellectually superficial, disconnected from deep issues of curriculum and learning, fragmented, and noncumulative” (Ball & Cohen, 1999, p. 3). Consequently, school leaders have a responsibility to provide systematic, ongoing, and effective professional development to cultivate and sustain teacher leadership capacity in their schools.

As a result, the literature is robust in studies related to professional development for content training; however, gaps exist that address school-based professional development focused specifically on building leadership capacity through leadership training. The literature discussed district-sponsored professional development models (Hirsh, 2009; Lambert, 2003) with an emphasis on cultivating leadership skills, specifically for leadership positions; however, on-going, school-based professional development that supports leadership skills in teachers is less prevalent. As a result, state standards for effective professional development, mentoring practices, and teacher leadership capacity building will be discussed.

**Virginia’s standards for effective professional development.** According to the National Staff Development Council, professional development is a “comprehensive, sustained and intensive approach to improving teachers’ and principals’ effectiveness in raising student achievement” (Hirsch, 2009, p. 12). The Virginia Department of Education (2004) asserts that high-quality professional development should:

1. improve and increase teachers’ knowledge of the academic subjects the teachers teach, and enable teachers to become highly qualified if they are teaching in a federal core content area;
2. be sustained, intensive, and classroom-focused in order to have a positive and lasting impact on classroom instruction and teachers’ performance in the classroom;
3. be based on, aligned with, and directly related to Virginia’s Standards of Learning;
4. be structured on scientifically-based research demonstrated to improve student academic achievement or substantially increase the knowledge and teaching skills of teachers;
5. be sponsored by school divisions, colleges, universities, organizations, associations, or other entities experienced in providing professional development activities to teachers and instructors;
6. be delivered by individuals who have demonstrated qualifications and credentials in the focus area of the professional development;
7. support the success of all learners including children with special needs and limited English proficiency;
8. provide training for teachers in the use of technology so that technology and technology applications are effectively used in the classroom to improve teaching and



learning in the curricula and federal core academic subjects in which the teachers teach;

9. promote the use of data and assessments to improve instruction; and
10. be reviewed for high quality and evaluated after completion to determine if the intended results were achieved (Virginia Department of Education, 2004).

These standards demonstrate the need for principals to provide school-based professional development that builds teacher leadership capacity in an effort to “enlist, mobilize, and motivate others to apply their abilities and resources to a given cause” (Eyal & Roth, 2011, p. 256).

**Mentorships.** According to Hansford and Ehrich (2006), mentoring can be defined as a structured and coordinated approach where individuals “agree to engage in a personal and confidential relationship that aims to provide professional development, growth and varying degrees of personal support” (p. 39). Additionally, they assert that mentoring differs from peer tutoring because a mentor demonstrates “greater experience, influence, and achievement” (Jacobi, 1991, p. 513). Furthermore, Drago-Severson (2007) affirms that through mentoring, principals can provide teachers with one-on-one professional development that assists them in broadening their perspectives, sharing their expertise and leadership, and supporting their own learning.

The literature has adequately addressed the benefits and concerns of mentorships. Kiltz (2003) asserted that teacher leaders benefit from being nurtured in a setting that fosters authentic dialogue, trusting relationships, and self-reflection. Moreover, Daresh (2004) noted increased confidence, professional competence, improved communication skills, and collegiality. Furthermore, Hansford and Ehrich (2006) found that mentees reported support, the sharing of ideas, and job-embedded professional development to be positive outcomes of their mentoring experiences. More recently, Mathur, Gehrke, and Kim, (2013) found that mentors perceived the greatest benefit of mentoring to be the opportunity to reflect; whereas, the mentees found the increase in their knowledge base and confidence to make day-to-day decisions the most significant benefit. Negative outcomes for mentors and mentees consist of the length of time required to see growth—sometimes as long as six months to a year (Kelehear, 2003)—a lack of time and a mismatch of personalities or expertise (Hansford & Ehrich, 2006) as well as difficulties sustaining focus, limited resources, and inadequately prepared mentors and mentees (Daresh, 2004).

Zepeda (1999) postulated that mentoring opportunities provided participants opportunities to increase their knowledge and reflective practices. Thereafter, Drago-Severson's (2007) research on principals as professional development leaders found mentoring to be one of four practices that supports teacher learning and leading. She maintained that "mentoring creates relationship roles that are less public and formal" (p. 108), enhances ownership in the organization, and operates on a one-to-one relationship, providing a more personalized learning environment and enhancing self-development. According to her research, most principals held the philosophy that mentoring was to "share leadership, strengthen relationships within their school, help adults manage change and diversity, and, of course, support teacher learning" (p. 110).

Mentorships, an alternative to single-shot workshops and in-services, provide teacher leaders with meaningful, on-going professional development. This type of professional development enhances collaboration and shared decision-making (Darling-Hammond et al., 1995). It also assists "principals in their role as professional development leaders to more effectively support teacher learning and growth" (Drago-Severson, 2007) and build teacher leadership capacity.

**Teacher leadership capacity building.** According to Lambert (1998), leadership capacity consists of "broad-based, skillful involvement in the work of leadership" (p. 3); hence, the need for principals to build leadership capacity in their schools is essential (Lambert, 2003). Hence, Lambert identified core principles that administrators share when they build and sustain leadership capacity: (1) leadership capacity is enhanced when administrators develop and support the leadership experiences in stakeholders; and (2) building leadership capacity in individuals strengthens the overall capacity of the school. Accordingly, principals build leadership capacity through purposeful professional development, mentorships, support, trustful relationships, and collaborative activities (Lambert, 2003). Patterson and Patterson (2004) affirm that building teacher leadership capacity mobilizes "the capacity of teachers to strengthen student performance and develop real collaboration within the school" (p. 77). Moller and Pankake (2006) assert that through collective work administrators can engage teachers in shared leadership and collaborative relationships, thus shaping school culture and capacity (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001; Lambert, 2003; Taylor et al., 2011). By empowering teachers to participate in the creation of policy, the writing of curriculum, and the improvement of student

achievement (Danielson, 2007; Fullan, 2001), “principals create an environment conducive to teacher leadership and empowerment” (Mullen & Jones, 2008, p. 330).

Building teacher leadership can present a challenge to some principals depending on their leadership style. According to Lambert (2003), directive principals practice top-down management style; this style stifles innovation and risk-taking. Laissez-faire leadership is disjointed and individualistic; whereby the principal’s vision and purpose is only shared with selected stakeholders. This practice eliminates shared decision-making and conveys a culture of distrust due to the lack of transparency. However, a collaborative principal uses “reflection, dialogue, inquiry, and action to build leadership capacity by first building a community within the school” (Swinney, 2010, p. 58). This type of principal can transition into a capacity building principal who encourages open dialogue and welcomes teachers’ perspectives and experiences. In their longitudinal, qualitative study, Youngs and King (2002) made a similar finding: “Effective principals can sustain high levels of capacity by establishing trust, creating structures that promote teacher learning, and...helping teachers generate reforms internally” (p. 643).

Although the literature adequately addresses the topics of teacher leadership and capacity building, it rarely examines the topics of professional development, singular topics and ongoing sessions, and their impact on building leadership capacity. Underrepresented in the literature as well is the principal’s role in facilitating ongoing teacher leadership professional development is also underrepresented in the literature (Mullen & Jones, 2008). As a result, it is the researcher’s intention to contribute to the literature focused on utilizing professional development to build teacher leadership capacity because “powerful professional development can transform schools into places which all adults and students are deeply engaged in learning and making meaning of their lives” (Christie, 2009, p. 461).

### **School Level Outcomes**

Creating and sustaining teacher leadership capacity produces major outcomes at the school and district level. In a qualitative case study conducted by Mullen and Jones (2008) that explored principals’ practices and teacher growth, the researchers found that when leaders provided educators with opportunities to exercise leadership in their buildings, they felt more satisfied and valued. They also had a better understanding of the “critical roles they played in the overall success of their schools (p. 336). Additionally, teachers felt empowered to make

suggestions for school improvement (Mullen & Jones, 2008). Moreover, Birky et al. (2006) study on encouraging, discouraging and motivating teachers in school leadership activities reported that teachers “received meaning and personal reward from their teacher leadership activities” (p. 92) and experienced personal satisfaction with student and school growth.

In addition to experiencing personal and professional satisfaction, teacher leadership reduces isolation, increases ownership in the school community, improves communication, and encourages new learning (Barth, 2001). These factors contribute to a second meaningful outcome—improved school culture. Building teacher leadership capacity affords educators the opportunity to become “owners and investors in the school, rather than mere tenants” (Barth, 2001, p. 449). Moreover, it positively impacts a school leader’s ability to distribute leadership, sustain the organization, and build school-level capacity (Crowther et al., 2002).

**Distributive leadership.** Another outcome of teacher leadership at the school level is the potential for distributive leadership. Since the role of the principal has shifted from manager to instructional leader (Reeves, 2004), it has become more complex and demanding, thereby creating structures that support shared leadership and building leadership capacity that “engender competent and effective involvement of teachers in the leadership of schools” (Richardson, 2003, p. 202).

Gibb (1954) described distributive leadership as a fluid structure, passing from one person to another. Later, Johnson (1997) expanded the definition to include the “collective efforts of many” (p. 2). More recently, Spillane et al. (2001) extended the definition to focus on leadership that is disseminated and performed by several people, including the formal leader. Finally, in their overview of the literature on teacher leadership, Muijs and Harris (2003) discussed the theory of distributive leadership as it pertained to teacher leadership. They asserted that distributive leadership (1) includes the activities of many groups of teachers who work to effectuate change; (2) involves a distribution of leadership over multiple leaders through interaction with one another, and (3) implies interdependency versus dependency, “embracing how leaders of various kinds and in various roles share responsibility” (p. 31). Indeed, the success of a school does not rely on the principal alone; success is dependent on the collective effort of the team (Spillane, 2005).

Because distributive leadership stretches over multiple leaders in a school, it has the potential to “build new ways for schools to be organized for continuous improvement” (Taylor et

al., 2011, p. 920) if principals can relinquish some control and power to embrace a collaborative leadership style rather than a bureaucratic one (Harris, 2012). While distributive leadership is not yet the norm in schools, teacher leadership makes the need for shared leadership structures apparent” (Taylor et al., 2011, p. 920). Moreover, “if effective change is the goal, then principals need to know how to collaborate with teacher leaders through mentoring and distributive leadership practices to develop high-performing teacher leaders” (Birky et al., 2006, p. 90).

**Sustainability.** Because distributive leadership is an “organic activity, dependent on interpersonal relationships and connects” (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006, p. 696), it promotes sustainability in school improvement, teacher retention, and professional growth (Hargreaves & Fink, 2003). Extrapolating from their work with six schools involved in school improvement, Hargreaves and Fink (2003) found school leaders promoted sustainability by (1) protecting deep learning in their schools; (2) supporting teachers in their learning; (3) providing opportunities to participate in shared leadership, and (4) ensuring lasting improvement—at the student, teacher and school level. Likewise, the time devoted to develop and build teacher leadership capacity, as well as the effort expended to create and support meaningful leadership roles, sustains the school culture and organization (Lambert, 1998).

**Building school capacity.** Current principals are expected to be visionaries and change agents, instructional leaders and facility managers, budget analysts and community builders (Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, Meyerson & Orr, 2007). Undoubtedly, they need the assistance of teacher leaders to effectively and efficiently lead a school. Thus, it can be “deduced that the time a principal spends building leadership capacity is extremely valuable in that the greater the number of teachers prepared to lead” (Burke, 2009), the greater the opportunity to further develop school capacity.

In their two-year study of professional development and school capacity, Newmann, King, and Youngs (2000) defined school capacity as “the collective power of the full staff to improve student achievement school-wide” (p. 261). In addition, they identified five aspects of school capacity: (1) teachers’ knowledge, skills, and dispositions; (2) professional community; (3) program coherence; (4) technical resources, and (5) principal leadership (Newmann et al., 2000, p. 259). Although their key findings were multifaceted, two specifically related to building school capacity and professional development: in order to boost school capacity,

professional development should address all five aspects of school capacity, and there is a “strong association between principal leadership and comprehensive professional development (p. 292). Accordingly, principals striving to increase school capacity through a systematic process of building of teacher leadership and purposeful professional development should acknowledge that such efforts require small, constant, and collective efforts. In time, these efforts form into a pattern of continuous improvement and sustainability.

## **Conclusion and Implications**

A review of the literature shows that the role of the principal has evolved over the last five decades. The primary charge of a school leader is to be an instructional leader who consistently works to raise student achievement, provide meaningful professional development, and meet the needs of all students. Because of the increasing demands placed on principals, they seek ways to share the responsibility of leading a school. Developing and mentoring teacher leaders affords school leaders the opportunity to build leadership capacity within the building. The literature supports the need for school leaders to build teacher leadership capacity in order to meet the ever-changing demands placed upon principals.

In the last three decades, there has been an increased interest among education researchers addressing the need for school improvement through teacher leadership. They cite a shared sense of purpose, engagement, and collaboration as key factors to the acceptance of leadership roles. However, the literature suggests there are still many obstacles to overcome if school leaders hope to engage educators in the practice of teacher leadership. These obstacles include (1) clearly defining and sharing the characteristics of teacher leadership; (2) defining the roles of teacher leaders and utilizing teachers to their fullest capabilities; and (3) differentiating between formal and informal leadership roles. Once the obstacles have been addressed and remedied, principals can develop teacher leaders and build leadership capacity in their schools.

Principals move teachers into leadership positions by increasing their readiness, removing barriers, and taking an active role in the capacity building process. Building on successful classroom experiences, interests, and dedication to the profession, principals influence teachers to embrace leadership roles. Administrators continue to build teacher leadership capacity by reducing or eliminating barriers such as limited time, knowledge, or experience. By

creating an inviting environment as well as providing mentorships and focused professional development, administrators enhance teacher leadership capacity in their schools.

A review of the literature establishes that professional development enhances teacher learning, confidence, collaboration, and professional growth, which, in turn, empowers them to seek leadership positions. However, Guskey (2003) found a lack of consistency in the characteristics of effective staff development. In addition, Yoon et al. (2007) found a shortage of high quality professional development as well as an overabundance of single-shot professional development. Accordingly, deficits exist in the quality of professional development offered to teacher leaders.

The quality of professional development offered to teacher leaders impacts a school leader's ability to create and sustain teacher leadership capacity as well as school capacity. This, in turn, affects school level outcomes, specifically school culture, sustainability, student achievement, and school improvement.

Based on the emergent themes and gaps in the literature on building teacher leadership capacity through school-level professional development, the researcher examined teacher and principal perspectives. The examination included an analysis of (1) principals' behaviors that teachers perceive as empowering or constraining in their development as teacher leaders, (2) teachers' perceptions of the quality of professional development they receive in comparison to the type they feel they need, and (3) principals' perceptions of the effectiveness of their decision-making process to build teacher leadership capacity.

## **CHAPTER III**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to identify principals' perceptions of their need and efforts to build teacher leadership capacity through school-level supports and professional development at the high school level as well as teachers' perceptions of their ability to act as teacher leaders having participated in school-level supports and professional development. The study examined how teachers in six high schools within one school division in Southeastern Virginia utilized various types of job-embedded leadership opportunities and professional development training to exercise teacher leadership. The study also explored principals' perceptions of the impact of professional development opportunities on teacher leadership capacity building in the school. The results of this study can provide schools and divisions with deficiencies in the types, quality, and breadth of professional development offered to build and sustain teacher leadership capacity that positively impacts school level outcomes.

#### **Research Design, Methodology & Justification**

To explore principals' and teachers' perceptions of the development and utilization of staff development opportunities, a qualitative research approach was used and an interpretative methodology was followed. According to Merriam (2009), interpretative research "assumes that reality is socially constructed, this is, there is no single, observable reality. Rather, there are multiple realities, or interpretations, of a single event" (p. 8), and it is an appropriate approach if the purpose is to describe, understand, or interpret. A qualitative approach most appropriately allowed for the experiences of the participants to be shared, offering insights not available through a survey.

The study was conducted in two phases: individual principal interviews and teacher focus group interviews. The principal interviews were conducted first, followed by the focus group interviews. Before the interviews, participants were asked to complete a questionnaire (see Appendix A) that recorded demographic information used in the data analysis phase of the study. The information from the interviews was audio-taped and transcribed. Afterwards, the transcriptions were coded, triangulated, member checked, and peer debriefed.



## **Research Questions**

This study sought to answer the following questions:

1. How do principals and teachers perceive school-based leadership's ability to develop teacher leadership capacity in high schools through supports and professional development?
2. How do principals and teachers perceive teachers' ability to serve as teacher leaders in high schools?
3. What do principals and teachers perceive are the additional supports needed to develop teacher leadership in high schools?

## **Site and Sample Selection**

This study was conducted in one school division in southeastern Virginia. There are seven high schools and two centers in this division. One center educates students in grades 7-9, and the other provides vocational education and flexible scheduling. Both centers were excluded from the study because they do not provide a comprehensive, traditional educational program. One high school principal chose to not participate in the study, so one of the six high schools in the division was excluded from the study. High schools were chosen for their larger population of teachers and teacher leadership opportunities as well as the limited amount of research available at the high school level.

Two sampling techniques were used. A purposeful sampling method (Creswell, 2014) was used to choose the sites and principals. All principals were asked to participate in individual interviews, whereas the selection of teachers needed to be narrowed. In order to capture the responses of both teacher leaders and non-teacher leaders, a random sampling method (Merriam, 2009) was utilized. The researcher solicited volunteers from each school and then randomly selected three teachers from each location to participate in the focus group. The researcher provided the school principal with a detailed e-mail to forward to the faculty to request volunteers for the focus group interviews (see Appendix B). Volunteers were instructed to e-mail the researcher directly if they were interested.

## **Data Collection Procedure**

The researcher completed the required training for Human Subjects Protection and received a Certificate of Completion (see Appendices C and D). After receiving approval from the doctoral committee to proceed with the study, the researcher submitted an application to the Intuitional Review Board (IRB) to comply with federal regulations and guidelines related to conducting research with human subjects. Upon receiving IRB approval, the researcher sought approval from the Director of Staff Development who oversees approvals for research studies in the school division. Afterwards, the researcher contacted the principals and teachers for interviews.

The researcher initiated contact, in-person or by telephone, with each principal to discuss the purpose of the study, set an appointment for their interview, and request assistance with securing teacher volunteers for the focus group interviews (see Appendix E). When e-mail responses were not received from the teachers at an individual school, the researcher made a follow-up phone call to the principal of the school. A statement of informed consent was shared with participants prior to the interviews (see Appendix F). Thank you messages were sent to each participant (see Appendix G).

## **Instrument Design & Gathering Data**

Interviews were conducted at the home schools at a time that was convenient for the participants. Interviews lasted approximately forty-five minutes. Each interview was audio-recorded and transcribed by the researcher with the permission of the interviewees. Once transcribed, the researcher solicited feedback from some of the participants in the form of member checks (Merriam, 2009). The researcher took “preliminary analysis back to some of the participants” (Merriam, 2009, p. 217) and asked if the interpretations were accurate. The principal and teacher interview questions are attached as Appendices H and I.

The researcher included a Research Question Matrix (Table 1) that links the two open-ended research questions with a structured set of interview questions that facilitated conversational-like responses (Merriam, 2009) rich in detail and data.

Table 1

*Research Question Matrix*

<b>Research Question</b>	<b>Principal Interview Question</b>	<b>Teacher Interview Question</b>
Q1: How do principals and teachers perceive school-based leadership's ability to develop teacher leadership capacity through supports and professional development?	What types of teacher leadership do you make available to teachers?	What types of teacher leadership opportunities are available to teachers?
	In what ways do you capitalize on teacher strengths to raise student achievement?	In what ways does the principal capitalize on teacher strengths to raise student achievement?
	What types of professional development do you offer teachers that develop and/or sustain teacher leadership?	What types of professional development does the principal offer teachers that develop and/or sustain teacher leadership?
	How do you identify the knowledge and skills teachers need to accept teacher leadership roles?	How does the principal identify teacher leaders?
	How effective is the teacher leadership structure in this school?	How effective is the teacher leadership structure in this school?
	How do you think teachers perceive your ability to build and support teacher leadership capacity in this school?	How do you perceive your principal's ability to build and support teacher leadership capacity in this school?
	Describe your strategic plan for building and supporting teacher leadership capacity that will sustain this organization?	

(table continued)

Table 1 (cont.)

<b>Research Question</b>	<b>Principal Interview Question</b>	<b>Teacher Interview Question</b>
Q2: How do principals and teachers perceive teachers' ability to serve as teacher leaders?	What characteristics do teachers need to possess for you to consider them a teacher leader ready for mentorship?	What characteristics would your principal need to possess for you to consider him/her an effective mentor?
	What prevents teachers from seeking leadership opportunities? How do you combat this?	How does having a strong mentor relationship with an administrator affect your ability to be a teacher leader? How does it affect your desire?
	What do you think motivates teachers to take action to improve your school, raise student achievement, or lead in some capacity?	What motivates you to take action to improve your school, raise student achievement, or lead in some capacity?
Q3: What do principals and teachers perceive are the additional supports needed to develop teacher leadership?	How would you like to adjust or change your professional development offerings to better prepare teachers for teacher leadership opportunities?	How should the principal adjust or change your professional development offerings to better prepare you for teacher leadership opportunities?
	What additional supports do you think teachers need to accept leadership responsibilities or enhance their emergent skills?	What additional supports do you need to feel more comfortable accepting leadership responsibilities?

### **Data Treatment & Management**

After conducting the individual interviews with principals and the focus group interviews with teachers, the researcher immediately transcribed the interviews from the audiotapes and destroyed the recordings after member checks were conducted to preserve interviewee

confidentiality. During the transcription, each interviewee was assigned a nondescript identifier to maintain anonymity. Principals were assigned a P1, P2, and etc., code whereas teachers were identified by a T1, T2, and etc. code. During the research process, all identifying files were locked in a filing cabinet in the researcher's home. At the conclusion of the successful defense, identifying documentation was destroyed.

### **Data Analysis Technique**

After the interviews were transcribed, the researcher read and reviewed each transcription twice, checking for accuracy and listening for nuances in tone not accessible in transcription. The researcher also compared field notes from a reflexive journal taken during the interviews and immediately afterwards with the interview transcripts to capture the entire experience. "Observation is a research tool when it is systematic, when it addresses a specific research question, and when it is subject to the checks and balances in producing trustworthy results" (Merriam, 2009, p. 118). Afterwards, the researcher coded the transcripts, using a shorthand designation to label various themes as they emerged (Merriam, 2009). After assigning codes, themes and relationships were identified and documented (Merriam, 2009). Finally, the researcher grouped the themes into categories and used charts and tables to organize data and clarify key findings.

### **Validity**

Creswell (2014) reported that qualitative validity "means that the researcher checks for the accuracy of the findings by employing certain procedures" (p. 201). In an effort to maintain the internal validity of this study, the following actions were taken: triangulation of data, member checks, peer debriefing, and disclosure of researcher bias. According to Creswell (2014), triangulation is the process of corroborating "different data sources of information by examining evidence from the sources and using it to build a coherent justification for themes" (p. 201). This study triangulated principal responses, teacher responses, and field notes.

To alleviate the possibility of misinterpretation, member checks were utilized to verify emergent findings from some of the interviewees (Merriam, 2009). "This is the single most important way of ruling out the possibility of misinterpreting the meaning of what participants say and do..." (Maxwell, 2005, p. 111). Principals were e-mailed a transcript of the interview to

review. They were asked to make corrections and add comments in red so they were readily noticeable. This member checking practice also minimized transcriber error. To provide validity to the teacher focus groups, a colleague attended the interview and observed the focus group. Afterwards, the colleague reviewed the transcripts. This practice served as another form of triangulation.

Creswell (2014) reported that peer debriefing, “involving an interpretation beyond the researcher and invested in another person—adds validity to an account” (p. 202). Therefore, a colleague read selections from the transcripts and checked the accuracy of the researcher’s coding.

Researcher bias can have a significant impact on the validity of a study. Maxwell (2005) asserts that, “The research relationship you establish can facilitate or hinder the other components of the research design, such as participant selection and data collection” (p. 83). The researcher is currently employed with the division in which the study was conducted, so the researcher took additional steps to prevent researcher bias in the home school with the principal and focus group interview. The focus group interview was conducted by a colleague and both principal and focus group interviews were transcribed by a colleague. The principal and focus group participants were emailed a copy of the transcription to review. Finally, a second colleague reviewed the audio recordings transcriptions for accuracy.

## **Timeline**

After receiving permission from the dissertation committee, IRB, and the Director of Staff Development for the selected school division, the researcher made contact with high school principals in August and appointments were set. Principal interviews and teacher focus group interviews were conducted in September and October. Reminder e-mails and phone calls were conducted on a weekly basis as necessary. An analysis of the data was completed by the end of December.

## **Methodology Summary**

Based on a review of the literature, the researcher chose a qualitative research approach and used an interpretative methodology for this study. Principals and teachers from six high schools within a school division in Southeastern Virginia were interviewed. Once the interviews

were completed, the researcher transcribed them, using a coding method and recorded the data and themes. Research-based steps were taken to validate the study and protect the confidentiality of the participants. The results of the analysis are discussed in Chapter Four.

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **PRESENTATION OF DATA AND ANALYSIS**

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of this study was to identify principals' perceptions of their need and efforts to build teacher leadership capacity through school-level supports and professional development at the high school level as well as teachers' perceptions of their ability to act as teacher leaders having participated in school-level leadership opportunities and professional development. The researcher interviewed six high school principals individually and conducted six focus group interviews comprised of high school teachers. The setting for this study was an urban school division in southeastern Virginia.

#### **Research Questions**

The participants responded to twelve open-ended questions that provided insights into the following research questions:

1. How do principals and teachers perceive school-based leadership's ability to develop teacher leadership capacity in high schools through supports and professional development?
2. How do principals and teachers perceive teachers' ability to serve as teacher leaders in high schools?
3. What do principals and teachers perceive are the additional supports needed to develop teacher leadership in high schools?

Although the findings cannot be generalized, it was the intention of the researcher to provide data that may be able to inform schools and divisions regarding the types, quality, and breadth of supports and professional development offered to build and sustain teacher leadership capacity that positively impacts school level outcomes.

#### **Participant Descriptions**

The six principal participants provided a varied sample (see Table 2). Their years of experience as principal ranged from three to nineteen years with a mean of 10.2 years of experience. All but one participant served as principal in this study's school division exclusively. Principals' ages ranged from 35 to 58 with a mean age of 49.5 years old. Four principals were



male and two were female. Also, four principals identified themselves as White and two as Black.

Table 2

*Principal Demographics*

	<b># Years Principal</b>	<b># Years Principal in Division</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Ethnicity</b>
Principal 1	5	5	52	Male	White
Principal 2	19	4	53	Male	Black
Principal 3	15	15	58	Male	White
Principal 4	11	11	52	Female	Black
Principal 5	8	8	47	Male	White
Principal 6	3	3	35	Female	White

The focus groups were comprised of three participants from each school. Teachers' years of experience ranged from 2 to 33 years with a mean of 16.83 years of experience. Teachers' years of experience teaching in the division varied slightly: two to 30 years. Participants taught in their current subject area for 2 to 25 years; the content areas represented were English, mathematics, history, world languages, special education and technology. Teacher ages ranged from 29 to 58 with a mean of 42.3. Ten males and eight females participated in the focus groups. Ethnicity included Hispanic, Asian, Black and White (see Table 3).

Table 3

## Teacher Demographics

	<b># Years Teaching</b>	<b># Years Teaching in Division</b>	<b># Years in Current Position</b>	<b>Content Area</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Ethnicity</b>
Teacher 1	2	2	2	History	36	Male	Hispanic
Teacher 2	4	4	4	History	29	Female	Asian
Teacher 3	32	23	6	Special Education	53	Female	White
Teacher 4	18	14	13	Technology	51	Male	White
Teacher 5	9	3	3	English	30	Female	White
Teacher 6	26	26	10	Technology	48	Male	White
Teacher 7	13	13	13	English	39	Female	White
Teacher 8	16	16	16	English	39	Male	Black
Teacher 9	18	15	15	English	46	Female	Hispanic
Teacher 10	30	30	25	Mathematics	51	Female	Black
Teacher 11	34	30	25	Mathematics	58	Male	White
Teacher 12	17	17	17	Special Education	46	Male	Black
Teacher 13	33	30	3	Mathematics	55	Female	White
Teacher 14	20	11	9	Technology	44	Male	White
Teacher 15	4	4	4	History	27	Female	White
Teacher 16	12	12	12	Mathematics	36	Male	White
Teacher 17	6	6	6	Technology	31	Male	White
Teacher 18	9	9	9	World Languages	42	Male	White

## Data Presentation and Explanation

The principals' and teachers' perceptions of efforts to develop teacher leadership capacity through supports and professional development were analyzed through the responses to twelve interview questions. Seven questions focused specifically on teacher leadership in the school; three interview questions concentrated on teachers' readiness, barriers and motivations, and two interview questions addressed additional supports needed to build teacher leadership at the school level. The findings were organized to each interview question in the following order: those emerging from the principals' perspectives (individual interviews) followed by the teachers' perspectives (focus group interviews). Quotations were used to describe the perceptions, feelings, and attitudes of the principals and teachers. Emergent themes are listed in Table 25 followed by a summary of the participant responses.

**Research question 1:** How do principals and teachers perceive school-based leadership's ability to develop teacher leadership capacity in high schools through supports and professional development?

**Teacher leadership opportunities.** When asked to discuss the types of teacher leadership opportunities principals make available to teachers, principals listed the following: department chair, presenter, Professional Learning Community (PLC) leaders, committee chairpersons, mentors, team leaders, and administrative interns (see Table 4). Every principal named the department chair opportunity and four of six administrators listed presenter and committee chairpersons as a leadership role. "We will find someone that's doing something different, neat, innovative things; we'll ask them to do training for other teachers" (P1, 140-42). Another principal shared,

The PLC process creates teacher leaders in that they're asked to collaborate and share. They're asked to share what they're doing in their classrooms and what's working for them and that's significant. They're being asked to share with other teachers, which to me are a basic form of leadership and it works (P1, 13-8).

Table 4

*Principal Responses to Available Teacher Leadership Opportunities*

<b>Principal Responses</b>	<b>P1</b>	<b>P2</b>	<b>P3</b>	<b>P4</b>	<b>P5</b>	<b>P6</b>
Presenter	X	X	X	X		
Department Chair	X	X	X	X	X	X
PLC/Team Leader	X	X				X
Mentor	X	X				X
Committee Chair	X		X		X	X
Administrative Intern		X	X		X	

When teachers were asked about teacher leadership opportunities available to them, five of the six focus groups discussed PLC leaders as a leadership opportunity. “We are allowed to lead in services; we are allowed to come up with initiatives, and we are allowed to come up with collaborative PLC plans” (FG1 T1 /3-5). Only three of the six groups listed presenters, department chairs, committee chairpersons and mentors as leadership opportunities (see Table 5). Additionally, the teachers who participated in the focus groups also listed coaches, club and activity sponsors, and tutors as leadership opportunities. “I think there are lots of opportunities than can be filled. They are always looking for coaches” (FG2T1, /19-20).

Table 5

*Teacher Responses to Available Teacher Leadership Opportunities*

<b>Focus Group Responses</b>	<b>FG1</b>	<b>FG2</b>	<b>FG3</b>	<b>FG4</b>	<b>FG5</b>	<b>FG6</b>
Presenter	X	X		X	X	
Department Chair	X		X	X		
PLC/Team Leader	X		X	X	X	X
Mentor	X	X		X		
Committee Chair		X	X			
Coaches/Sponsors/Tutors		X	X	X		

**Identifying teacher leaders.** There was little consistency among principal responses to the question how do you identify the skills and knowledge teachers need to accept leadership

roles. Their responses included: content knowledge, observation, strong relationships with students, test scores, and administrative degrees (see Table 6). Three principals discussed the importance of communication, specifically individual academic discourse and/or conversation with their teachers to ascertain their potential for teacher leadership. Principal 4 shared that, “getting to know the teachers... can determine if that person has the ability to lead others” (144-47). Principal 6 asks teachers: “What are you in to? What do you think your strengths are? What are the areas you’d really like to delve into a little bit more? Where do you need a little bit more assistance?” (161-64).

Table 6  
*Principal Responses to Identifying Teacher Leaders*

<b>Principal Responses</b>	<b>P1</b>	<b>P2</b>	<b>P3</b>	<b>P4</b>	<b>P5</b>	<b>P6</b>
Content Knowledge	X			X		
Observation						X
Relationships with Students			X			
Test Scores				X		
Administrative Degrees					X	
Communication Skills	X	X				X
Past Successes		X			X	

Teachers were varied in their responses to how the principal identifies teacher leaders. They cited observations volunteerism and test scores as answers (see Table 7). One teacher shared, “The principal observes teacher in the school and around the building and in all the activities that (s)he is able to see who the natural leaders are” (FG4T1, 138-40). Teacher 2 continued: “I think some of our tests scores are also evaluated as to whether or not we are able to function in a leadership capacity in a certain subject area” (141-43). However, all teacher focus groups stated that a teacher’s prior successes played a role teacher leader identification. “It’s mostly teachers that have shown themselves, willing to go above and beyond their regular classroom duties. They may be the ones the principal might select to give more responsibilities to” (FG6T2, 134-37).

Table 7

*Teacher Responses to Identifying Teacher Leaders*

<b>Principal Responses</b>	<b>FG1</b>	<b>FG2</b>	<b>FG3</b>	<b>FG4</b>	<b>FG5</b>	<b>FG6</b>
Observation				X		X
Test Scores				X		
Volunteerism	X	X				
Past Successes	X	X	X	X	X	X

**Capitalizing on teacher strengths.** According to the principals interviewed, four of the six capitalize on teacher strengths to raise student achievement by encouraging or assigning teachers to lead professional learning communities (PLC). One principal stated, “We want them to share what they do through the PLC process...they have good ideas and we want them to present them in there” (P3, 175-84). A second principal responded,

It’s important that teachers understand the trends and the highs and lows in their content area so they can make more informed instructional decisions. We do a lot with analysis of data [in PLCs]. We look at longitudinal data whether its attendance, or reading scores, especially for students coming from the elementary level. We try to participate in conversations with other schools in order to help our kids make the transition when they get here (P2, 119-26).

Other responses included recognition, presenting during in-service trainings, coordinating special programs, co-teaching, and mentoring other teachers (see Table 8).

Table 8

*How Principals Capitalize on Teacher Strengths*

<b>Principal Responses</b>	<b>P1</b>	<b>P2</b>	<b>P3</b>	<b>P4</b>	<b>P5</b>	<b>P6</b>
Presenter	X			X		
Department Chair	X				X	
PLC/Team Leader		X	X	X	X	
Recognition			X	X		
Mentorships			X			X

Teachers in four of the six focus groups reported that principals capitalized on their content expertise to raise student achievement (see Table 9). Teachers in one focus group acknowledged their principal’s practice: “(S)He really likes to focus on your expertise, what you’re comfortable with, what (s)he personally feels you can handle. I think (s)he makes a good judgment based on personality and what your potential may be in certain leadership roles” (FG2T1, l26-28). Another teacher stated her principal “often utilized those teachers to help with struggling students in the building, or asked [teachers] to lead tutoring sessions for students in the building” (FG4T4, l10-12). Teacher 1 elaborated, “We have a tendency to help teachers who seem to be struggling; we help each other with coming up with lesson plan ideas and whatever kind of help anybody needs” (FG4, l15-16).

Table 9

*Teachers’ Perceptions of how Principals Capitalizing on Teacher Strengths*

<b>Focus Group Responses</b>	<b>FG1</b>	<b>FG2</b>	<b>FG3</b>	<b>FG4</b>	<b>FG5</b>	<b>FG6</b>
Leadership Committees	X	X				
PLC	X			X		
Content Expertise		X	X	X	X	
Mentorships				X		X

**Professional development offerings.** When asked what types of professional development they offered, all six principals reported they offered instructional in-services such as rubric and common assessment training. Other opportunities included mentorships, professional leave for conferences, guest speakers, and articles of the month that contain instructional strategies to develop and sustain teacher leadership (see Table 10). In addition, several principals administer surveys to the staff to determine their needs.

We take an interest survey among the teachers and determine exactly what type of development we need. We focus on things that are unique to this building. I give my teachers a chance to lead different professional development activities so they become the experts in presenting material that may assist teachers in their subject area or that may have an impact on other teachers across the curriculum (P2, l44-52).

Two principals elaborated further: “Sometimes we have the luxury of sending teachers out to trainings and workshops. It’s the train-the-trainer model. They understand when they go out, they have to come back and train the staff” (P2, 159-62). Principal 5 sent a teacher to Pennsylvania who attended a Flipped Classroom training, brought the information back, and facilitated staff development training to those who wanted to learn more about it. “We probably have 3 or 4 teachers who are flipping classrooms based on the opportunity they had to learn about it from the teacher who went to the training and shared with other teachers what was going on” (P5, 160-64).

Table 10

*Principals Responses to Professional Development Offerings*

<b>Principal Responses</b>	<b>P1</b>	<b>P2</b>	<b>P3</b>	<b>P4</b>	<b>P5</b>	<b>P6</b>
Mentorships	X		X			
Instructional In-services	X	X	X	X	X	X
Conferences					X	
Guest Speakers						X
Article of the Month			X	X		

All six teacher focus groups reported that principals provided instructional in-services as a type of professional development (see Table 11). One teacher reported, “I think this year especially there has been more of a push instructionally toward teacher development. An administrator arranges for people to come in to help us with informative assessments. It’s grab and go stuff I find is really helpful” (FG2T1, 152-55). Furthermore, four of the focus groups discussed participation in PLCs as an opportunity to obtain professional development through academic discourse or modeling. One focus group shared:

I know there was a little bit of people not wanting to do the PLCs, but now that we have been doing them people are finding a lot of value in the PLCs because we have an opportunity as teachers to sit down and play off each other’s strengths and to sit down and reflect and that makes a big difference as well (FG4T1, 131-35).



Table 11

*Teachers' Responses to Professional Development Offerings*

<b>Focus Group Responses</b>	<b>FG1</b>	<b>FG2</b>	<b>FG3</b>	<b>FG4</b>	<b>FG5</b>	<b>FG6</b>
Instructional In-services	X	X	X	X	X	X
Model instructional strategies	X					
Article of the Month	X					
PLC Discussions		X	X	X	X	

**Teacher leadership structures.** When asked how effective the teacher leadership structure was in their schools, the principals offered responses that ranged from very effective to emerging (see Table 12). Only 33% of the principals reported a very effective rating. One principal stated,

We've created that hierarchy and have given opportunities and our doors are always open for questions. If your teachers know you're willing to work with them, they will ask questions. Our staff and culture supports that. Leadership is a component of it, but it's also just being heard (P1, /81-85).

Principal 2 shared, "I think it's very effective. Four years ago we were very comfortable in what we were doing. That's because we were very successful. Since I've been here, we've redefined success" (/101-103). Conversely, another principal reported,

Probably nowhere near as much as it should be...I don't have a formal structure for that. There are positions and things and opportunities, but I don't really have something structured to say let's step out; it's your opportunity to be a teacher leader; let's do that. It should probably be more structured and part of what we do (P3, /333-338).

After sharing an average rating to the interview question, Principal 5 reflected:

Maybe somebody in a school does have a formal leadership program that is very, very structured which ours is not. It's just having opportunities, seeking the ones we see as leaders. So there is probably somebody that has fantastic leadership skills that we don't see, that we haven't approached and given them that opportunity individually (/142-147).

Table 12

*Principals' Perceptions of the Effectiveness of Teacher Leader Structures*

<b>Principal Responses</b>	<b>P1</b>	<b>P2</b>	<b>P3</b>	<b>P4</b>	<b>P5</b>	<b>P6</b>
Very effective	X	X				
Average					X	
Functional						X
Emerging			X	X		

Teachers shared the same range of responses as principals, varying from very effective to informal (see Table 13). In addition, there were differing opinions within the same focus group. One teacher reported:

I think it is very effective. From a professional and personal standpoint, I think that they are all awesome individually, and they work really well together as a team. I think that there is a hierarchy in the sense that you know which person to go to, there is great communication; things are addressed in a timely manner. I think it's pretty effective (FR2T1, 1103-108).

Another teacher offered:

I think ... that [it] works well generally functioning. As with any organization I am sure there are areas for improvement and some people that could be involved that aren't, but we are very busy group so you have a lot of people that are busy and sometimes you can't focus all your efforts on completely on that (FG3T1, 193-97).

A different teacher focus group shared, "It seems less of a structure and more kind of a--almost veiled as to who is. It's based on which teachers come out of their responsibilities to do more. I think a lot of people think it's vague as far as how people take on more leadership roles" (FG6T2, 143-46). Another participant in the same focus group continued. "I think it needs improvement. More teachers need to take a more active role in leadership in this school" (FG6T3, 147-48).

Table 13

*Teachers' Perceptions of the Effectiveness of Teacher Leader Structures*

<b>Focus Group Responses</b>	<b>FG1</b>	<b>FG2</b>	<b>FG3</b>	<b>FG4</b>	<b>FG5</b>	<b>FG6</b>
Very effective	X	X		X		
Effective	X					
Functional			X			
Somewhat inconsistent			X			
Informal	X					

**Principals' ability to support teacher leadership.** Principals had mixed responses to teachers' perceptions of their ability to support teacher leadership capacity in their school; three of six which were positive (see Table 14). Their responses ranged from strong to uncertain. One principal commented,

I think they see it as being strong...They know I'm supportive of them. If you put me in a position where I can support you, I'll support you to a fault. If you put me in a position where I can't support you, you put me in a bind. It's not an us against them mentality; it's a collaborative effort (P1, 1112-1117).

Principal 2, who reported a "positive" rating, shared,

I think my teachers recognize the fact that I don't mind giving them an opportunity to grow. I'm in the business of helping anyone I possibly can...My teachers understand that I'm open to new ideas and that I'm flexible and I want to think outside of the box because I want to do what's in the best interest of my school (P2, 1166-1173).

Whereas Principal 3 stated, "I think they would feel it more if there was some structure in place" (1338-339).

Table 14

*Principals' Perceptions of their Ability to Support Teacher Leadership*

<b>Principal Responses</b>	<b>P1</b>	<b>P2</b>	<b>P3</b>	<b>P4</b>	<b>P5</b>	<b>P6</b>
Strong						
Positive	X	X	X			
Mixed					X	
Uncertain				X		X

The teacher focus groups shared similar opinions of their principal’s ability to support teacher leadership capacity (see Table 15). Only two groups volunteered a strong rating. One teacher commented, “I perceive it to be 100% open and encouraging and supportive of teachers who want to try something different and challenging and innovative” (FG1T1, /159-161). A teacher from Focus Group 2 reported,

I think our principal is able to read the energy in the group well and always tries to pivot when things aren’t working to make things more effective to support. Our principal is constantly reiterating this and supporting each other and so having that constant reminder and overall feeling that support is helpful. I think our principal definitely may not succeed all of the time but is definitely trying (T1, /147-152).

Focus Group 3, who reported a “mixed” rating shared, “I think the opportunities are there to build but...I have felt here that a lot of the support comes from the assistant principals” (T2, /189-193).

Table 15

*Teachers' Perceptions of Principal's Ability to Support Teacher Leadership*

<b>Focus Group Responses</b>	<b>FG1</b>	<b>FG2</b>	<b>FG3</b>	<b>FG4</b>	<b>FG5</b>	<b>FG6</b>
Strong	X	X				
Positive				X		
Mixed			X		X	
Uncertain						X

**Strategic plan for building and supporting teacher leadership.** Principals were asked to describe their strategic plan for building and supporting teacher leadership capacity in their schools. Once again, responses were varied with only two categories receiving two acknowledgements—positive communication and mentorship (see Table 16); however, none of the principals provided a detailed plan. Only a few mentioned some component of a strategic plan. One principal focused on the identification of leaders, communication and mentorship. “You identify those folks early on, folks that can support you. Nurture those relationships, talk about expectations, support, your vision and mission of the building and bring them with you and walk them through the process” (P1, 1106-109). Another principal discussed the value of professional development. “My strategic plan is, number one, making sure professional development is on the forefront” (P2, 1139-140). Another reported no plan at all: “I have never really thought about a plan for teacher development that way” (P3, 1388-389).

Table 16

Strategic Plan for Building and Supporting Teacher Leadership

<b>Principal Responses</b>	<b>P1</b>	<b>P2</b>	<b>P3</b>	<b>P4</b>	<b>P5</b>	<b>P6</b>
Identifying leaders	X					
Positive communication	X					X
Mentorship	X					X
Professional development		X				
Surveys				X		
No plan			X		X	

Some consensus existed in principals’ and teachers’ perceptions in the principals’ ability to develop teacher leadership capacity through school-level supports and professional development. Both principals and teachers identified similar teacher leadership opportunities, specifically the department chair position. Additionally, principals and teachers recognized that school leadership capitalizes on teacher strengths by utilizing teacher leaders to facilitate professional learning communities. Likewise, principals and teachers agreed that the professional development offerings at the school-level develop and enhance the teacher in instructional leadership. Differing opinions were voiced concerning the identification of teacher leaders. Principals’ responses varied with strong communication skills identified by only half the

principals. Contrary to principals’ responses, teachers reported principals identified teacher leaders based on teachers’ past successes. Finally, principals reported a lack of consistency and comprehensiveness in their strategic plan to build and support teacher leadership capacity at the high school level.

**Research question 2:** How do principals and teachers perceive teachers’ ability to serve as teacher leaders in high schools?

**Characteristics of teacher leaders and mentors.** When principals were asked what characteristics teachers needed to possess for principals to consider teacher leaders ready for mentorship, 83% of the principals discussed instructional competence and 66% of principals cited strong communication skills (see Table 17). Otherwise, the responses varied. “They must be instructionally sound. They must be content area experts and they must have the ability to communicate well with others and be able to give and receive feedback” (P6, 1139-141).

Table 17

*Principals’ Perceptions of Teacher Leaders and Mentors Characteristics*

<b>Principal Responses</b>	<b>P1</b>	<b>P2</b>	<b>P3</b>	<b>P4</b>	<b>P5</b>	<b>P6</b>
Instructionally Competent	X	X	X	X		X
Strong Communication Skills	X	X		X		X
Relationship Builder	X	X		X		
Common Sense	X				X	
Self-Starter		X		X		

Teachers were asked what characteristics would their principal need to possess for them to consider him/her an effective mentor. Sixty-six percent of the teacher focus groups reported knowledge, a positive role model and a positive attitude as characteristics necessary for effective mentorship (see Table 18). When discussing the importance of knowledge, one teacher commented on the need for a principal to be knowledgeable of his staff and their talents;

Another characteristic that principals need to have is that they need to be a good facilitator. They need to use effectively the talents of the people they have and direct what’s going on and redirect when things are going wrong and that’s something we’ve all described that we’ve seen in the building (FG4T1, 1201-205).

Table 18

*Teachers' Perceptions of Teacher Leaders and Mentors Characteristics*

<b>Focus Group Responses</b>	<b>FG1</b>	<b>FG2</b>	<b>FG3</b>	<b>FG4</b>	<b>FG5</b>	<b>FG6</b>
Knowledgeable	X	X		X		X
Strong Communication Skills		X	X	X		
Relationship Builder	X		X			
Positive Role Model	X		X		X	X
Positive Attitude	X	X		X	X	

**Effect of strong mentor relationships.** Teachers were asked how having a strong mentor relationship with an administrator affects their ability to be a teacher leader. All six teacher focus groups reported it made them feel motivated. “I think it keeps me motivated” (FG2T1, 1271). Teacher 2, from the same focus group, continued:

It makes me excited about my job when I have someone who is excited about being in the classroom or excited you’re in the building or excited that you took the job—that type of thing. It makes me excited to be here and do it. It’s encouraging to see someone who is not just sitting in his or her office but is out in the building and is taking an active interest in what you’re doing in the classroom and your success. When they ask how you’re doing, it’s not an empty question but it is about what can I do to help you. It keeps me motivated to do better (1279-287).

Another teacher commented, “I think that it feeds your desire to do what you need to do” (FG3T2, 1297-298).

**Barriers to teacher leadership.** Asked what prevented teachers from seeking leadership opportunities and what they did to combat it, 100% of the principals reported that time prevented teachers from seeking leadership opportunities. “Leadership roles take a lot of time from their families. That’s hard to do depending upon your family situation. It’s difficult to manage the administrator’s role as related to time” (P1, 1126-128). Another principal added,

Time commitment is huge. As you know, there is so much more on our plates now than there was before. Teachers feel overwhelmed, they’re stressed, they get paid little for

everything they do and they have families. So when you're asking teachers to do more with other teachers but it's on their own time then it's hard because you're taking away from their family time (P6, 1156-161).

The principals reported they did not attempt to combat the barrier of time. They said they understood the demands already placed on teachers. While time was a consistent response to this interview question, other responses included lack of knowledge of the position, lack of skills, and lack of confidence. Other than time, there was no overlap in principal responses.

**Motivations to take action.** When asked what they thought motivated teachers to take action to improve their school, raise student achievement, and lead in some capacity, 83% of the principals responded that teacher recognition and incentives were motivators (see Table 19). One principal stated, "The fact that we celebrate one another quite often, I think that is important" (P2, 1256-257). Another principal responded, "I think recognition is important. I think the incentives create somewhat of a competition between the teachers so I think that is also a piece" (P4, 1210-212). A third principal shared, "I think some people are motivated by opportunity; they will do if they think it is going to get them somewhere" (P5, 1260-261). Three of the six principals listed intrinsic motivation as a reason for teachers to take action. "They are educators and they want to give back to kids. You know, this is where they work; they want to improve the school. They want pride in this school" (P5, 1272-274).

Table 19  
*Principals' Perceptions of What Motivates Teachers*

<b>Principal Responses</b>	<b>P1</b>	<b>P2</b>	<b>P3</b>	<b>P4</b>	<b>P5</b>	<b>P6</b>
Students				X	X	
Recognition/Incentives		X	X	X	X	X
Intrinsic Motivation			X	X	X	
Supportive Leadership	X	X				X
Collaboration			X		X	

Contrary to the principals' perceptions of what motivates teachers to improve their school, raise student achievement, and lead in some capacity, all six teacher focus groups reported they are motivated by their students (see Table 20).



It's all about the kids. My motivation is constantly trying to make it better for them. I think being a teacher and working with them all the time is very selfless in the fact that you are always working for them. No matter how much sleep you get or don't get, I think at the end of the day we try to do what is best for the students in our building (FG3T1, 1317-324).

Another teacher shared, “I’m invested in everybody—any kid that comes though” (FG6T2, 1248). Teacher 1 from Focus Group 4 declared, “Love of students. We care about our students and we want them to succeed. And that means doing what it takes—whether it’s improving the school, improving the classroom, improving my teaching style. We love our kids” (1249-252). Four of the six focus groups report intrinsic motivation was also a motivator. One teacher stated, “I want to be the best; I want to work at the best school. I want my school to be thought of as the best” (FG6T3, 1140-141). Another teacher shared, “[I] try to be motivated by my personal drive” (FG3T1, 1328).

Table 20  
*Teachers’ Perceptions of What Motivates Teachers*

Focus Group Responses	FG1	FG2	FG3	FG4	FG5	FG6
Students	X	X	X	X	X	X
Intrinsic Motivation	X		X	X		X
Supportive Leadership				X		

Principals perceived teachers had the ability to lead or serve as a mentee if they were instructionally competent and possessed strong communication skills. Principals also reported time as the significant barrier to teacher leadership and that teacher were motivated to take action by recognition and incentives. Teachers reported they sought knowledgeable leaders who acted as positive role models and possessed a positive attitude to be their mentors. They maintained this type of leader motivated them to participate in mentor/mentee relationships. However, teachers reported that students motivated them to improve their school, raise student achievement, and lead.

**Research question 3:** What do principals and teachers perceive are the additional supports needed to develop teacher leadership in high schools?

**Additional supports needed.** When principals responded to what additional supports they thought teachers needed to accept leadership responsibilities or enhance their emergent skills, 100% of the principals agreed that teachers needed more opportunities and authentic experiences. Principal 2 explained:

They need opportunities. There are several opportunities within the division. Some type of interest survey should be available for those that have aspirations of becoming leaders. I know we have the leadership program for those wanting to assistant principals, but we also need academies for other specialty areas such as guidance counselors, English specialists, and those wishing to deal with pupil discipline. There are a number of opportunities we have but what limits a division is manpower and time. I think that is certainly something that becomes an obstacle for us as a division. We have the time to deal with what we perceive as the most immediate need, which is training individuals that may take over our schools one day. We're just looking at the top tiered positions in the schools, which are the principals. What about the other individuals that are in place to support the principals? I think we need to spend more time in developing those (184-98).

Principal 5 asserted that opportunities eliminate barriers for teachers. "Give them the opportunity to do this. This is what it is; some of that helps them break some of those barriers they perceive they have to do or can do" (1123-125). In addition to more opportunities and authentic experiences, other responses included coaching, encouragement, and confidence (see Table 21).

Table 21

*Principals' Perceptions of Additional Supports Needed*

<b>Principal Responses</b>	<b>P1</b>	<b>P2</b>	<b>P3</b>	<b>P4</b>	<b>P5</b>	<b>P6</b>
More Opportunities	X	X	X	X	X	X
Authentic Experiences	X	X	X	X	X	X
Coaching			X	X	X	
Encouragement					X	
Confidence					X	

While principals perceived teachers need more opportunities, teachers in all six teacher focus groups reported they needed clear descriptions of leadership roles and clear expectations for those roles. One teacher explained,

I think that there always needs to be clear expectations. In other words, when talking about leadership responsibilities that administration may want a teacher to be part of, I think they just need to always spell out the clear expectation of what is involved and what it entails (FG1T3, 1183-190).

A teacher from Focus Group 2 concurred: “I think that the biggest thing that would make me feel more at ease would be details and more information on what I’m doing, what the expectations are and possibly examples” (T1, 1202-205). Another focus group addressed consistency: “I think the professional development in general needs to be more consistent—maybe more narrowed for a year or two. If we have a professional development training and then six months later it switches to another topic, it’s kind of hard to follow up on. So I think it should be fewer topics with a narrower range and follow up for a year or two” (FG6T2, 157-61). Other singular responses from teachers included support, mentors, autonomy, and time (see Table 22).

Table 22

*Teachers’ Perceptions of Additional Supports Needed*

<b>Teacher Responses</b>	<b>FG1</b>	<b>FG2</b>	<b>FG3</b>	<b>FG4</b>	<b>FG5</b>	<b>FG6</b>
Description of Leadership Role	X	X	X	X	X	X
Clear Expectations	X	X	X	X	X	X
Support	X					
Mentors	X					
Autonomy		X				
Time						X

**Changes to professional development opportunities.** Principal responses to the question how would you like to adjust or change your professional development offerings to better prepare teachers for teacher leadership opportunities lacked consistency. Their responses included additional time, a more structured program, varied offerings, more teacher presenters

and distance learning opportunities (see Table 23). Only two of the six principals reported similar changes—additional structure and distance learning opportunities.

Table 23

*Principals' Responses to Changes to Professional Development Opportunities*

<b>Principal Responses</b>	<b>P1</b>	<b>P2</b>	<b>P3</b>	<b>P4</b>	<b>P5</b>	<b>P6</b>
Additional Time	X					
More Structured/Systematic			X		X	
Varied Offerings				X		
Teacher Presenters				X		
Incorporate Technology-Distance Learning		X				X

Likewise, the focus group responses lacked congruency. Their responses oscillated between teacher input on the professional development offerings, professional development that was offered to all teachers, additional teachers as presenters, distance learning opportunities for teachers receive professional development outside the structured school program and no change (see Table 24). One teacher stated, “We do a lot of professional development that is in person. It takes in-service time, planning, and afterschool time and it would be nice to see opportunities using distance learning” (FG4T1, 176-78). Another teacher offered, “Most of the professional development has been about equity and dealing with students, not so much as taking teachers from a teaching role to leadership positions” (FG6T2, 124-27).

Table 24

*Teachers' Responses to Changes to Professional Development Opportunities*

<b>Focus Group Responses</b>	<b>FG1</b>	<b>FG2</b>	<b>FG3</b>	<b>FG4</b>	<b>FG5</b>	<b>FG6</b>
Teacher Input on Offerings	X				X	
Offered to All Teachers			X			
Teachers as Presenters				X		
Distance Learning Opportunities				X		X
No Change		X	X			

## Emergent Themes

As displayed in this study, the principals had the opportunity to reflect upon and share their perceptions their perceived need and efforts to build teacher leadership capacity through school-level supports and professional development. In addition, teachers received the opportunity to share their perceptions of their ability to act as teacher leaders having participated in school-level leadership opportunities and professional development. All participants appeared to express their feelings and opinions candidly. Furthermore, they appeared relaxed in their responses. Table 25 includes some prevalent and emerging themes that were developed during the review of these data.

Table 25

### *Emergent Theme*

Teacher Leadership Capacity	School Level Supports	Professional Development
Instructional leadership	Inconsistency in school-level teacher leadership structures	Instructional
Varying perceptions of teacher leadership among principals and teachers	Vague, unstructured strategic plans for supporting teacher leadership	Mentorships
Barriers to teacher leadership Time	Opportunities and experiences	Administrative/leadership opportunities
Motivation for teacher leadership Recognition Students	Clear expectations	Professional learning communities

## Summary

In conclusion, this chapter presented the data and analysis from this qualitative study and the emergent themes that explored the principals' perceptions of their perceived need and efforts to build teacher leadership capacity through school-level supports and professional development as well as teachers' perceptions of their ability to act as teacher leaders having participated in school-level leadership opportunities and professional development. The next chapter will

provide a summary, discussion and implications of the findings as well as discuss the implications for practice and make recommendations for future studies.

## CHAPTER V

### FINDINGS, IMPLICATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

#### **Introduction**

This chapter provides a review of the purpose of this study and research questions, followed by a discussion of the findings, implications for practice, and suggestions for further studies. The researcher's reflection on the process and experience of conducting this study will conclude the chapter.

The purpose of this study was to identify principals' perceptions of their need and efforts to build teacher leadership capacity through school-level supports and professional development at the high school level as well as teachers' perceptions of their ability to act as teacher leaders having participated in school-level leadership opportunities and professional development. The researcher sought to examine the following research questions:

1. How do principals and teachers perceive school-based leadership's ability to develop teacher leadership capacity in high schools through supports and professional development?
2. How do principals and teachers perceive teachers' ability to serve as teacher leaders in high schools?
3. What do principals and teachers perceive are the additional supports needed to develop teacher leadership in high schools?

A qualitative research approach was used and an interpretative methodology was followed to examine the perceptions of the interviewees. The findings are presented below.

#### **Summary of Findings**

This research study produced several findings. Those findings are identified, explained, and related to prior research.

**Finding 1: Principals and teachers perceived both formal and informal leadership roles as an opportunity to develop leadership capacity.** Principals and teachers identified numerous teacher leadership opportunities at the school level that were considered formal and informal leadership roles. All principals reported department chairs and two-thirds listed in-service presenters as formal opportunities to develop teacher leadership capacity; whereas 83%

of the teachers reported PLC/team leaders and 66% listed in-service presenters as opportunities. Other informal opportunities included coaches and tutors. Through collaboration, training, and sharing at the team or school level, teacher leaders emerged.

This finding supports Daley's (2002) assertion that formal and informal leadership roles prompt the development of new skills and increase growth while developing personal ability, interpersonal aptitude, and organizational capacity. It also supports the findings of York-Barr and Duke (2004), who found that as teachers develop in their leadership roles, the principal, teachers, and students benefit from their knowledge and expertise.

**Finding 2: Principals offered professional development that developed the instructional leader.** Interviews revealed that 100% of the principals interviewed in this study provided in-service trainings and leadership experiences that enhanced instructional leadership capacity such as differentiated instructional strategies, the development of rubrics, and the analysis of common assessment data. Additionally, all principals provided instructional leadership opportunities such as department chair, in-service presenter, and PLC leaders. Furthermore, one-third reported offering mentorships and research-based instructional articles on a monthly basis.

The practice of offering instructional leadership supports the research of Hallinger (1992), Blasé and Blasé (1999), and The Wallace Foundation (2012), which maintains that instructional leadership is a key factor for improving student achievement.

**Finding 3: Principals did not offer professional development that developed leadership capacity.** During the interviews, no interviewed principal mentioned in-service trainings that provided leadership skills training. Specifically, principals did not offer professional development that focused on leadership skills such as effective communication skills, problem-solving, conflict resolution, or organizational leadership skills. Additionally, principals did not reference leadership capacity building in mentorships; their responses focused specifically on the development of the instructional leader.

This finding contradicts Danielson (2007), who asserts that leaders are expected to be managers as well as instructional leaders. Di Paola and Tschannen-Moran (2003) also recognize the need for leaders to manage critical tasks and communicate well with stakeholders as well as act as instructional leaders. Furthermore, Hirsh (2009) and Lambert (2003) identify the need for teacher leadership professional development that emphasizes the cultivation of leadership skills.



Zepeda (1999) also recommends leadership knowledge in addition to content professional development because leadership professional development enhances teachers' ability to better lead.

**Finding 4: Principals and teachers perceptions varied on the effectiveness of the teacher leadership structure in their schools.** Responses from interviewees ranged from emerging to very effective. Additionally, responses within the same focus group ranged widely. Consistency in the level of effectiveness of the leadership structures in the division's high schools was lacking. No concrete examples of the leadership structure were provided in the responses.

This finding conflicts with best practices as reported by Mujis and Harris (2003) who found that teacher leadership is a "central component in securing and sustaining schools improvement" (p. 443). The finding also contrasts with the research of Harris and Lambert (2003) who found that teacher leadership structures promote a sense of purpose, engagement, and collaboration among teachers who serve as teacher leaders.

**Finding 5: Principals' strategic plans for building and supporting teacher leadership at the school level lacked consistency and comprehensiveness.** Each principal shared a different, fragmented strategic plan or no plan for building and supporting teacher leadership. Some of the principals discussed some professional development as a plan for building teacher leadership capacity while others mentioned no plans. Eighty percent of the principals provided at least one example, and one principal acknowledged having no plan at all. None of the principals shared a comprehensive plan.

Many researchers assert that building and supporting teacher leadership capacity is essential (Danielson, 2007; Fullan, 2001; Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001; Lambert, 2003; Moller & Pankake, 2006; Patterson & Patterson, 2004; Taylor et al., 2011). It is accomplished through purposeful professional development, mentorships, and collaborative activities (Lambert, 2003). Furthermore, it strengthens student performance and develops collaboration within schools (Patterson & Patterson, 2004).

**Finding 6: Teachers were motivated to become teacher leaders when they developed a strong mentor relationship with their principal.** Teachers shared that they experienced excitement, a sense of motivation, and desire to embrace leadership opportunities when they had

a personal, helping relationship with their principal. They indicated they were inspired by the supportive relationship.

This finding supports the research of Hansford et al. (2003) who found that an established mentoring relationship between principals and teacher leaders contributes to the process of developing leadership capacity. This is also in line with Mullen and Jones (2008) who postulated that teachers felt more satisfied, valued, and had a better understanding of their role in the overall success of the school as well as Kurtz (2009) who asserted that supportive mentor relationships contribute the improved school culture.

**Finding 7: Principals perceived time to be the most significant barrier to teachers seeking leadership opportunities.** One hundred percent of the principals offered a lack of time as the most important barrier to teachers seeking leadership opportunities. They attributed familial commitments and additional responsibilities as time barriers.

The research of Crawford et al. (2010) supports this perception; however, the researchers cite other reasons as well. These additional barriers include formal leadership structures, principal leadership styles (Crawford et al., 2010) and tension among colleagues (Wilson, 1993).

**Finding 8: Principals believed teachers needed more opportunities and experiences in leadership.** One hundred percent of the principals interviewed shared that teachers need more opportunities and experiences at the school level as well as the division level. These opportunities not only include administrative preparation, but also opportunities for specialty areas to include reading specialists, guidance counselors, and program coordinators.

This finding supports Danielson's (2007) assertion that teacher leadership has the capacity to move beyond the classroom and impact the school and district. When afforded opportunities and experiences outside of the classroom, teachers can extend their reach to impact policies and programs, student achievement, and collegial effectiveness.

**Finding 9: Teachers reported they needed clear expectations and descriptions of leadership roles.** All teacher focus group responses contradicted the principals' assertions that teachers need more opportunities and experiences. One hundred percent of the teacher focus groups reported they needed specific descriptions of leadership roles and clear expectations of those roles to feel more comfortable accepting leadership responsibilities.

Mullen and Jones (2008) report that principals must foster an environment that promotes leadership in the school setting. Lambert (2003) found that extending understandings, developing

norms, and communicating effectively empower teachers to embrace teacher leadership opportunities. Moreover, the research of Darling-Hammond et al. (1995); Danielson (2007); Guskey (2003), and Sparks (2009) assert that teachers need opportunities to learn leadership skills through professional development. Teachers' conflicting responses to the principals' replies suggest that teachers needs differ from principals' perceptions of what teachers need to embrace leadership roles.

**Finding 10: Principals and teachers failed to identify a consistent set of recommendations to improve professional development opportunities.** There was no consistency in the responses from the principals or teachers. The recommended changes focused on additional time, varied offerings, and distance learning opportunities. No one specifically addressed research-based topics, ongoing training versus one-shot in-services, or mentoring.

According to Zepeda (1999), professional development should be research-based and time-appropriate, systematic and collaborative, and focused on content and leadership knowledge. Drago-Severson (2007) asserts that professional development should consist of teaming/partnering, providing leadership roles, engaging in collegial inquiry, and mentoring. The lack of consistency supports the need for a systematic, ongoing, and effective professional development structure that cultivates and sustains teacher leadership capacity at the school level.

### **Implications for Practice**

The results of this study have implications for teachers, principals and division-level leaders. They may be able to inform schools and divisions regarding the types, quality, and breadth of school level supports and professional development offered to build and sustain teacher leadership capacity that positively impacts school level outcomes. The implications for practice are presented below.

**Implication 1: Teachers should advocate for the types of professional development that will enhance their teacher leadership abilities.** When teachers examine the quality and quantity of school-level support and professional development offerings, they are better able to make meaningful recommendations to the administrative team for relevant changes. According to Eyal and Roth (2011), Lambert (2003), and Richardson (2003), the quality of teacher leadership in a school is directly linked to student achievement and school outcomes.

Consequently, part of the burden to continuously improve teacher leadership falls to the teachers to identify and communicate their professional needs.

**Implication 2: Principals should examine ways to build a culture that supports teacher leadership.** The literature on teacher leadership clearly discusses the benefits and advantages of seeking teacher leadership opportunities (Harris & Lambert, 2003; Mujis & Harris, 2003; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). According to Harris and Lambert (2003), it promotes a sense of purpose, engagement, and collaboration as well as develops new skills and growth (Daley, 2002). It also improves school culture, student success, and communication (Richardson, 2003; Taylor et al., 2011), so principals should identify barriers, challenges, and misconceptions and foster a culture and climate that encourages mentor relationships and opportunities to lead.

**Implication 3: Teachers and principals should engage in on-going, collaborative discussions to share teacher leadership professional development needs and expectations of leadership roles.** The lack of consistency between principals' and teachers' perceptions in barriers to teacher leadership, additional supports required, and improvements needed in professional development offerings suggest that significant misconceptions exist. Lambert (2003), in her seminal research on teacher leadership, discusses the importance of extending understandings between the principal and staff by establishing communication processes. Clarifying needs, expectations, and roles will enable principals to empower teachers to embrace leadership roles, and cultivate a culture of sustainability, collaboration, and motivation (Giles & Hargreaves, 2006).

**Implication 4: Principals should consider expanding professional development to include a focus on leadership skills and instructional leadership.** In order to be effective teacher leaders, teachers need a combination of leadership and instructional leadership professional development. Offering professional development that focuses on improving communication, problem-solving, and conflict-resolution skills in addition to on-going instructional leadership professional development would further enhance teachers' leadership abilities and confidence levels (Danielson, 2007; Sparks, 2009).

**Implication 5: Principals should develop and implement a strategic plan for building and supporting teacher leadership capacity in their schools.** Principals cannot expect teachers to assume leadership roles without preparation or mentoring (Crawford et. al., 2010; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). In order to avoid one-shot, fragmented, or limited professional

development, principals need to devise a strategic plan that will sustain teacher leadership capacity, improve student achievement and positively affect school outcomes. Likewise, principals must focus their efforts on developing teacher leaders if their schools are going to improve (Mullen & Jones, 2008).

**Implication 6: School division leaders should provide opportunities for teacher professional development that focuses on leadership skills.** Because teacher leadership capacity contributes to improved school culture, communication, and collaboration as well as positively impacts student achievement (Richardson, 2003; Taylor, 2011), school division leaders must support their principals in developing a systematic, strategic plan and implementing professional development opportunities. The evolving role of the principal requires them to inspire teacher leadership in order to create transformative change (Devaney, 2014); however, they require the support of the school division leaders to plan, implement, and sustain a systematic program.

**Implication 7: Principals should develop mentoring plans to support the development of teacher leaders.** Because teachers reported an increased sense of motivation and principals reported a need for teachers to have leadership experiences, principal should develop and maintain mentoring relationship with teachers to build leadership capacity in schools. A mentoring plan would also assist principals with the creation and expansion of a strategic professional development plan.

Hansford et. al. (2003) reported that the mentoring relationship between principals and teacher leaders builds teacher leadership capacity. In addition, mentor relationships contribute the improved school culture (Kurtz, 2009).

### **Recommendations for Future Studies**

1. Future research with a specific focus on the types of professional development that emphasizes organizational leadership would provide teachers with the knowledge and skills they need to confidently accept leadership roles.
2. Further studies on the principal's role in planning and facilitating ongoing teacher leadership professional development could assist principals in creating and maintaining a strategic plan to build teacher leadership capacity.

3. Expanding the research on the relationship between teacher leadership capacity and school level outcomes could provide schools and divisions with data to further develop their professional development offerings.
4. Replicating or expanding this research to encompass a school division or multiple school divisions would provide school divisions or states with findings that could be generalized to develop and implement meaningful supports and professional development offerings for multiple schools.

## **Summary**

In this examination of principals' and teachers' perceived needs and efforts to build teacher leadership capacity through school-level supports and professional development, multiple findings and implications for practice emerged. It became evident that school-level supports and professional development need to be supportive, systematic, and strategic. Teacher leadership should be viewed as a mechanism to improve student achievement, engender a sense of confidence and motivation in teachers, and sustain organizational capacity.

## **Reflections**

I embarked upon this investigative journey with the intention of researching the impact of professional development on a principal's ability to build and sustain teacher leadership capacity at the school level. After completing the literature review and meeting with my dissertation committee, I shifted my focus to researching principals' perceptions of their perceived need and efforts to build teacher leadership capacity through school-level supports and professional development in addition to teachers' perceptions of their ability to act as teacher leaders having participated in school-level leadership opportunities and professional development. I was motivated to shift my focus because the understandings gained from this research would immediately and directly impact my ability to develop and sustain teacher leadership capacity. I also felt this new focus would illuminate some of the reasons teachers seem to be less interested in pursuing leadership positions, slowly depleting the teacher-to-administrator pipeline.

Since conducting the literature review and interviews, I have gained tremendous knowledge and skill in developing teacher leadership capacity through school-level supports and purposeful professional development. The knowledge acquired through the interviews has

altered the types and style of professional development I recommend and present. It also motivated me to continually seek input and feedback from teachers, specifically in regards to teacher leadership and professional development. It is my intention to share this information with the superintendent's staff so we may create and implement a consistent, strategic plan of delivering school-level supports and professional development that sustains teacher leadership capacity in our division.

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**APPENDIX A**  
**PRE-INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE**

How many years have you been teaching?

How many years have you taught in this division?

How many years have you been teaching in your current position?

In what department do you currently teach?

What is your age?

What is your gender?

What is your ethnicity?

**APPENDIX B**  
**EMAIL REQUEST FOR TEACHER VOLUNTEERS**

Dear Teacher,

My name is Lisa Harding and I am a doctoral candidate with Virginia Polytechnic University (VT). I am currently working on my dissertation. The focus on my research study is principal and teacher perspectives on teacher leadership and professional development. Your insights and experience are very important to me, so I would like to interview you about your perception of teacher leadership in your building.

Please consider participating in this study. I value your limited time. If you choose to participate, I will only ask for one hour of your time. I will conduct a one-hour focus group interview at your school in the Principal's Conference Room on a day mutually agreed upon by the teacher volunteers between September 23 –October 28.

I would love to hear your stories of teacher leadership and recommendations for meaningful professional development. Please contact me via email (lisa.harding@xxx.xxx) or by phone at (xxx) xxx-xxxx if you are interested in participating in this research study. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,

Lisa Harding  
Doctoral Candidate

**APPENDIX C**  
**IRB APPROVAL**



**APPENDIX D**  
**LETTER FROM IRB**

**Office of Research Compliance**  
Institutional Review Board  
North End Center, Suite 4120, Virginia Tech  
300 Turner Street NW  
Blacksburg, Virginia 24061  
540/231-4606 Fax 540/231-0959  
email [irb@vt.edu](mailto:irb@vt.edu)  
website <http://www.irb.vt.edu>

MEMORANDUM

DATE: July 18, 2016  
TO: Carol S Cash, Lisa Ann Harding  
FROM: Tech Institutional Review Board (FWA00000572, expires January 29, 2021)  
PROTOCOL TITLE: Building Teacher Leadership Capacity Through School-Level Supports and Professional Development: Teachers&rsquo; and Principals&rsquo; Perspectives  
IRB NUMBER: 16-596

Effective July 18, 2016, the Virginia Tech Institution Review Board (IRB) Chair, David M Moore, approved the New Application request for the above-mentioned research protocol.

This approval provides permission to begin the human subject activities outlined in the IRB-approved protocol and supporting documents.

Plans to deviate from the approved protocol and/or supporting documents must be submitted to the IRB as an amendment request and approved by the IRB prior to the implementation of any changes, regardless of how minor, except where necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the subjects. Report within 5 business days to the IRB any injuries or other unanticipated or adverse events involving risks or harms to human research subjects or others.

All investigators (listed above) are required to comply with the researcher requirements outlined at: <http://www.irb.vt.edu/pages/responsibilities.htm>

(Please review responsibilities before the commencement of your research.)

PROTOCOL INFORMATION:

Approved As: Expedited, under 45 CFR 46.110 category(ies) 6,7  
Protocol Approval Date: July 18, 2016  
Protocol Expiration Date: July 17, 2017  
Continuing Review Due Date\*: July 3, 2017

\*Date a Continuing Review application is due to the IRB office if human subject activities covered under this protocol, including data analysis, are to continue beyond the Protocol Expiration Date.

**FEDERALLY FUNDED RESEARCH REQUIREMENTS:**

Per federal regulations, 45 CFR 46.103(f), the IRB is required to compare all federally funded grant proposals/work statements to the IRB protocol(s) which cover the human research activities included in the proposal / work statement before funds are released. Note that this requirement does not apply to Exempt and Interim IRB protocols, or grants for which VT is not the primary awardee.

The table on the following page indicates whether grant proposals are related to this IRB protocol, and which of the listed proposals, if any, have been compared to this IRB protocol, if required.

IRB Number 16-596 page 2 of 2 Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board

If this IRB protocol is to cover any other grant proposals, please contact the IRB office (irbadmin@vt.edu) immediately.

**APPENDIX E**  
**SCRIPT FOR INTERVIEW APPOINTMENTS WITH PRINCIPALS**

Hello [Principal].

My name is Lisa Harding and I am one of the assistant principals at Indian River High School. I am also a doctoral candidate with Virginia Polytechnic University (VT). Currently, I am working on my dissertation. The focus on my research study is principal and teacher perspectives on teacher leadership and professional development.

I have received permission from Dr. [Name], the Director of Staff Development, to conduct research on my dissertation. She has also granted me permission to interview the high school principals. Your insights and experience are very important to me, so I would like to interview you about your perceptions of teacher leadership in your building and how your professional development offerings affect teacher leadership.

I know your time is very valuable, so I am asking for approximately 45 – 60 minutes of your time. What day and time works best with your schedule between July 25 – August 19.

Thank you for agreeing to meet with me. I look forward to seeing you soon.

## APPENDIX F

### INFORMED CONSENT

Principals:

Welcome and thank you for your participation today. My name is Lisa Harding and I am a graduate student at Virginia Tech conducting a qualitative study in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of EdD in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies. Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview, which will take approximately 45- 60 minutes and include 12 questions regarding your experiences with teacher leadership and professional development. I would like your permission to tape record this interview so that I may accurately document the information you share. If at any time during the interview you wish to discontinue the use of the recorder or the interview itself, please feel free to let me know. In addition, you must sign a form devised to meet our human subject requirements. Essentially, this document states that: (1) all information will be held confidential, (2) your participation is voluntary and you may stop at any time if you feel uncomfortable, and (3) we do not intend to inflict any harm. Thank you for your agreeing to participate.

Your responses will remain confidential and be used to develop a better understanding of how you and other principals view topics related to teacher leadership. The purpose of this study is to increase my understanding of building teacher leadership capacity through professional development at the school level. As you respond to my questions, I would like you to address teacher leadership at the school level (not necessarily teachers going on to become administrators). This research project focuses on principals' and teachers' perceptions of developing and sustaining teacher leaders through effective professional development. The study does not aim to evaluate your techniques or experiences. Rather, I am trying to learn more about how to effectively develop teacher leaders at the school level.

Let's begin.

Teachers:

Welcome and thank you for your participation today. My name is Lisa Harding and I am a graduate student at Virginia Tech conducting a qualitative study in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of EdD in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies. Thank you for agreeing to participate in this focus group interview, which will take about 60 minutes and include 12 questions regarding your experiences with teacher leadership and professional development. I would like your permission to tape record this interview so that I may accurately document the information you share. If at any time during the interview you wish to discontinue the use of the recorder or the interview itself, please feel free to let me know. In addition, you must sign a form devised to meet our human subject requirements. Essentially, this document states that: (1) all information will be held confidential, (2) your participation is voluntary and you may stop at any time if you feel uncomfortable, and (3) we do not intend to inflict any harm. Thank you for your agreeing to participate.

Your responses will remain confidential and be used to develop a better understanding of how you and your colleagues view topics related to teacher leadership. The purpose of this study is to increase my understanding of building teacher leadership capacity through professional development at the school level. As you respond to my questions, I would like you to address teacher leadership at the school level (not necessarily teachers going on to become administrators). This research project focuses on principals' and teachers' perceptions of developing and sustaining teacher leaders through effective professional development. The study does not aim to evaluate your techniques or experiences. Rather, I am trying to learn more about how to effectively develop teacher leaders at the school level.

For clarification purposes, during the interview process, please identify yourselves by the following titles before sharing your response to the questions: Teacher 1, Teacher 2, Teacher 3, Teacher 4, and Teacher 5.

Let's begin.



**APPENDIX G**  
**THANK YOU MESSAGE TO PARTICIPANTS**

Dear [Participant],

Thank you very much for making time to meet with me and share your insights and experiences concerning teacher leadership and professional development. I truly appreciate you taking the time despite your busy schedule. If you are interested, I am willing to share my findings you.

Again, thank you for your time and consideration.

Lisa Harding  
Doctoral Candidate, VT

**APPENDIX H**  
**PRINCIPAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

1. What types of teacher leadership do you make available to teachers?
2. In what ways do you capitalize on teacher strengths to raise student achievement?
3. What types of professional development do you offer teachers that develop and/or sustain teacher leadership?
4. How do you identify the knowledge and skills teachers need to accept teacher leadership roles?
5. What additional supports do you think teachers need to accept leadership responsibilities or enhance their emergent skills?
6. How effective is the teacher leadership structure in this school?
7. How would you like to adjust or change your professional development offerings to better prepare teachers for teacher leadership opportunities?
8. Describe your strategic plan for building and supporting teacher leadership capacity that will sustain this organization?
9. How do you think teachers perceive your ability to build and support teacher leadership capacity in this school?
10. What characteristics do teachers need to possess for you to consider them a teacher leader ready for mentorship?
11. What prevents teachers from seeking leadership opportunities? How do you combat this?
12. What do you think motivates teachers to take action to improve your school, raise student achievement, or lead in some capacity?

**APPENDIX I**  
**TEACHER INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

1. What types of teacher leadership opportunities are available to teachers?
2. What types of teacher leadership opportunities are available to you? Why are different opportunities available?
3. In what ways does the principal capitalize on teacher strengths to raise student achievement?
4. What types of professional development does the principal offer teachers that develop and/or sustain teacher leadership?
5. How does the principal identify teacher leaders?
6. What additional supports do you need to feel more comfortable accepting leadership responsibilities?
7. How effective is the teacher leadership structure in this school?
8. How should the principal adjust or change your professional development offerings to better prepare you for teacher leadership opportunities?
9. How do you perceive your principal's ability to build and support teacher leadership capacity in this school?
10. What characteristics would your principal need to possess for you to consider him/her an effective mentor?
11. How does having a strong mentor relationship with an administrator affect your ability to be a teacher leader? How does it affect your desire?
12. What motivates you to take action to improve your school, raise student achievement, or lead in some capacity?