The principal's role in building teacher leadership capacity in high-performing elementary schools: A qualitative case study

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The Principal’s Role in Building Teacher Leadership Capacity in High-Performing Elementary Schools: A Qualitative Case Study

by

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education
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Dedication

I wish to dedicate this dissertation to two significant people in my life: my mother, who taught me that education is the key to life and to always believe in myself, and Dr. Richard O’ Sullivan, who inspired me to become a principal and encouraged me to pursue my doctorate. Their guidance and support from heaven have been invaluable during the writing of this dissertation.
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The Principal’s Role in Building Teacher Leadership Capacity in High-Performing Elementary Schools: A Qualitative Case Study

Rahim Jamal Jones

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to explore how public elementary school principals develop teacher leadership capacity within their schools, as well as the effect of this effort on a school’s performance. After examining a variety of sources, such as journal articles and web-based search engines, the researcher determined that there was scant information explaining the process principals undergo to create teacher leadership roles in an effort to develop a high-performing school.

To accomplish the goals of this study, salient reports in the field of teacher leadership were reviewed. The insights afforded from these reports guided the researcher in developing a field-based investigation focusing on school leaders and teachers employed in three high-performing elementary schools in central Florida.

The researcher explored features of teacher leadership that were evident in high-performing schools and sought to discover the characteristics principals seek in selecting new teachers. Also investigated were the teacher leadership opportunities created by the principals and the ways in which these roles helped to sustain the elementary schools’
high performance. Furthermore, recent school-based decisions made by the school leaders were studied.

Throughout the data, school administrators provided opportunities for teacher leadership within their schools, primarily by forming school-based committees. The results showed that principals solicited opinions from teachers, especially when it came to curriculum and instructional concerns. In addition, when sharing best practices or participating in staff-development opportunities with colleagues, teachers felt satisfied with their work environments. School leaders and teachers understood the roles they played in the overall success of their schools.

Based on the results of this qualitative study, principals can build leadership capacity at schools by first establishing a culture of trust, honesty, and professionalism between themselves and the teachers. Next, school leaders provide and support opportunities for leadership by aligning teacher strengths and roles. The researcher recommends that future research in teacher leadership examine whether the principal’s impact on teacher leadership has an affect on retention at the school level.
Chapter One

Introduction

School reform reports written during the past three decades offered various interpretations of how to improve schools. Barth (1999) conducted an exhaustive analysis of more than 250 major school reform studies and discovered that the most prevalent recommendation to improve our nation’s schools was that teachers should take on and share more of the leadership of their schools (Hicks, 2006; Holloway, 2000). School leaders must learn how to build leadership capacity for all involved in education in order to effectively restructure our schools (Ackerman & Mackenzie, 2006; Barkley, Bottoms, Clark, & Feagin, 2004; Berry, Johnson, & Montgomery, 2005; Lambert, 2005).

Teachers as leaders and their roles within schools have become the focus of much research on how to improve schools (Boyd-Dinock & McGree, 1996; Elmore, 2003; Gabriel, 2005; Jerald, 2003; Nielsen, 2001; Peel & Walker, 1994; Zmuda, Kuklis, & Kline, 2004). The Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy (1986) presented a major school reform report, *A Nation Prepared: Teachers for the 21st Century*, which supported the idea of using classroom teachers as change agents, citing them as the center of educational reform efforts and student learning and achievement Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001; Mullen, Stover, & Corley, 2001). In addition, this report emphasized the importance of creating new roles for teachers that acknowledge the centrality of classroom teaching and extend teachers’ decision-making power to school-wide leadership activities (Barkley, et al., 2004; Reeves, 2004; Troen & Boles, 1993).
Furthermore, the report made recommendations for school leaders to create a new profession of well-educated teachers and identified some key responsibilities for teachers to provide leadership in restructuring the nation’s schools (Hicks, 2006; Jerald, 2003). Examples of these responsibilities included teachers acting as curriculum developers, research coordinators, mentors, lead teachers, and school improvement teams (Ackerman & Mackenzie, 2006; Berry, Johnson, & Montgomery, 2005; Boyd-Dimock & McGree, 1996; Clandinin & Connelly, 1992; Elmore, 2003; Gabriel, 2005; Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001; Mullen, et al., 2001; Nielsen, 2001; Troen & Boles, 1993). Gayle Moller, executive director of the South Florida Center for Educational Leadership, proposed that more teacher leaders are essential in meeting the enhanced expectations of teachers and students (Moller as cited in Richardson, 1997). She also cautioned that, without teacher support, any reforms would be short lived (Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy, 1986; Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001; Lambert, 2005; Moller as cited in Richardson, 1997). If schools are going to improve, administrators and teachers must focus their efforts on student achievement, learning, and accountability (Reeves, 2006).

Background on Teacher Leadership

No major social institution has been more subject to pressure for change than the public school system (Sarason, 1996). Educational reform initiatives have been conceived throughout history; they are proposed when reformers believe that society is facing a crisis that necessitates a legitimate change in school policies or practices (Simpson & Jackson, 1997). Danitz (2000) stated that politicians and government officials, many of whom have a limited background and/or experience in education, have created some of these initiatives, and before they make critical decisions and create new policies in
education, they should consult those who know student learning and achievement best: practicing, experienced educators.

One educational reform initiative was *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). The National Commission on Excellence in Education suggested that schools were eroding and needed to improve academic achievement. It declared that our society and its educational institutions seemed to have lost sight of the basic purposes of schooling and the high expectations and disciplined efforts needed to attain them. Tyack and Cuban (1997) suggested, “For the first time in the history of our country, the educational skills of one generation will not surpass, will not equal, will not even approach, those of their parents” (p. 7). The concerns presented in *A Nation at Risk* resulted in greater challenges and better opportunities for all people involved in education, but it was especially so for those who directly managed teaching and learning in classrooms around the nation (Marzano, Walters, & McNulty, 2005; Mullen, et al., 2001; Nielsen, 2001).

Some teacher leadership roles have been characterized as representative, meaning a selected individual represents an entire grade level or department in order to share important information or insight from their group with the administration. These teachers’ leadership roles have included team leaders, department chairs, and curriculum developers, but they have had little or no impact on the school as a whole (Livingston, 1992).

Recently and increasingly, teachers have begun taking on new leadership roles, including developing operational policies and procedures, selecting materials and instructional practices, allocating school resources, determining student standards and
assessments, and assigning students to classes (Livingston, 1992; Nielsen, 2001). Other leadership roles have involved organizing schedules, planning and conducting staff development, mentoring other professionals, establishing student discipline and grading practices, and selecting and evaluating staff (Barth, 1999; Gabriel, 2005; Gehrke, 1991; Smylie, 1997). These emerging leadership roles have offered teachers opportunities to develop their leadership skills by allowing them to make decisions that improve the organization as a whole (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001; Marzano, Walters, & McNulty, 2005; Mullen, et al., 2001; Zmuda, et al., 2004). By using teacher leaders as agents of organizational change, the reform of the public school system will stand a better chance of building momentum and improving education (Barkley, et al., 2004; Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001, Reeves, 2006).

The National Association of Elementary School Principals (as cited in Ferrandino, 2002) published an article, *What Principals Should Know and Be Able To Do and Strategies for Achieving Them,* that listed six standards for principals:

1. Lead schools in a way that places student and adult learning at the center.
2. Set high expectations for the performance of all students and adults.
3. Demand content and instruction that ensure student achievement of agreed-upon academic standards.
4. Create a culture of continuous learning for adults tied to student learning and other school goals.
5. Use multiple sources of data as diagnostic tools to assess, identify, and apply instructional improvement.
6. Actively engage the community to create shared responsibility for student
and school success.

The first standard calls on principals to put student and adult learning at the center of their leadership and to serve as the lead learner—this is also known as instructional leadership (DuFour, 2002; Ferrandino, 2002). The concept of instructional leaders began to emerge out of research gathered from effective schools (Weber, 1989). Research consistently showed principals who were directly responsible for improving instruction, learning, and accountability (Blasé & Blasé, 2000; Fullan & Hargreaves, 1996; Lezotte, 1997; Pollock, 2007; Reeves, 2004, 2006; Sergiovanni, 2000). Howard (2003), a former middle school principal and assistant high school principal, defined the duties of an instructional leader: (a) provide opportunities for teachers to use the best instructional practices for their students, (b) engage in the curriculum, (c) know the curriculum, (d) know instructional strategies, and (e) move beyond the management of the building to become engaged in the academic life of the school.

Accountability

The pressures of accountability in education come from a variety of sources. The general public, state governments and federal governments have always had an interest in accountability in public education. An overwhelming percentage of adults, often 90% or higher (Public Agenda, 2000), support accountability, recognizing the appropriateness of holding public educators responsible for teaching essential material instead of permitting them to use public classrooms as forums for their personal agendas (Hess, 2003; Johnson, 2003; Public Agenda, 2000).

For many educators in Florida, the word accountability evokes mixed feelings and thoughts. In 1998, Governor Jeb Bush unveiled the Florida Comprehensive
Assessment Test (FCAT) in an effort to improve the teaching and learning of higher educational standards for public and charter schools (Florida Department of Education, 2004). Every year in March, students in Grades 3 through 10 across the state of Florida take various assessments to measure their comprehension in reading, writing, mathematics, and science. The stakes are high if students fail to perform according to a set of criteria; students who score a Level 1 (lowest level, failure) face mandatory retention and high school students are unable to graduate with a standard diploma. According to Florida statutes, if schools fail, the principal is the only person held accountable (Online Sunshine, 2007).

Although the federal government mandates schools to be accountable for what students are and are not achieving, state and individual school districts are charged with maintaining and improving achievement. On January 8, 2002, President George Bush signed the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), one of the most comprehensive acts pertaining to education. With the enactment of NCLB, the federal government made performance-based education accountability of public schools a federal mandate. NCLB was designed to emphasize four principles: stronger accountability for results, more freedom for states and communities, support for research-based educational methods, and more choices for parents (Elmore, 2003).

NCLB has had a profound effect on schools (Cawelti, 2006). Although there is a national shortage of individuals entering the teaching profession, teachers who are deemed highly qualified or fully certified (those who have completed all of the certification requirements in order to receive a professional teaching certificate in the state of Florida) were required in all classrooms by the 2005–2006 school year. Under the
new law, standardized testing for reading, mathematics, writing, and science must be
administered every year in Grades 3 through 8. Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) reports
have been created for all K–12 schools at the end of each school year to determine if state
academic standards are being met. Based on the results of the AYP, parents have the
option of transferring their children to a school that is making adequate progress if their
current school is failing. With all of the demands being placed on schools because of
NCLB, school administrators, teachers, and parents must work even more closely
together to ensure that no child is left behind.

With the increasing demands of accountability from parents, the federal
government, and the public, school principals can no longer be the sole instructional
leaders in the school (Bolman & Deal, 2002; Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001; Lambert,
2003). In order to meet daily challenges, principals must create a school culture and
student-centered accountability system that supports new roles and responsibilities for
their teachers that were previously reserved solely for themselves (Conley & Muncey,

Purpose and Rationale of the Research

Research in the field of teacher leadership has primarily focused on two premises
that help bring an understanding of the roles and importance of teacher leaders within
schools:

1. Teachers need to provide leadership in various roles in order to restructure
schools (Ackerman & Mackenzie, 2006; Barkley, et al., 2004; Berry, Johnson, &
Montgomery, 2005; Boyd-Dimock & McGree, 1996; Clandinin & Connelly, 1992;
Gabriel, 2005; Lambert, 2005; Mullen, et al., 2001; Nielsen, 2001; Smylie, 1997; Troen
& Boles, 1993; Zmunda, et al., 2004).

2. The principal is critical in implementing a shared decision-making process and empowering teachers with an increasing role in leadership (Blasé & Blasé, 2000; Marzano, Walters, & McNulty, 2005; Mullen & Sullivan, 2002; Reeves, 2006; Richardson, 1997; Smylie, 1997; Weiss, 1993; Zmuda, et al., 2004).

After reviewing journal articles, books, educational websites (such as the National Association for Elementary and Secondary School Principals); contacting the associate executive director of the National Association for Elementary School Principals; and conducting queries on such web-based search engines as Google and Yahoo, inadequate attention appears to have been given to the principal’s interactive role in enhancing teachers as leaders as a means of creating a high-performing school. Research has examined the following aspects: (a) principals’ comments attributing all of their accomplishments to teacher leadership and shared governance (Glatthorn, 1993), (b) principals building cultures that support teacher leadership (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001), and (c) steps taken by principals to facilitate teacher leadership (Lambert, 2003; Rallis & Goldring, 2000). However, the research tends to omit further explanation of the process the principals went through to create these leadership roles and develop a high-performing school. Although the research indicated that enhancing teacher leadership is a complicated process, the researcher believes that the role of the principal needs to be examined more closely.

The purpose of this study was to examine the role of teacher leadership in three elementary schools and its effect on each school’s performance. This research will provide information about the principal’s role in building teacher-leadership capacity in
order to create a high-performing school. Schools with similar characteristics, such as racial demographics, free and reduced lunch rates, and school grades were examined. The goals of this study are to identify the processes by which the principal participants started to create and develop teacher leaders within their schools and observing the principals’ selection of teachers for various leadership roles.

Research Questions

Understanding how principals create and sustain high-performing schools is of great interest to educators. This primary inquiry question was asked: What features of teacher leadership are evident in high-performing schools? This question served as a prompt for the following secondary inquiry questions:

1. What are the behaviors of elementary school principals in building leadership capacity in high-performing schools?

2. What are the perceptions of elementary school teachers related to principals in building leadership capacity in high-performing schools?

Rationale of the Researcher

Factors in my background, such as being a public elementary school principal for 2 years, former classroom teacher for 5 years and assistant principal for 3 years, all in various schools in Florida, assisted in the development and completion of this study. As a teacher, I wanted to have a voice by sharing ideas and suggestions with administration and to feel like a contributing member to school improvement as a whole. This was often difficult because the administration exhibited an authoritarian leadership style. My frustration led to my becoming a school administrator with the belief that I could effectively lead a school organization with a different leadership style.
During my 1st week as an assistant principal in 2002, I learned from the principal that my primary function within the school was to help move the school from a grade of C to an A or B. I knew that this was going to be a long and difficult process because it would involve change, not just from the administration but also from the teachers. I also knew this was going to require a collaborative effort on everyone’s part within the school. I found myself facing several key challenges:

1. How was I going to help bring about this change?
2. How was I going to identify the teachers that could be seen as leaders?
3. How could I empower my teachers to take on roles and responsibilities outside the classroom?

My goal as an administrator is to create a school climate and culture where teachers and administrators work collaboratively to meet the needs of both teachers and students. It is my hope to create an atmosphere where teachers are part of a community and can share their ideas with other colleagues and administrators to better the school as a whole. My objective is to create opportunities that invite teachers to take on various leadership roles so that they become involved in the decisions that affect all aspects of the school.

Barth (1999) summarized my belief about teacher leadership: “Teachers become more active learners in an environment where they are leaders. When teachers lead, principals extend their own capacity; students live in a democratic community of learners, and schools benefit from better decision-making” (p. 17). My experiences as a classroom teacher feeling unimportant in decision making, as well as my desire as a school administrator to develop a capacity-building leadership style, makes me an ideal
individual to conduct this study.

Significance of this Research

This study is significant in that the literature base in the area it addresses is sparse. Although teacher leadership is adequately addressed in the literature, the principal’s role in creating and interacting with teachers is seldom examined. This research provided principals with conditions for building teacher leadership capacities within their schools. Examples of these conditions highlight the processes the principal undertakes in order to initiate and create leadership roles for teachers who wish to be more involved. It draws attention to what leadership roles are effective and ineffective within the schools studied and more generally based on the literature. Since all schools are different, some of the conditions offered may not be relevant to every site. It is assumed that readers of this study who are principals or on leadership teams will therefore have to determine which leadership roles would best apply to their school.

Limitations of the Study

There are thousands of elementary schools in Florida and throughout the United States. However, the in-depth portion of this case study used a small sample population of three elementary schools in central Florida. As such, the results cannot be generalized. Stake (1995) noted that case studies seem a poor basis for generalization; however, patterns and themes of the principal’s role in creating teacher leaders were identified and relative to the actual school sites and the literature. Further limitations in this study include the following:

1. By acknowledging that the researcher has personal biases, a conscious effort was made not to let any bias affect the outcomes of my research. In an effort to minimize
bias, the researcher used multiple sources of data, also known as triangulation, to corroborate the research. The researcher limited the results to the schools selected.

2. Some teachers may have felt inclined to share information or participate because they believed or assumed that the researcher would share this information with their principal or assistant principal. The researcher attempted, in written or verbal form, to inform the participating teachers that all information given in the surveys, focus groups, and interviews is anonymous. In addition, all identifying information was masked with fictitious names for schools and individuals.

3. In an effort to limit the number of variables in this study, only public elementary schools with the following statistics were selected: 2005 school accountability grade of A, comparable racial demographic makeup of the school, and similar percentage of students on free or reduced lunch.

One limitation, my role as an assistant principal, principal, and researcher, could be classified as a strength. Being a former classroom teacher and assistant principal and currently a principal conducting this research in the district in which I am employed, I acquired a firsthand understanding of school district politics, district expectations and requirements for teachers and administrators, district growth, and demographics. This background knowledge assisted me in this research.

Definitions of Significant Terminology

For the purpose of clarifying language used in this study, a list of definitions is provided:

Teacher leadership. Leadership that enables practicing teachers to reform their work and provide a means for altering the hierarchical nature of schools (Katzenmeyer &
Moller, 2001; Lambert, 1998; Smylie, 1997; Troen & Boles, 1993)

*Shared governance.* School administrators, teachers, parents, and students
deciding, sharing, and reflecting as a team (Glickman, 1998; Schlechty, 2001;  

*Transformational leadership.* Leadership that focuses on individual concerns,
stresses human nature, and aligns individual and organizational goals (Bass & Avolio,  
Chapter Two

Review of the Literature

Organization of Literature Review

This literature review examined the research in the area of teachers as leaders. The first section discussed the changing views of leadership and followed by a section on shared governance. The following section reviewed current teacher leadership roles and opportunities in schools, and the chapter concludes with a description of how local and national institutions created educational programs and workshops based on the principles of, as well as benefits and costs of, teachers as leaders. It is important to note that Smylie (1997), a professor at the University of Illinois at Chicago, has also completed a comprehensive literature review of teacher leadership, which was highlighted in this review.

Changing Views of School Leadership

Leadership suggests many possible meanings. Evans (1996) claimed, “Despite thousands of empirical studies yielding hundreds of definitions of leadership, there is still no consensus about it” (p. 116). Furthermore, Hodgkinson (1991) proclaimed that there are more than a hundred definitions of leadership. For some individuals, the word brings to mind a specific person or group who hold positions of power or authority (Karlenzig, 1997). Others describe personal characteristics, such as charisma or personal magnetism, or accomplishments they have come to associate with leaders (Maxwell, 1999; Mitchell & Tucker, 1992).
Leadership has been viewed in several different ways throughout history. For example, Taylor’s (1996) scientific management (or hierarchical) system was evident in our educational system. Principals were seen as building managers supervising school operations and teachers as workers, similar to a business (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001; Lunenberg & Ornstein, 2003). Lunenberg and Ornstein (2003) stated that the main focus was the needs of the organization, not the needs of the individual. Additionally, the assumption of school leadership was that if the principal directed the work of teachers, held high expectations, and aligned the curriculum, teachers would then work cooperatively and the school would be effective (Patterson, 2001).

Another example of leadership is Elton Mayo’s Human Relations Theory (as cited in Lunenberg & Ornstein, 2003), which stated that people are motivated by social and psychological needs, as well as economic incentives. Mayo’s research found that production of work improved due to such human social factors as morale and self-esteem. Today, leadership has emerged as a set of functions rather than as a formal role (Lieberman, 1997)—it is viewed as an influence process that occurs naturally within a social system and is shared among its members (Yukl, 2001).

In the early 1980s, principals were beginning to be seen as instructional leaders (Smith & Andrews, 1989). The functions of an instructional leader included defining the school mission, promoting a positive learning environment, observing and giving feedback to teachers, managing curriculum and instruction, and assessing the instructional program (DuFour, 2002; Mullen = Hutinger, in press; Lashway, 2002; Schmoker, 2007; Smith & Andrews, 1989; Weber, 1989).
Changing the Perception of School Leadership

School leadership has generally been defined in terms of power and authority; it is often viewed as resting in the hands of certain individuals who are driven because of personality characteristics (including qualities such as charisma or personal magnetism) and organized as a top-down structure (Karlenzig, 1997; Terry, 1995). Some traditional hierarchical or management models of organizations have relied heavily on the premise that the world is divided between leaders (principals) and followers (teachers). Generally, teachers have had little or no voice in such workplace issues as curriculum material, the types of tests used to evaluate instruction, the scheduling of classes, and the allocation of instructional resources (Reitzug, 1991).

Blasé (1990) examined politics in the educational setting and found that their constituents did not revere a majority of school administrators as respected, caring, or popular people. Instead, they were seen as manipulators using resource distribution, administrative assignments, appointments, and advancement opportunities as rewards. Blasé found that a majority of administrators also used control tactics associated with materials, resources, work factors within and outside the classroom, and opportunities to gain teacher input. Some school administrators had created pseudo-opportunities for teacher participation, leadership, and decision making (such as creating a budget committee but already knowing how the money was going to be spent). Blasé discovered that, frequently, some principals employed the subordinate statute, emphasizing the authority differences; some principals claimed, “I’m the boss; you are here to do a certain job” (p. 740).

The teachers surveyed in Blasé’s study indicated that the tactics employed by
their principal substantially affected their morale. Furthermore, teacher involvement in school-wide activities significantly decreased. Teachers’ low self-esteem was attributed to the fact that the principal made them feel as if their thoughts and opinions were not valid or important. As a result, teachers felt anger, depression, and anxiety, which hindered their input and leadership.

*Principals and Teachers as Leaders*

According to Bolman and Deal (2002), school leaders need to understand that there are two basic realities about school leadership. First, leadership is a three-way relationship among leaders, constituents, and concepts. Although individual leaders can make a difference, constituents are very powerful forces that often favor the norm. Second, leadership is not a top-down influence for those in high positions. It is a process of reciprocal influence centered on questions of purpose, values, and strategies.

School principals can no longer be expected to deal with the challenges of education alone. Teacher input is needed in all aspects of the school’s operation if reforms are going to be long lived (Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy, 1986; Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001). Today, the shift in leadership acknowledges that the effective principal works cooperatively with teachers and students to enhance teacher and student learning (Bolman & Deal, 2002; Lambert, 2003; Schmoker, 2007).

One concept that has emerged from educational reform is transformational leadership. Transformational leadership refers to a process of change in which participants define or redefine their vision and goals, question accepted practices, and seek alternatives to the status quo (Bass & Avolio, 2001; Karlenzig, 1997; Sergiovanni, 1999). Transformational leadership may contribute to a rethinking of
how schools are understood and structured. Schools are expected to reflect the values, beliefs, and expectations of their community and model how teacher organizations will change to carry out their overall mandate (Bass & Avolio, 2001; Sergiovanni, 1999). Such expectations encourage teachers to define their roles and responsibilities, develop specific policies, and implement these policies through programs and services (Karlenzig, 1997; Lieberman, 1997).

Leadership is not a quality that automatically comes with an office or person; rather, it is derived from the context and ideas of individuals who influence one another. Equally so, principals and teachers may at times be leaders and, at other times, followers. Blasé and Blasé (2000) stated, “Leadership is an act bound in space and time. It is an act that enables others and allows them, in turn, to become enablers” (p. 14).

**Shared Governance**

Although many ideas have been shared in the name of educational reform, the center of educational reform is the issue of school governance. In fact, a central component of school improvement is shared governance (Glickman, 1998; Holloway, 2000; Schlechty, 2001; Sergiovanni, 1999; Smylie, 1997; Weiss, 1993). Shared governance (also known as participative decision making, shared decision making, and school-based management) is decision making at the local school level by a leadership team made up of administrators and teachers (and sometimes parents and other interested stakeholders) whose goal is to improve instruction and school climate (Apodaca-Tucker, Slate, & Brinson, 2001; Schmoker, 2007). The two most common rationales behind shared governance are as follows:
1. Persons closest to students are best equipped to make decisions about the improvement of instructional programs (Mullen, Stover, & Corley, 2001; Terry, 1995).


Teachers should be considered part of the solution to educational problems, not the source (Boyd-Dimock & McGree, 1996; Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001; Nielsen, 2001). They know how to best meet the needs of their students. After all, teachers are the ones most closely working with the students.

The role of the principal has come to be seen as critical in implementing the shared decision-making process and providing teachers with an increasingly important role in building leadership (Blasé & Blasé, 2000; Mullen & Sullivan, 2002; Weiss, 1993). By providing leadership roles for teachers, principals can share this knowledge to improve teacher and student learning and the school community. Principals must use this firsthand knowledge from teachers when making decisions that affect their school as a whole. All parties must be involved in school-based decision making if the schools are going to succeed (Blair, 2002; Livingston, Slate, & Gibbs, 1999; Short, Short, & Brinson, 1998).

**Advocates and Critics of Shared Governance**

As one might guess, viewpoints of advocates and critics of shared governance differ greatly. Advocates claim that shared governance will yield better policies for all of those involved and unleash teacher creativity with fresh ideas and innovative proposals. Other benefits of shared governance include enabling teachers to identify problems that
interfere with teaching, treating teachers as professionals, and helping teachers become committed and accountable for their decisions (Darling-Hammond, 1987; Futrell, 1988; Lieberman, Saxl, & Miles, 1988; Sergiovanni, 1999; Smylie, 1997).

Several researchers have made criticisms of shared governance. Conway and Calz (1996), for example, warned that shared decision-making was founded on an industrial model that showed the benefits of involving factory workers in changing their work roles. The researchers had reservations about applying an industrial model to education because factory workers and teachers are different. Furthermore, Conway and Calz stated that the one constant regarding shared decision making is increased worker satisfaction, and satisfaction is not the same as productivity.

Others have asserted that shared governance merely gives teachers a semblance of power, while real or true authority remains securely anchored in the principal’s office or the district headquarters—the system is doing something without, in effect, doing much of anything. It is also contended that shared governance spreads blame for schools’ poor performance by placing the heads of teachers and administrators on the same chopping block and undermines teachers’ unions by giving teachers increased control over their work life (Duke, Showers, & Imber, 1980; Parker, 1991; Welsh, 1987).

Weiss (1993) conducted a study comparing 12 schools described as being with and without shared governance. Overall, the evidence did not support either hypothesis as to whether shared governance is effective or ineffective; however, there were two main differences. First, schools with shared governance were involved in the decision-making process—they devoted energy to getting the process organized and running. Even after 3 or 4 years of shared governance, a train of sub-decisions often had to be made about
functions, procedures, and allocation of responsibilities. Second, schools without shared governance brought up such issues of discipline as tardiness, absence, dress code, or discipline. These issues continued to arise because teachers were not involved in the decision-making process. Decisions about these issues were made by the district and/or administration.

Furthermore, schools with and without shared governance were involved in decisions dealing with curriculum issues, student issues, and pedagogical issues. Weiss (1993) concluded that shared governance was an innovative change that was initiated by administrators. School administrators have the resources and time to learn new ideas, the opportunity to communicate widely, and the authority to bring proposals to the attention of the school. They are the ones that can advocate changing the culture of the organization. They are also better suited to implement changes in a continuous and comprehensive manner (Howey, 1988).

Some teachers should provide leadership for implementing educational reforms, but empowerment alone is not sufficient. Shared governance and implementation of new policies and practices require teachers to make decisions. Attempting to do so without training, role, and structure clarification places a tremendous burden on teachers under the guise of empowerment (Patterson & Marshall, 2001).

If shared governance leads to significant improvements in teaching and learning, change in the decision-making structure is not enough (Odden & Wohlstetter, 1995; Weiss, 1993). Weiss (1993) concluded that teachers gained a sense of satisfaction and ownership by giving their input on school decisions. This in return committed teachers to follow through by implementing school decisions and perhaps sustaining such decisions
over time. They felt more respected and professional. Teachers from schools without
shared governance said they wished they had had a stronger voice in what their schools
did. Without teacher commitment in any school reform effort, even the best
conceptualized reform is destined for failure (Darling-Hammond, 1987; Duke, et al.,
Welsh, 1987).

Discussion of Teacher Leadership

Smylie’s (1997) literature review noted that efforts to develop teacher leadership
in the United States began as far back as the early 1900s. Teacher councils (such as the
National Education Association) and democratic administration movements were formed
in the United States to establish new opportunities for teachers to participate in school-
and district-level policy making (Conley, 1991; Smylie, 1997). Beyond organizing
teachers to help solve specific educational problems, the driving force behind these
efforts was to democratize schools and (Smylie, Brownlee-Conyers, & Crowson, 1992).
In this regard, teacher participation in policy making was an expression of key
democratic principles, self-determinism of teachers, and the enfranchisement of teachers
in educational administration (Smylie, 1997).

Attempts to develop teacher leadership faded during the 1960s and 1970s but
were renewed in the mid-1980s in response to the regulatory, bureaucratic reforms of the
late 1970s and early 1980s (Murphy, 1990). By the mid-1980s, nearly every American
state had adopted or was studying some form of teacher leadership program or policy
(Smylie, 1997). Opportunities for teacher leadership came in the form of career ladder
and mentor teacher programs, the appointment of master and lead teachers, and policies
to decentralize and involve teachers in school- and district-level decision making (Smylie, et al., 1991). In 2003, the Florida Legislature created the Better Educated Students and Teachers (BEST) Act, which requires all school districts to implement a salary career ladder for classroom teachers beginning with the 2004–2005 school year. The career ladder must have four levels:

1. Associate teacher—classroom teachers not professionally certified or low-performing teachers
2. Professional teacher—classroom teachers who are professionally certified
3. Lead teacher—classroom teachers who are responsible for leading other teachers
4. Mentor teacher—classroom teachers who serve as regular mentors to teachers, and as faculty-based professional development coordinators also provide direct instruction to low-performing students (Florida Department of Education, 2004). This Act was repealed after one year of implementation.

The Principal’s Role

As previously mentioned, the role of the principal has changed over the years. The literature on school leadership has had a paradigm shift from using manager to instructional leader to describe the function of the principal (Mullen, 2004, 2005; Pollock, 2007, Reeves, 2006). These changes include the complexity of the principal’s role itself and greater accountability. With these increasing demands, the question is raised: Are principals becoming instructional leaders or still managers?

When speaking with seasoned colleagues about the role of the principal, a recurring comment has been made by several of them: “The job [principalship] is not like
what it used to be when I first became a principal.” One veteran principal stated, “[Being a principal] used to be fun. You had more freedom and you could truly do what was best for kids.” Upon further investigation of this comment, I asked what has changed over the years. Federal laws, such as Individuals with Disabilities Educational Act (IDEA), the NCLB, the Meta Decree for Second Language Learners, and the recently passed Physical Education Bill are just several of the existing mandates that have affected schools today. In addition, school district mandates have been put in place as well that have affected schools, manifested as textbook adoptions, school-based budgeting, school board policies and procedures. Based on the researcher’s personal knowledge, the reality of the principalship has caused some educators not to take on this job, thus creating a shortage of principals across the state of Florida. As a current school-based administrator, I understand the complex demands that principals are facing, which can be seen as overwhelming at times because of the managerial overload. Our daily job consists of juggling multiple tasks at once, such as dealing with parents, teachers, district employees, students, and school facilities.

One of the most pressing demands being placed on principals is greater accountability, which has become more evident with recent legislation for Florida’s A+ Plan and the NCLB. Higher standards of proficiency are being raised yearly. According to Florida statutes, if schools fail, the principal is the only person held accountable (Online Sunshine, 2007). In addition to standardized testing, daily operations and tasks, such as internal audits and student count surveys, have to be overseen by the principal.

It is difficult to balance the management tasks and instructional tasks as a
principal. I have had to learn to adjust my schedule to make it a priority to be an instructional leader and make a conscious decision to let managerial-type tasks go to the backburner while instead focusing on student achievement, instructional practices, and the coaching of teachers. It is through these practices that I am empowered to help shape the culture of the school and model for teachers what I believe is important for our students.

Research continually suggests that the principal’s leadership is the key to shaping the school’s culture (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001; Lambert, 2003; Patterson, 2001). It is vital that principals assist teachers in remaking the education profession and establishing a culture in which they are seen as fully empowered partners in shaping policy, creating curriculum, managing budgets, improving practice, and improving education for children (Fullan, 2001; Troen & Boles, 1993). Byham and Cox (1992) and Fullan (2001) agreed that empowering teachers involves helping them take ownership so that they obtain a personal interest in improving the performance of the organization. Empowering teachers as leaders has been seen as a way to retain good teachers in education, attract new teachers, and reverse a trend toward treating them as employees who do specific tasks planned in detail by other people (Erlandson & Bifano, 1987; Macpherson, Aspland, Brooker, & Elliot, 1999).

It is also essential that principals create an environment conducive to teacher empowerment and encourage all endeavors toward empowerment (Bolin, 1989; Mullen & Sullivan, 2002; Terry, 1995). Terry (1995) pointed out that successful schools enabled teacher leaders to apply their creative energy toward constant improvement. In order for school principals to create an environment for learning and growth, they must recognize
that teachers and staff in the school desire achievement and recognition (Combs, Miser, & Whitaker, 1999). Combs and colleagues (1999) claimed that in a school culture where individuals are rewarded on competition and autonomy, many teachers do not like to be singled out for their achievements for fear that their colleagues will perceive them as arrogant, sucking up, or better than others.

Principals must go beyond merely involving teachers in decision-making processes. Such principals provide a supportive environment that encourages teachers to examine and reflect upon their teaching and on school practice, use specific behaviors to facilitate reflective practice, and make it possible for teachers to implement ideas and programs that result from reflective practice (Perie & Baker, 1997; Terry, 1995). Within the area of providing a supportive environment, teachers are allowed to teach in the manner they feel is most appropriate; however, they do have to justify their methodologies to their colleagues, share their ideas, and create teaming structures for collective responsibility (Black, 2000; Bolin, 1989; Terry, 1995).

Establishing a school where learning and change can occur is a strenuous task for school principals. For schools to become better places where people can grow, learn, change, expand, and find joy in discovery, everyone must be seen as a learner (Bolin, 1989; Combs, et al., 1999). Administrators and teachers must work together to create a culture of learning that is modeled for their students in order for both to succeed.

Teacher Leadership Roles and Opportunities

Smylie (1997) identified three common teacher leadership roles and opportunities: lead and master teachers, career ladders, and teacher mentoring. Additional research (Hutinger = Mullen, 2007; DuFour, Eaker, & Karhanek, 2004; Schmoker, 2007)
on teacher leadership roles and opportunities has acknowledged professional learning communities and teachers as action researchers.

*Lead and master teachers.* School districts across the nation are recognizing the need to keep talented teachers in classrooms and schools and allow them to undertake leadership roles within their profession. These lead and master teachers have assumed leadership roles because they have a desire to be change agents for other teachers’ learning, school improvement, and for their own personal and professional growth (Smylie, 1997; Troen & Boles, 1992). Research has shown that teachers in these positions develop instructional or curricular programs, lead staff development, or assimilate to quasi-administrative power positions (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001; Smylie, 1997; Wasley, 1991).

Those who support greater leadership roles for teachers cite many reasons for doing so. First, principals and central-office administrators no longer have the time or all of the skills needed to be the one and only expert of curriculum and instruction. In addition, instructional expertise has little chance of spreading among teachers unless some are put into greater positions of authority. Finally, Tell (1999) indicated that teachers are often more responsive to one another than to an administrator, and without opportunities to exercise leadership, many of the most skillful and ambitious teachers feel forced to go into administration (see also Archer, 2001; Solomon, 2000).

*Teacher mentoring.* Effective school research has linked collaborative activities and collegiality among teachers with gains in student learning (Charles A. Dana Center, University of Texas at Austin, 1999; Designs for Change, 1998; Lein, Johnson, & Ragland, 1997; Taylor, Pearson, Clark, & Walpole, 2000). Collaboration is critical in
program or project development because it leads to the identification of problems and successful resolution and promotes the social interaction that enables school leaders to deal with the anxiety that is prevalent during any change process (Koehler & Baxler, 1997). Consequently, programs such as mentoring are being widely advocated.

Mentoring has typically been defined as a relationship between an experienced and a less experienced person in which the mentor provides guidance, advice, support and feedback to the protégé (Haney, 1997; Kerka, 1998; Mullen, 2000). Mentoring programs and relationships in schools have usually existed between experienced teachers and beginning teachers, as well as between principals and beginning teachers (Holloway, 2001; McDaniel, 1999; Smylie, 1997).

Studies have shown that mentoring increases the retention rates of teachers (National Association of State Boards of Education, 1998). Furthermore, research conducted after 1 year of mentoring suggests that teachers who had been mentored continued teaching the following year more than teachers without mentors (Ellyn, 2002; Gold, 1999). Another way that mentoring programs have been successful is in regard to teacher collaboration. Teachers indicated that collaboration through mentoring improved their communication skills, gave them a sharper focus, and enhanced their self-esteem and confidence in their teaching ability (Kerka, 1998; McCann & Radford, 1993; Mullen, 2000).

Professional Learning Communities

One rationale of shared governance is that the persons closest to students are best equipped to make decisions about the improvement of instructional programs (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Karhanek, 2004; Mullen, et al., 2001; Terry, 1995). Teachers need an
opportunity to share their best practices and ideas with others in order to promote educational reform. Teachers learn from outside knowledge, as well as each other, looking at student work, helping shape assessment tools, and examining their own practice (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993; DuFour, et al., 2004).

As an organizational arrangement, the professional learning community is seen as a powerful staff development approach and a potent strategy for school change and improvement (DuFour, et al., 2004; Roberts & Pruitt, 2003). It is used in a variety of situations, such as extending classroom practice to the community; bringing community personnel into the school to enhance the curriculum and learning tasks for students; or simultaneously engaging students, teachers, and administrators in learning (DuFour, et al., 2004). Astuto, Clark, Read, McGree, and Fernandez (1993) coined the concepts professional community of learners and communities of continuous inquiry and improvement, in which the teachers and administrators continuously seek and share learning and then act on what they learn to ultimately enhance their effectiveness as professionals for the benefit of the students.

There are five components to developing professional learning communities: (a) supportive and shared leadership, (b) collective creativity, (c) shared values and vision, (d) supportive conditions, and (e) shared personal practice (DuFour, et al., 2004; Mullen, et al., 2001; Roberts & Pruitt, 2003). Louis and Kruse (1995) identified the supportive leadership of principals as one of the necessary human resources for restructuring staff into school-based professional communities. The authors referred to the principals as post-heroic leaders who did not view themselves as the architects of school effectiveness. Boyd (1992) similarly identified characteristics of principals that undertake school
restructuring as a willingness to share authority, the capacity to facilitate tasks to the staff efficiently, and the ability to participate without dominating.

The learning community is demonstrated by people from multiple constituencies at all levels collaboratively and continually working together (Louis & Kruse, 1995; Roberts & Pruitt, 2003). Such collaborative work is grounded in reflective dialogue in which staff members conduct conversations about students, teaching, and learning, as well as identifying related issues and problems. Louis and Kruse (1995) maintained that a core characteristic of the vision is an everlasting focus on student learning in which each student’s potential achievement is carefully considered. These shared values and vision lead to binding norms of behavior that the teaching staff supports.

Several factors determine when, where, and how the staff regularly come together as a unit to do the learning, decision making, problem solving, and creative work that characterize a professional learning community. In order for these communities to function productively, the physical or structural conditions and the human qualities and capacities of the people involved must be optimal (Boyd, 1992). Examples of the physical and structural conditions include the availability of resources, schedules, and structures that reduce isolation; policies that encourage greater autonomy, collaboration and communication; and provisions for staff development. Human qualities and capacities include positive teacher attitudes toward schooling, students, and change; norms of continuous critical inquiry and improvement; positive and caring collegial relationships among teachers and student–teacher–administrator relationships; and a sense of community in the school. This type of school environment values and supports hard work and accepts challenging tasks, risk taking, and growth promotion (Midgley &
In extensive studies conducted by Hord (1997), the following positive results of professional learning communities for staff and students have been observed:

1. Reduction in the isolation of teachers
2. Increased commitment to the mission and goals of the school and increased vigor in working to strengthen the mission
3. Shared responsibility for the total development of students and collective responsibility for students’ success
4. Powerful learning that defines good teaching and classroom practice and that creates new knowledge and beliefs about teaching and learners
5. Increased meaning and understanding of the content that teachers teach and the roles they play in helping all students achieve expectations
6. Higher likelihood that teachers will be well informed, professionally renewed, and inspired to teach
7. More satisfaction, higher morale, and lower rates of absenteeism
8. Significant advances in adapting teaching to the students, often accomplished more quickly than in traditional schools
9. Commitment to making significant and lasting changes

For students, the results from Hord’s (1997) studies on professional learning communities highlighted the following results:

1. Smaller achievement gaps between students from different backgrounds
2. Decreased dropout rate and fewer classes skipped
3. Lower rates of absenteeism
4. Increased learning that is distributed more equitably in the smaller high schools

5. Greater academic gains in mathematics, science, history, and reading than in traditional schools

*Teachers as Action Researchers*

Teachers are being called upon to provide leadership in order for schools to improve. They are also being recognized as researchers because they are the people best able to identify problems pertinent to teaching (Mullen, et al., 2001). Action research is a form of disciplined and collaborative inquiry and research that has re-emerged as a popular way of involving practitioners. Teachers and supervisors systematically reflect on their work and make changes in their practice (Borgia & Schuler, 1996; Garner, 1996; Glanz, 1999; Richardson, 1997). Action research entails looking at one’s own practices, such as instruction on a specific academic subject and allows teachers to create time and space to reflect on their work. It might involve examining a particular situation involving the development of children, such as behavior, social interactions, learning difficulties, family involvement, learning environments, actions, policies, or events. After collecting this data, teachers then reflect and seek support and feedback from colleagues (Borgia & Schuler, 1996; Glanz, 1999; Patterson & Marshall, 2001). With all of the daily demands placed on teachers, they rarely have time to stop and reflect on the work they have accomplished.

There is an appeal for teacher leadership in the action research literature. Interest in action research is growing partly because practitioners find they can be in leadership positions as they plan, conduct, and evaluate research on their own, rather than relying on library research or double-blind experiments (Borgia & Schuler, 1996; Glanz, 1999).
Many researchers now acknowledge teachers’ expertise and wisdom as they live out their experiences to change what they perceive to be in need of change (Borgia & Schuler, 1996; Mullen & Lick, 1999).

Central to the notion of teacher research as teacher leadership is the issue of influence. Action research can influence classroom teachers’ practices. Garner (1996) proposed a cyclical paradigm: “To learn is to change; to change is to create; and to create is to learn” (p. 2). Borgia and Schuler (1996) revealed some of the benefits of action research:

1. Teachers are viewed as equal partners with their collaborators in deciding what works best in their situation, thus reducing the possibility for unequal power relationships that might otherwise develop among university researchers, curriculum developers, administrators, and teachers.

2. Teachers develop a deeper understanding of children, the student-learning process, and their role in the educational lives of children.

3. Teachers arrive at instructional solutions cooperatively.

4. Teachers are often more committed in implementing new concepts when they have been involved in the design.

*Developing Teachers as Leaders*

Current programs for teacher education reform clearly recognize new directions for teacher leaders, researchers, learners, collaborators, and team members (Nielsen, 2001). While they have developed slowly, many districts, school boards, colleges, and universities have created educational programs based on the principles of teachers as leaders.
Broward County, Florida, has designed a program to provide leadership and managerial skills beneficial to teachers who do not aspire to enter into administration but want to grow in their roles as leaders. The program consists of four staff development sessions: time management, facilitative change, performance problems, and techniques of an effective leader (Broward County Public Schools, 2003).

The University of Hawaii (2001) offers an interdisciplinary master’s of education (IMED) with an emphasis on teacher leaders. The objective of IMED is to contribute to the professional and personal growth of educators who are working in the public school system to promote their potential as teacher leaders. The four components to this program are:

1. Fostering an increased level of knowledge and promoting specific types of teaching, consultation, and advocacy skills
2. Creating effective organizational changes in one’s classroom, school, or community
3. Stimulating effective change among individuals and within various human systems
4. Helping teachers develop a vision of specific changes that they would like to implement in their classroom, school, or community

Vanderbilt University (2001) designed a 3.5-week Teachers as Leaders Initiative summer program. It is an intensive study and reflection on the challenges of teaching, teacher leadership, and school reform. The program is based on the premise of these professional learning practices:

1. Afford opportunities to develop habits of shared and individual inquiry and
reflection.

2. Place classroom practice in the larger context of education and the educational careers of children.

3. Provide access to an array of human and material resources for learning.

4. Provide participants with leadership skills and structures to support the learning of others beyond the context of the program.

5. Be centered on meaningful problems or challenges.

The University of Nebraska–Lincoln Teachers College (2003) offers a master’s degree in education focused on developing teachers as leaders. Courses are designed to promote the growth, development, and learning process through educational inquiry. This is accomplished in a variety of contexts, such as educational research and action research.

Benefits and Costs of Teacher Leadership

Benefits. Lieberman and colleagues (1988) conducted a study focusing on what teachers did when they assumed leadership positions designed to assist other teachers. They found that the work of the lead teachers was varied and largely specific to the individual context of the school. In order to be effective with their colleagues, lead teachers found it necessary to learn a variety of leadership skills, such as building trust and developing rapport, diagnosing organizational conditions, dealing with processes, managing work, and building skills and confidence in others (Boyd-Dimock & McGree, 1996; Wilson, 1993). The authors concluded that restructuring school communities to incorporate leadership positions for teachers requires teacher leaders to place nonjudgmental value on providing assistance, model collegiality as a mode of work, enhance teachers’ self-esteem, use different approaches for assistance, make provisions
for continuous learning and support for teachers at the school site, and encourage others to provide leadership to their peers.

Intellectual and personal growth and decreased isolation are some of the personal benefits to those involved. Teachers admitted that their knowledge and skills in teaching increased dramatically as a result of their involvement in leadership positions. Teacher leaders also reported a significant decrease in isolation as a result of opportunities to work with others outside the classroom (Lord & Miller, 2000; Troen & Boles, 1992).

Troen and Boles (1993), Lieberman (1997), and Karlenzigg (1997) explained that various conditions are necessary to support and sustain teachers in leadership positions. First, it is important that teacher leadership roles be part of an overall vision and set of values that accepts and expects teachers to participate in leadership. Second, teacher leadership roles need to have structure to bring legitimacy to the new role and facilitate the understanding that knowledgeable and well-respected teachers can provide. Third, teacher leaders need to have time to experiment, reflect, develop, deal, create, and build collegial relationships with other teachers, parents, and community. Finally, teacher leaders need to develop such necessary skills and abilities as taking initiative, persevering in the face of obstacles, analyzing and making program adjustments/improvements, using alternative strategies, and exercising patience.

Costs. While leadership roles can provide important benefits, they have also proven to be highly problematic. It has been extremely difficult to institutionalize leadership roles for teachers for several reasons. First, many teachers are reluctant to think of themselves as leaders (Fullan, 1993; Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001). They view with some discomfort the idea of assuming quasi-administrative or expanded teaching
functions. Second, there is an expectation of top-down mandates with little input from practitioners. Third, when teacher leaders emerge and begin to affect policy and the larger domains of the school, they may encounter resistance—not just from the principal, but also from other teachers. Lastly, it is unlikely that teacher leaders will emerge from the ranks in places where teachers are powerless to affect school-wide policy (Lord & Miller, 2000; Troen & Boles, 1993).

Studies have shown that lead teachers also encounter a number of barriers as they learn about their new roles and relationships. In a study conducted by Wasley (1989), problems and confusion often resulted when teacher leadership roles were not well defined. Teacher leaders who are given the opportunity to develop and define their own roles and receive more support experience greater success. Wasley also suggested that time constraints on teacher leaders significantly limited their ability to succeed in the dual roles of teacher and leader. Some teachers are often forced to make sacrifices that compromise their ability to be effective in both roles. Furthermore, this research also asserted that a lack of support and encouragement from school administrators and teaching colleagues often poses the biggest obstacles for teacher leaders. Teacher leaders repeatedly experienced the egalitarian nature of teaching and had to work hard to gain acceptance and respect (Hart, 1995). They are teachers, one of rank and file, yet they are also leaders, which somehow sets them apart from other teachers (Johnson, 1990, Little, 1988; Lord & Miller, 2000).

In a study conducted by Wilson (1993), several teacher leaders shared their ideas about the importance of teacher leaders and how change occurred in schools:

1. The label of leader sets a person apart from peers and diminishes his or her
ability to bring change.

2. Leadership is a role played by one person in a group. The role seduces the leader into believing that he or she is the mouthpiece of the group. Given a strong group of competent people, a leader may not be necessary.

3. As a group, teachers should exercise more control over the initiation and implementation of change.

4. Participatory decision making is critical. Any teacher who wishes to participate in a particular decision should be encouraged to do so.

Summary of Literature Review

This literature review suggests that there is a paradigm shift in leadership. School administrators have realized that they alone cannot solve all of the educational issues facing schools today. Leadership has to come from the trenches in order to improve our schools (Mullen, 2002a)—teachers need to be change agents empowered by school administrators to improve the educational system (Byham & Cox, 1992; Fullan; 1993, 2001; Gabriel, 2005; Troen & Boles, 1993).

Teachers’ voices have long been overlooked in helping to reform education (Mullen, 2002a, 2002b). Teachers can and should be activists for education; they need to work with those that are interested in education as well as with those individuals in positions of power to inform them of the importance of a strong teaching profession (Sachs, 2003). Teachers need to be reminded to treat teaching as a profession. Everything from displaying their diplomas, certificates, and awards to having personalized business cards must be done to project that image (Whaley, 1994). As school leaders and educators look to reform their schools, understanding how to interact and empower
teachers as leaders may help solve some of the problems facing education today.

*Reflections on the Literature*

Some administrators have begun to apply the recommendations from the Carnegie Task Force on Teaching as a Profession (1986) in an effort to create leadership roles and opportunities for teachers (Barkley, et al., 2004; Boyd-Dimock & McGree, 1996; Nielsen, 2001; Troen & Boles, 1993). Teachers have to take the initiative to accept these leadership roles and opportunities, and principals must provide support for their teacher leaders. Before principals can create teacher leadership roles within their schools, they must understand how to interact with their teachers and the significance of their relationships with them.

Shared governance is needed to improve school effectiveness and increase student learning (Glickman, 1998; Schlechty, 2001; Sergiovanni, 1999; Smylie, 1997; Weiss, 1993). Without teacher input and support, any educational reform strategy is destined for failure (Darling-Hammond, 1987; Duke, et al., 1980; Futrell, 1988; Lieberman, et al., 1988; Weiss, 1993; Welsh, 1987). With the support and input of qualified teachers, coupled with teachers being cultivated as leaders, there is a far better chance for the development of successful strategies that will ultimately lead to reform in education.
Chapter Three
Qualitative Methodology and Research Design

A case study was used to describe processes by which principals have enhanced teacher leadership roles within their schools and the leadership roles teachers undertake (Gall, Borg, & Gall, 1996; Patton, 2002). The primary inquiry question framed for this study is: What features of teacher leadership are evident in high-performing schools? The secondary inquiry questions are as follows:

1. What are the behaviors of elementary school principals in building leadership capacity in high-performing schools?

2. What are the perceptions of elementary school teachers related to principals in building leadership capacity in high-performing schools?

Case Study Research Design

A multi-site case study was used to gain an in-depth understanding of the teacher leadership phenomenon within the selected schools. The case study method is chosen when the researcher wishes to study a specific case in-depth (Krueger, 2000; Merriam, 1998). Merriam (1998) described a case study as an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single instance, phenomenon, or social unit. Furthermore, Stake (1995) depicted a case study as entering a scene with actors with a sincere interest in learning how they function in their ordinary pursuits and milieus and with a willingness to put aside presumptions while we learn.

A convenient sample (Patton, 2002) of seven public elementary schools in a
southeastern district in the state of Florida was surveyed. One of the schools served as a pilot study. Based on the data from the surveys, three schools were selected in which to conduct interviews and focus groups in order to gather further insights into the teacher leadership phenomenon. In an effort to limit the number of variables, schools with similar characteristics were studied: (a) a 2005 school grade of A by the Florida Department of Education, (b) comparable racial demographics, and (c) similar free and reduced lunch statistics.

The researcher used school demographic information provided by the pupil assignment office in the relevant school district and the 2005 school accountability grades to select the schools. The 2004–2005 school demographic information includes racial composition of the schools by percentage, number of students enrolled, and percentage of students on free and reduced lunch. The researcher obtained the 2005 school grades online as determined by the Florida Department of Education to select schools in a southeastern district in Florida that received a grade of A. In addition, this study did not include the schools in which the researcher had been employed. This deliberate omission assured that an effort was made to minimize bias. The researcher believed that sampling these information-rich settings gave further insight into the various leadership roles that teachers are taking outside of the classroom.

With the intention of identifying various themes and patterns of teacher leadership within these schools, several different methods were used to gather data, a process known as triangulation. Triangulation is defined as the use of multiple data-collection methods, data sources, analysis, or theories as corroborative evidence for the validity of qualitative research findings (Gall, et al., 1996). This process helped the researcher gain in-depth
understanding of teacher leadership by providing different perspectives on the same conditions. Using triangulation to explain the phenomenon of teacher leadership strengthened the validity of this study and monitored biases potentially influencing the case study findings. The researcher had the opportunity to examine, verify, and reinforce the information collected from one data source to another.

Three different sources were used in this case study to gather data: surveys, focus groups, and interviews. The rationale for this strategy was that the use of multiple data-collection techniques would contribute to the trustworthiness of the data (Glesne, 1999; Merriam, 1998). Each data collection technique identified something different to aid in a better understanding of teacher leadership in the schools examined.

Study Participants

University guidelines were followed pertaining to the use of human subjects in the case study as specified by the Institutional Review Board (IRB). The researcher obtained a certificate of completion for the Human Participants Protection Education for Research Teams online course in 2003 and has since reviewed the information on the website in an effort to keep updated. An application for the IRB Review of Research Involving the Use of Human Subjects was completed and no data collection began until approval was received from the University of South Florida Research and Compliance Office. The researcher contacted the Office of Testing and Measurement for the school district to receive approval to conduct the research.

As the data were collected, they were kept confidential throughout the study. All data protected anonymity by using fictitious names of schools and individuals. I secured all data in my home office, a locked, private facility. Data from the surveys was displayed
in the dissertation. Once this process was completed, all surveys were destroyed. The tape recordings gathered from the interviews and focus groups were transcribed, and then destroyed. Although multiple collection techniques were used in this study, not all of the data materialized in the analysis section of this research. Salient responses were quoted in the study to explain or elaborate themes and patterns of teacher leadership.

Although several schools in this school district met the criteria for study, the researcher selected seven schools to survey and informally asked the principals if they would be willing to participate. Patton (2002) refers to this process as convenient sampling. The researcher contacted these particular schools because of the professional relationship that he had developed with them. This relationship proved helpful in undertaking and completing this study. Participating principals were supportive of the study and cooperated with scheduling meetings, interviews, and focus groups.

The principals were contacted again, and an appointment was scheduled to discuss the study and meet with the faculty. Participation was voluntary. Their principal informed the teachers of this study during a staff meeting at which the researcher was present to answer any questions and distribute the survey. Then teachers and administrative team members were asked to complete a survey, and I asked for volunteers to participate in the two focus groups and two to six interviews at each school. Interested volunteers were asked to write their names and e-mail addresses on a piece of paper after they had submitted their survey to me. Focus groups and interviews were conducted at three schools based on the surveys that provide rich, full descriptions of the teacher leadership phenomenon (Patton, 2002). Volunteers chose to participate in the focus groups as well as the interviews.
The case study participants consisted of principals, assistant principals, administrative deans, other members of the school’s administrative team (as defined by each principal), and teachers. This case study relied on a total of 165 surveys, as well as 6 focus groups and 24 interviews from administrative team members and teachers at the 3 schools selected. The time commitment for participants varied depending upon their level of involvement. Surveys took no more than 15 minutes to complete for administrative team members and teachers. Two focus-group sessions totaled about 2 hours, each session approximately 1 hour. Individual interviews took no more than 30 minutes.

The potential benefits to participants may not be immediate; however, it is a contribution that may benefit school administrators and teachers in identifying ways to enhance teacher leadership within their schools. Administrators would understand the importance of interacting with teachers to develop their leadership skills or have the message reinforced. Teachers would learn the importance of all stakeholders working together to resolve issues at their own schools or provide school leaders with options on how to improve their school with regard to teacher leadership.

*Background on Research Sites*

Table 1 indicates the variables that were used in selecting the research sites for this study. Each site is an urban school comprised of pre-kindergarten through Grade 5 and serves a different population of students with exceptional education needs. Enrollment ranges from 600 to 1,100 students. All of the research sites were located in subdivisions with average to lower average income homes. The zoning boundaries designed by the school district created a diverse cultural community within these schools. The mobility rates range from 15% to 25%.
Table 1

Variables Used in Selecting Elementary Schools as Research Sites

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>% Minority rate</th>
<th>% Free/reduced lunch</th>
<th>School grade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G (pilot study)</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data Collection Techniques

As previously mentioned, this study included three different data-collection techniques:

**Step 1.** Fifty surveys were distributed to and collected from administrative team members and teachers at one school that served as the pilot study (see Appendices A and B).

**Step 2.** Three hundred surveys were distributed to the remaining 6 schools (50 surveys per school). Three schools were selected for interviews and focus groups based on the data gathered from the surveys. Candidates for the interviews and focus groups included classroom teachers, principals, assistant principals, deans, resource teachers, guidance counselors, and behavior specialists. Schools were contacted to schedule the focus groups and interviews. The distribution of surveys and conducting of interviews and focus groups spanned a 3-month timeline from March 2006 through June 2006.

**Step 3.** Interviews and then focus groups with teachers and administrative team members were conducted at the schools. Twenty-four interviews were completed for this study—12 interviews with the administrative team members and 12 interviews with
teachers at each school (see Appendices C and D). Twelve focus group sessions were completed for this study (two sessions with the administrative team members and two with the teachers at each school) (see Appendices E and F).

In order to survey the schools that became the research sites for further study, the researcher had to overcome several obstacles. After the dissertation proposal defense and the actual start of the study, School B’s principal retired, and a new principal was appointed. As previously mentioned in chapter 3, the researcher discussed this project in advance with all seven principals of the selected schools and had informally asked if they were willing to participate. The new principal was contacted and an appointment was scheduled to discuss this study and her participation in it. She declined. During School C’s faculty meeting, surveys were distributed to the administrative team members and teachers. Administrative team members were asked to complete the study in the conference room, while teachers remained in the media center. School C’s principal stayed in the conference room. The researcher felt that her presence potentially hindered the participants from responding openly and providing rich, full answers to the survey questions; therefore, School C was not selected for continued study. School E’s principal, administrative team members, and teachers completed the surveys; however, because of auditing issues the principal declined further participation.

Persisting to complete this study, the researcher scheduled another meeting with the three remaining principals to explain the study, discuss the current challenges, and ensure “buy-in.” Principals from Schools A, B, and D understood my concerns and assured me that they would be willing to do whatever it took to assist. The researcher was
thus able to complete the surveys, interviews, and focus groups with the principal, administrative team members, and teachers at the remaining three elementary schools.

The researcher was disappointed that School E was unable to continue participation due to auditing issues because the preliminary data analysis had suggested that two of the administrative team members supported teacher leadership within their school. To this effect, one had stated, “I created teacher committees based on the seven principles of leadership. All concerns are handled through these committees.” Another school leader added, “Our teachers solve most of our problems, except for the tough ones the principal makes.” Based on these comments, this school would have added insight to this study.

Surveys of Administrators and Teachers

Surveys can be used to collect data about characteristics, experiences, and opinions in relation to participants (Gall, et al., 1996). Two multi-item surveys (one for school principals and administrative team members and one for teachers) were given to the seven schools to gain insight into the teacher leadership phenomena at each school (see Appendices A and B). During their faculty meetings, the researcher explained the research study and the informed consent forms. It was strongly emphasized that participation in this study was voluntary and that there would be no repercussions if an individual choose not to participate. Since all teachers were invited to the faculty meetings at each school, this provided a cross-selection of the faculty. Surveys were then distributed to and completed by the teachers and administrative teams.

The surveys were distributed at one school that served as a pilot study. The researcher asked the principals, administrative team members, and teachers to complete
the survey and suggest how to improve the surveys for others. The researcher used these comments and suggestions on the surveys before distributing them to the remaining six schools.

Each participant answered the same semi-structured questions in the surveys. After each item, space was provided to allow participants to offer specific examples. The entire faculty (administrative team members and teachers) at each of the seven schools were invited to complete the survey. Part of the survey for principals and administrative team members was based on the article *The Role of Leadership in Sustaining School Reform: Voices from the Field* (U.S. Department of Education, 1996). This national publication identified five dimensions of leadership for effective school reform: partnership and voice, vision and values, knowledge and daring leadership, savvy and persistence, and personal qualities. Administrative team members were asked to identify and list the names of committees at the school. The responses to these questions were correlated to the five dimensions of leadership for effective school reform.

*Interviews with Administrators and Teachers*

In order to understand the teacher leadership phenomenon within their schools, it is necessary to gain the perspectives of the stakeholders by conducting one-on-one interviews (Glesne, 1999; Merriam, 1998; Patton, 2002). Seidman (1998) offered, “At the root of in-depth interviewing is an interest in understanding the experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience” (p. 3). Although there are numerous types of interviews, the standard open-ended interview was used in this study. Interviews were conducted with the administrative teams and teachers at these schools before the focus groups because there was the potential that comments made during the
focus groups would influence individual responses. Before the interviews began, the researcher stated to the teacher participants that none of the information shared during the session would be shared with their principals or administrative team members. This statement was needed in order to establish trust with the volunteers and authenticate the data collected.

Twenty-four interviews were completed from the three schools that were asked to participate in the focus groups. The researcher separately interviewed four members of the administrative team and four teachers at each school. The first four teachers who responded to my request for participants were selected for interviewing. Each interviewee was asked the same semi-structured questions (see Appendices C and D). Discussion prompts were used to facilitate dialogue and gain insight into the principal’s role in building leadership capacity at each school.

Focus Groups

Focus groups are carefully planned groups to obtain perceptions on a defined area of interest in a permissive, non-threatening environment (Krueger, 2000). They have several advantages, such as significantly increasing sample size in a short amount of time, enhancing data quality, and tending to be enjoyable to participants (Kruger & Casey, 2000; Patton, 2002). The purpose of the focus groups was to conduct member checks (Creswell, 1998; Glesne, 1999; Merriam, 1995, 1998; Stake, 1995), or corroborate the data from the surveys and interviews. The rationale for performing member checks is to ensure that the researcher represented the administrative team members’ and teachers’ ideas accurately.

Focus group participants were given a list of the survey and interview responses.
Each had the opportunity to validate the statements, correct any misconceptions, and check for accuracy (Stake, 1995). Participants were asked a series of open-ended questions (see Appendices E and F). Discussion prompts were used to facilitate dialogue, gain insight into the various teacher leadership roles at the schools, and keep the group on target. As Patton (2002) explained, “The power of focus groups resides in their being focused” (p. 388). To increase confidence in patterns that emerge from the data, more than one focus-group meeting will occur at each school (Patton, 2002). Again, the researcher reiterated to the teacher participants that comments made during the focus group sessions would not be shared with their principal.

Data Collection, Management, and Analysis

One of the aspects of qualitative research is the researcher’s ability to collect, manage, and analyze data at the same time. Due to the multiple data-collection techniques used in this study, it was necessary to have a clear and structured plan for data management analysis. As Merriam (1998) contended,

A qualitative design is emergent. The researcher usually does not know ahead of time every person who might be interviewed, all the questions that might be asked, or where to look next unless data are analyzed as they are being collected. (p. 155)

Although this proposal contained a clear and structured plan to collect, manage, and analyze the data collected, the researcher made some important adjustments throughout the study to increase the dependability, trustworthiness, and authenticity of the data collected. The processes next described were used to collect, manage, and analyze the data.

Data Collection and Management

Data collection should focus on emergent themes or constructs (Miles &
Huberman, 1994; Patton, 2002). Data from 165 surveys, 6 focus groups, and 24 interviews were clustered and coded for specific words or phrases separately and together to illustrate themes or patterns in the research. A meta-matrix displaying some of the primary themes discovered in this study can be found on page 63. The response rate for this study was extremely high—55%. The researcher attributed this successful outcome to two factors: (1) selecting schools in which the researcher already had a professional relationship with the school’s administrator and (2) the researcher’s ability to connect in an honest and positive manner with the study participants.

To ensure efficient storage and retrieval of the data, each school and collection method had a specific code. The codes developed were:

1. A through C were used to represent each school (A represents one school, B another, and C another).

2. Surveys were represented by S.

3. Focus groups were represented by FG.

4. Interviews were represented by I.

Two codes appeared on all items related to each data collection method to represent each school and each group. For example, a file from a specific school was marked A/S. A represented School A, and S, a survey. All letters and codes were chosen for their simplicity in order to ensure anonymity and provide an organizational system to properly collect and manage the data.

The teacher surveys were turned in to the researcher following the faculty meeting in the media center. Administrative team surveys were completed and collected in the principal’s office. To analyze the data, each question and each individual answer to that
question were listed at the top of the table. Data were clustered and coded for specific words and phrases to illustrate themes or patterns. Matrices and/or concept maps were used to further reduce and analyze the written responses from the surveys (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

The researcher recorded all focus groups sessions and individual interviews on audiotape and transcribed verbatim. This practice ensured that everything said was preserved for analysis (Merriam, 1998; Patton, 2002). An example of a transcript from one teacher interview and one focus group session with teachers is included (see Appendices F and G). In addition, strategic and focused notes were taken during the interview to assist in the analysis of this data. This allowed the researcher to reflect and elaborate on the interview. Patton insisted, “It is a time of quality control to guarantee that the data obtained will be useful, reliable, and authentic” (p. 384). After each transcription was completed, the researcher read each one and coded the data. This process of rereading each transcription was repeated several times. Marshall and Rossman (1999) claimed, “Reading, reading, and reading once more through the data forces the researcher to become familiar with those data in intimate ways” (p. 153).

While each transcript was being read, the researcher coded for specific words to illustrate themes and patterns, and make notes and shorthand codes in the margins. Samples of these specific words are located in a meta-matrix display (see p. 9).

In addition, the researcher selected an independent code checker to review the data from the surveys, interviews, and focus groups. He analyzed the coding, patterns, and themes that emerge and provide recommendations. The code checker was a recent Ph.D. graduate who understood the procedures and techniques employed in qualitative
research.

Data Analysis

Data analysis is the process of bringing order, structure, and interpretation to the mass of collected data (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). Marshall and Rossman stated that, in qualitative studies, data collection and analysis usually go hand in hand to build a coherent interpretation of the data (see also Miles & Huberman, 1994; Patton, 2002). Surveys were collected and analyzed simultaneously with the interviews and focus group processes.

According to Marshall and Rossman (1999), most qualitative researchers generate categories and establish themes and patterns to assist in interpreting the data. In this study, the researcher immersed himself in the details and specifics of the data to discover important patterns and themes, a process called inductive analysis, to describe the phenomenon being studied (Patton, 2002). Furthermore, the researcher kept a journal to document the qualitative process and assist interpreting the data. It included experiential notes (relating to a researcher’s own life/experiences), contextual notes (initial notes on research site), and methodological notes (process of qualitative study/problems encountered) (Merriam, 1998; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Miles and Huberman (1994) found that a journal contributed to the reliability, validity, and integrity of the researcher’s inquiry.

Pilot Study

A pilot study was conducted to test the instruments, gather feedback on the instruments from the participants, and detect any errors before conducting the official study. By conducting a pilot study, the researcher ensured the validity and viability of the
instruments (Merriam, 1998; Patton, 2002). In addition, the pilot study allowed me to experience analyzing and interpreting the data. Based on the criteria proposed in this study, a public elementary school was selected. The school in the pilot study was comparable to the ones selected for the in-depth study. The pilot study focused on the role of teacher leadership and its effect on the schools’ performance.

The participants involved in this pilot study consisted of 10 educators working at this elementary school site. Four were members of the administrative team (principal, assistant principal, curriculum resource teacher, and guidance counselor); the remaining six were classroom teachers with various grade-level assignments. These 10 educators completed a survey and participated in interviews and focus groups.

**Background on Pilot Study Site**

The elementary school used in this pilot is located in a large urban community in Florida with middle to lower average income homes. It is common for more than one family to live in a home or for a single parent or family to immigrate to the area and live with relatives. The mobility rate of students in 2005 was 13%.

The pilot study site had an enrollment of 950 pre—kindergarten through fifth-grade students. The racial demographics were 42% White, 45% Hispanic, 6% Black, and 7% other. Thirty-six percent of the students are on free or reduced lunches. The principal that opened the school retired in December 2004, and a new principal was appointed. Eighty percent of the instructional staff had less than 5 years of teaching experience.

**Methodology for Case Study**

For this pilot study, data were collected from the surveys, focus groups, and interviews. The instruments were analyzed using the same protocol to ensure consistency.
The surveys, focus groups, and interviews addressed major themes, such as the principal’s perception of gathering teacher input and the various teacher leadership opportunities that have been created. The surveys, focus-group questions, and interview questions were given to the participants, as well as doctoral students and scholarly professors from the University of South Florida to evaluate the wording, key phrases, and grammar. Both groups gave suggestions on how to improve the surveys, interview questions, and focus group discussion prompts and all data collection instruments were revised. Suggestions ranged from creating open-ended questions and simplifying word and/or phrases used in the questions. These modified instruments were used for the official study.

Trustworthiness and Authentication

As this study followed a qualitative paradigm, concerns over such issues as validity and reliability were addressed according to the appropriate qualitative terminology. This was important to mention because many qualitative researchers continue to use quantitative terminology (Denzin, 1988; Merriam, 1998, 2002). Social construction and constructivist perspectives have generated new language and concepts to distinguish quality in qualitative research (Glesne, 1999; Patton, 2002). Lincoln and Guba (1986) suggested different criteria from those inherited from traditional social science, such as dependability as an analog to reliability, credibility as an analog to internal validity, and transferability as an analog to external validity.

To make certain the dependability and credibility of the data collection instruments were evaluating what the researcher contended, each instrument had already been authenticated by the Writers in Training, a dissertation study group of teachers and
administrators working in the schools that Dr. Carol Mullen, my major professor, leads. Importantly, all survey items, as well as the interview and focus group questions and prompts, were grounded in the literature on teacher leadership (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001; U.S. Department of Education, 1996).

Creswell (1998), Glesne (1999), Merriam (1995, 1998), and Stake (1995) all provided strategies for enhancing dependability, credibility, and trustworthiness. The following strategies were utilized in this study to establish trustworthiness and authentication:

1. Triangulation of data—using multiple data sources such as surveys, interviews, and focus groups to confirm findings.

2. Member checks—taking data back to the people from whom they were derived and asking them if the results were plausible. Data gathered from the surveys were given to the participants during the interviews, and data gathered from the interviews were also given to the focus group participants.

3. Peer/colleague examination—asking colleagues to comment on the findings (also known as an auditor). The Writers in Training, a dissertation study group of teachers and administrators currently working in the schools, and a recent doctoral graduate from the University of South Florida served as colleague examiners during this study.

4. Participatory modes of research—involving participants in all stages of the study. Voluntary participants were involved in all stages of data collection, from collecting surveys to participating in focus groups and interviews.

5. Researcher’s biases—statement of researcher’s experiences, assumptions, and
biases at the outset of the study (these experiences and biases were as stated in chapter 1).

*User Generalizability*

User generalizability is defined as the reader’s ability to determine whether the researcher’s results can apply to his or her own situation (Merriam, 1998). Individuals who read this study have the opportunity to determine whether its results can be applied to their own situation (Merriam, 2002). The researcher’s intent was not to generalize the findings of this study to all principals and teachers but to provide valuable and relevant information that may be useful to other school practitioners and researchers.

The researcher used a variety of techniques in order to help the reader relate to the results. One technique that was used was to provide detailed descriptions of teacher leadership and its implementation at each school. This helped to enhance the probability of connections formed by the reader. Another technique was examining multiple schools, a common strategy for enhancing user generalizability (Merriam, 1998).

*Summary*

This study examined how principals initiated and created teacher leaders within their schools. This investigation is potentially highly valuable to school-based educators because the current literature infrequently examines the importance of principals interacting with teachers to enhance teacher leadership. Although researchers such as Rallis and Goldring (2000) and Lambert (2003) listed steps taken by principals to facilitate teacher leadership, there is little explanation of the process the principals went through to initiate teacher leadership roles.

This qualitative study set out to provide principals with a set of conditions for effective interaction with teachers in order to create teacher leadership roles that are
meaningful and productive to the school as a whole. As previously mentioned, some of the conditions offered may not be relevant to every school site because all schools are different. It is assumed that readers of this study who are principals or leadership teams will therefore determine which leadership roles best apply to their schools.
Chapter Four

Results

The purpose of this chapter is to report results from my exploration of the primary research question: What features of teacher leadership are evident in high-performing schools? Questioning the principal’s role in building leadership capacity, the researcher investigated three elementary schools to describe the effects of this phenomenon on each school’s performance. The goals of this study were to identify the processes by which the principal participants created and developed teacher leaders within their schools and how teachers were selected for various leadership roles, assuming these processes were occurring.

School-based administrators, administrative team members, and teachers completed surveys and responded to questions conducted during interviews and focus groups. Principals were asked to list the number of leadership opportunities within their schools. In addition, administrative team members provided examples of situations when teacher input was needed.

In addition, the researcher examined the principals’ behaviors and teachers’ perceptions of three elementary principals in a school district in central Florida. Although user generalizability is limited in this study, multiple data sources were collected at several sites, the analysis of which revealed crucial insights. Based on the literature review conducted and the discoveries made, the researcher concludes in chapter 5 with a
set of conditions for initiating and creating teacher leadership roles that may assist principals and teachers in working together in the total operation of their schools.

Summary of Methodology

A brief description of the study’s methodological structure is included within this chapter, but it is described more completely in chapter 3. The following methodological information is outlined: case study research design, study participants, data-collection procedures, and data-analysis procedures.

Case Study Research Design

Seven public schools in a southeastern district in Florida were surveyed to gain an in-depth understanding of teacher leadership. Prior to surveying all of the schools, one of them served as a pilot for the original study. Data collected from this research site were used to test the surveys, gather feedback on the instruments, and detect errors before conducting the official study with the six remaining schools. Schools were selected based on similar demographic information, such as a school accountability grade of A, racial composition of students, student enrollment, and percentage of students on free and reduced lunch. Based on the data analyzed from the surveys obtained from the six schools, three were selected for conducting interviews and focus groups with administrative team members and teachers. Schools A, D, and F were selected for this study. Chapter 3 explained how the three schools were selected for participation.

Study Participants

This study’s research population consisted of principals, assistant principals, resource teachers, deans, behavior specialists, reading coaches, compliance teachers, guidance counselors, staffing specialist, and teachers. A sample was selected from among
this population. The researcher discovered three administrative team players—assistant
principals, curriculum resource teachers, and compliance teachers—that were regularly
employed at the three elementary schools. For consistency purposes, these individuals
were asked to participate in the interviews and focus groups. The principal and the three
members of the administrative team at each school agreed. In all, 165 surveys, 24
interviews, and 6 focus-group sessions with school leaders and teachers were completed
between March and June 2006.

Prior to and during this study, the expected research procedures were upheld. The
researcher followed guidelines, upon approval, from the University of South Florida’s
Institutional Review Board (IRB), and permission was obtained in January 2006 from the
district’s Office of Assessment, Accountability, and Research. The researcher then
contacted each of the seven elementary school principals selected for this study within
the school district, inviting their participation for the second time.

Data Collection Procedures

After creating the study’s instruments, conducting the pilot study, and obtaining
approval from the university’s research compliance office and the district, I telephoned
the six principals to set a time to be at their next faculty meeting. All meetings were
scheduled after third- through fifth-grade students completed the Florida Comprehensive
Achievement Test (FCAT). At the faculty meetings, the researcher explained the research
study and the informed consent forms. Surveys were then distributed to and completed by
the teachers and administrative teams. Teachers were invited to participate in the focus
groups and interviews, and dates were scheduled for these activities at all three
elementary school sites.
The semi-structured interviews (see Appendices C and D) with the administrative team members and teachers were designed to last up to 45 minutes but actually took 25 to 30 minutes. Focus groups with the two sets of participants lasted about 45 minutes. Prior to all interviews and focus groups, the researcher asked administrative team members and teachers for permission to audiotape 24 interviews and 6 focus-group sessions for later transcription and analysis. All participants gave their verbal consent. Overall, the surveys, interviews, and focus groups enabled me to develop a more complete understanding of the principal’s role in building leadership capacity at various elementary schools.

Data Analysis Procedures

The focus of my data analysis was to identify common ideas, themes, and/or patterns that emerged from the responses (Merriam, 1998; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Patton, 2002; Stake, 1995). The researcher utilized the results to describe the processes by which principals enhanced teacher leadership roles within their schools (see chapter 5), therefore responding to the primary and secondary research questions. The following steps outline the data analysis procedures used:

Step 1: Immediately following each session, the researcher transcribed the interview and focus group data.

Step 2: The researcher conducted member checks (Creswell, 1998; Glesne, 1999; Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1995) by sending the transcripts from the interviews and focus groups to the participants. They were instructed to send the transcripts back to me if changes were needed. The researcher was able to gather all of the interview transcripts from the 24 participants. All participants had indicated in writing on the transcripts that no changes were needed to the transcripts.
Step 3: The researcher read all the transcribed material, noting important themes, patterns, and ideas in the margins.

Step 4: A sample of the data collected were shared with graduate colleagues and my major professor in a group context for peer examination (Creswell, 1998; Glesne, 1999; Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1995). The purpose of this practice was to ask professionals and a scholar in the educational field to conduct inter-rater reliability on selected data sets. Additional themes/patterns/ideas were worked out through dialogue and sharing and were incorporated into the study’s findings.

Step 5: The emergent themes, patterns, and ideas related to the study’s research questions were communicated and supported through the dissertation’s results (see chapters 4 and 5).

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Data Collection Method</th>
<th>Data Analysis</th>
<th>Theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Primary Question</td>
<td>surveys, interviews (administrators and teachers)</td>
<td>Looked for similarities and differences from responses</td>
<td>Curriculum (see p. 64)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary Question #1</td>
<td>surveys, interviews, focus groups</td>
<td>Looked for descriptive words to describe what principals did</td>
<td>Supportive (see p. 67)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary Question #2</td>
<td>surveys, interviews, focus groups</td>
<td>Looked for descriptive words to describe what teachers thought of principals</td>
<td>Visionary (see p. 81)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 presents a snapshot of how the data were gathered and analyzed from the pilot study. Beginning on page 64, additional themes and patterns are highlighted from
this study. The pilot study helped the researcher to organize the data and begin to see similarities and differences in the responses provided by the school leaders and teachers. The data were placed on a meta-matrix (Miles & Huberman, 1994) to help put the text in content, explain its importance, and provide a synopsis. The researcher reviewed the documentation, which then allowed for content analysis and pattern recognition. Patton (2002) used this process to search for repeating words, phrases, ideas, patterns, or themes to see how many times and in what context a word or phrase was used. In addition, Miles and Huberman (1994) noted the frequency with which an idea or phrase was repeated as a way to illustrate why a particular idea, word, or phrase was selected as a common pattern or theme. For this study, the researcher created themes collected by the teachers’ responses based on whether words or phrases were repeated at least twice. The emergent ideas, words, phrases, themes, and patterns as they related to the study’s primary and secondary research questions, as well as the data collection instruments were communicated through the dissertation’s findings in chapter 4.

One strategy the researcher used to establish credibility and authentication was to identify his personal biases (Creswell, 1998). By acknowledging these, I made a conscious effort to minimize any prejudice that could affect the outcomes of this research. In order to do this, the researcher debriefed my major professor and graduate peer examiners as to my results. This was an effort for peer examiners to call attention to any questions about or concerns with the findings. This study’s results were reviewed twice throughout the course of the dissertation process: after the pilot study was conducted and after the data (via the survey, interview, and focus group) were collected from the three research sites.
**Resulting Data**

The next section outlines the data results generated from surveys, interviews, and focus groups. Within these responses, the researcher uncovered common ideas, themes, and/or patterns that answer the study’s research questions and accomplish the goals of the research.

**Survey Questions for Administrative Team Members**

Administrative team members, such as deans, behavior specialists, reading coaches, guidance counselors, and staffing specialists at all three school sites were prompted for basic demographic information, such as the number of years spent in education and in their current professional roles. Four principals, four assistant principals, four curriculum resource teachers—teachers who support teacher development through curriculum and instruction, and four compliance teachers—teachers who oversee Language Enriched Pupils (LEP) policies and procedures—completed the surveys at all three sites. At two sites, administrative team members ranged in age from 31 to 40, while they were between 41 and 50 at one of the sites. School leaders had been in the education profession anywhere from 11 to 20 years. The administrative team members had been in their current roles from between 4 to 8 years.

*Question 1. Please list all the leadership opportunities or committees that are available at your school. Also, please give the number of teachers that belong to each of these.* Examples of leadership opportunities and committees were evident at these schools. The committees varied from each site, but all of them could be categorized as one of the following:
1. School-based. All sites had grade level/team leaders. School Advisory Councils (SACs) and Parent–Teacher Associations (PTAs) functioned at all schools. In Florida, SACs and PTAs are required to operate in schools according to district and state policies.

2. Curriculum. Two schools had established a Reading/Literacy Council, and one had a Math Council. All three sites had created vertical teams—several groups of teachers consisting of one teacher from each grade level—to align the process of how benchmarks are taught on a continuum and up-leveled in concepts.

3. Professional development. Since this district had cut site-based funding and centralized all funds, the schools all relied upon the expertise of teacher leaders for professional development. All schools funded a part-time reading coach, who was required to attend a series of monthly, 1-day workshops to learn new strategies and training to take back to their schools. Two teachers, one in a primary grade and another in an intermediate grade at each school, had also been chosen by the principal to serve as math specialists. These teachers followed the same expectations as the reading coaches. Curriculum resource teachers worked closely with the reading coaches to provide school-based workshops and follow up with implementation of these new strategies.

4. Code of school conduct. All three elementary schools formed committees to address discipline. Two of the schools listed having a Discipline Committee, and one school had a Bullying Prevention Committee. One of the schools had a subcommittee of the Discipline Committee: the Character Education Committee. This committee developed monthly themes for teachers to conduct mini-lessons on such topics as honesty, perseverance, and empathy.
5. Social. Although the names of the committees varied, each school had established a social committee in charge of organizing different events for the faculty and staff, such as Holiday Parties and Team-Building Activities. The number of teachers listed as being part of these committees ranged from 2 to 16.

*Question 2. Describe situations or instances when it is important to have teacher input.* One administrative team member’s response summarized the overall theme that emerged: “All situations directly involving the teachers! It is imperative to have teacher input for all important issues at the school.” Examples such as interviewing/hiring new teachers, budget, scheduling, parent involvement, curriculum, and how programs and student support personnel work were given.

*Question 3. Describe situations or instances when it is not important to have teacher input.* All four principals replied that it is not important to have teacher input in situations “that are beyond their [principals] control.” Examples consisted of federal and/or state laws or mandates, emergency-response procedures that are outlined by district policies, and anything mandated “from above,” such as district policies or superintendents.

*Question 4. Describe situations or instances when you have implemented or changed a policy or procedure due to suggestions made by a committee or teacher at your school.* Each school leader shared an example of a recently changed policy or procedure. One administrative team member replied,

I asked for input from teachers and the administrative team members about the procedures in place. I did not want to change everything abruptly, but to analyze whether it was working and was effective. Changing check-out material procedures were made and implemented by teachers.
Another school leader replied, “Traffic flow of cars coming into school to drop off and pick up students.” A common theme discovered in all three schools was that administrative team members had changed their offerings of staff development workshops based on what teachers had suggested.

Question 5. What strategies, techniques, and/or programs have helped your school to become an A? All participants gave detailed responses to this question. The three schools had implemented school-wide tutoring programs with teachers and/or paraprofessionals to work with students. A common theme that all school leaders felt helped them to achieve “A” status was using student data to drive classroom instruction. Two schools shared the theme of a “supportive, caring environment” for teachers and students. Another strategy evident in all three schools was faculty-oriented professional development: One of the schools had study groups where teachers shared their learning with one another. Teachers had selected a book called Powerful Teaching by Judy Taccogna and John Jay Boustingl (2003). They met over a series of three weeks and shared successful and unsuccessful examples of how they utilized the instructional strategies presented in the book.

Survey Questions for Teachers

At all three school sites, teachers were prompted for basic demographic information, such as the number of years spent in education and at their current schools, on the surveys they completed. At one site, teachers ranged in age from 20 to 30, while at two of the sites they were between 31 and 40. Teachers had been in the education profession anywhere from 11 to 15 years, and they had been working in at their current schools from between 4 to 6 years.
Question 1. Are you a member of any school committees? If yes, please list the name(s) of the committee(s). Out of 165 surveys, only two teachers noted that they did not belong to a school committee. Common committees included a School Advisory Council and PTA. While compiling data from the surveys, the researcher noticed discrepancies in what leadership committees were offered at the schools by administrative team members and teachers. Teachers provided more examples than their school leaders of the various committees. In order to verify the data results of the question, I e-mailed the three principals a list of the responses that the teachers and administrative team members had provided from their school. When reviewing the lists, all three principals had identical responses: “I forgot about that committee.” When asked why they had forgotten a particular committee, one respondent remarked, “Some teachers listed duties, such as Team Leader or Beginning Teacher Mentor, which they are in charge of as committees. Getting a supplement isn’t the same as being on a committee.” Principal participants distinguished the difference between leadership roles and duties. Leadership roles were seen as voluntary and non-paid, while duties were not.

Question 2. What leadership opportunities have you taken on this past school year? Why or why not? Leadership opportunities were made available to the teachers at all three schools. Principals were using direct and indirect approaches for inviting teachers to be on committees. One teacher explained, “During preplanning, our principal has a big list of committees on chart paper that she needs teachers on. She asks everyone to sign up for one committee, except 1st-year teachers.” Another teacher replied, “She asked me personally to sit in on the interview committee for the new assistant principal, curriculum resource teacher, and compliance teacher.”
**Question 3.** Describe a time when you have served on a committee that presented an issue or concern to your principal. How did the principal handle the issue or concern?

Different issues were presented to the principal in each of the schools. Several concerns were relevant to the curriculum or instruction of the students. A theme highlighted here was that feedback is important to principals when it affects the teachers. One teacher explained,

> Successmaker [FCAT preparation computer software for students] has incredible potential for enhancing success. Unfortunately, the time/stress increases as teachers increase the number of programs students perform since each of those programs must be monitored and managed. Teachers were instructed to use a basic reading and math program for each child. Other programs could be added when needed, and mentors were available to assist teachers in doing so. This prevented Successmaker from overwhelming teachers.

Another teacher shared,

> As a grade level, we approached the principal about a problem we were having during a math meeting. We were asked to align our task analyses to our TERC series [math curriculum used at this school] to Everyday Math [math curriculum adopted by the district]. We had questions about the format and agreeing on which program should take precedence over the other.

An elementary teacher added,

> When it comes to making decisions about what we are doing for our students, I want to be involved. I want to understand the principal’s reason and the direction that we need to move the school. Once I know that and a plan has been set, then I am completely comfortable in what we are going to do.

One concern that was consistent across all three schools involved the Faculty Advisory Council’s (FAC’s) challenge regarding how to spend the A+ Recognition bonus money. According to Florida statutes, each FAC must create a plan, and faculty and staff must vote on it. Once the plan has been approved by the school, the School Advisory Council (SAC) must approve it. If the FAC cannot come up with a plan by the middle of November of each school year, the bonus money gets equally split among all faculty.
members. Non-instructional and classified staff members are ineligible. Teachers indicated that they struggled with creating the plan, but once finalized it was approved by the principal before it was presented to the SAC for approval.

Question 4. Under what circumstances are you given the opportunity to have input into the important decisions that affect your school? When teachers were asked this question, one theme emerged: Their principal had an open-door policy. A participant responded, “She has an open-door policy and counts on our opinions in making policy decisions.” Another teacher commented, “Our principal has an open-door policy, meaning that he is open to suggestions and/or concerns at any time during the year.”

Contrasting views were shared by teachers at one school about giving input into decisions made at the school. Although the principal of this school had perceived herself as encouraging teacher input and having an open door, the teachers shared mixed feelings. Some suggested that their principal had an open-door policy, while others did not. Teachers at one school felt their principal did not feel they were capable of giving input into decisions being made at the school. Concerns of trust and input were discussed. One teacher shared,

We have very little input. SAC is a very benign committee (we receive information and convene). There is a lack of trust when delivering opinions. There is a fear of backlash if your opinion does not go with what the principal wants. There are a few that reside in the “inner circle” of having opinions valued; the rest need to keep their heads down and their mouths shut.

Another teacher explained, “I do not feel that the staff is given very much input into important decisions at this school. At times, it is usually (almost always) the same staff members that are asked to give input.”
Question 5. How does your principal show that your opinion is valued? Several leadership behaviors were evident in teachers’ responses. These included having an open-door policy, encouraging and supporting ideas, and offering feedback by notes or by e-mail. One teacher disclosed,

[My principal] always tells us that we know our students and that we know where their areas of difficulty are. He supports us by encouraging us to bring concerns and ideas to him. He truly respects our opinions by allowing us to feel comfortable with our ideas.

Several teachers echoed this response. One observed, “[The principal] has an open-door policy and will listen and respond to any concerns or ideas. He promotes using e-mail to ask questions or offer suggestions. He always responds to e-mail.” Teachers discussed their principal’s approach on how information was shared with the faculty and staff. In addition, teachers understood the complexity of the principal’s role. One respondent stated,

[My principal] always tries to “soften the blow” on many things. The district has placed so many demands on administrators that as soon as the principal makes a decision with the staff, the demands may have already changed. It must be very frustrating for administrators.

Questions for the Administrative Team Member Interview

The researcher created seven semi-structured questions for the participants with the hope that, within and across their responses, themes and ideas would be uncovered among the respondent groups. Data from the three elementary school administrative teams and teachers’ interviews were analyzed via individual respondents and schools, and via participant groups. Based on their clear and concise answers given during their interviews, the researcher sensed that the principals and teachers felt it was their duty to make their school the best. Teachers expressed that they understood the mission and
vision of their school and school district. Participants seemed comfortable answering questions about teacher leadership and their success with students. The interview protocols for administrative team members and teachers are provided in appendices C and D.

**Question 1. In your own words, define the word leader.** The definitions given for leader included motivation, organization, and achieving goals. One respondent captured a common viewpoint: “A leader has a goal or vision and is able to motivate and guide others towards that goal or vision.” Other leaders added the phrases, “good listener” and “constant learner” to the same response. Another school leader stated, “Someone who tries to be fair and conscientious of others.”

**Question 2. In what ways do you use this definition of leader for yourself?** When participants answered this question, the first theme that emerged from the data analysis was supporting goals. Several school leaders mentioned, “I support the goals of the principal and the school. I do whatever I can to support him and empower the teachers to do the same.” Other teachers asserted, “I help facilitate the implementation of effective teaching strategies in the classrooms as well as curriculum and in this way move the school toward the goal of increased student achievement.”

The second theme that emerged from the data analysis was leading by example. Many of the administrative team members echoed the response of this participant: “I believe I set a standard and lead by example. People will often follow someone if that leader is willing to join in the effort and go through all the steps required to achieve a particular goal.”
Question 3. What are the characteristics you look for when hiring a new teacher?

The following is a list of desired characteristics of new teachers described by school principals and administrative team members:

1. Knowledge of curriculum
2. Ability to be a team player
3. Ability to get along with others
4. Energetic (“bubbly”) personality
5. Same philosophy about how to educate students
6. History of accomplishing goals

The first two items were the most frequent responses received.

Question 4. In what ways have you provided opportunities for teacher input?

School leaders provided opportunities for teacher input through surveys, informal discussions, curriculum and data meetings, grade-level meetings, faculty meetings, e-mails, and student-profile meetings. Principals had shared that their teachers were always willing to give their input on issues and concerns that were presented to them. School leaders had stated that they had solicited input when it came to decision involving curriculum and instruction. In addition to these methods, some school leaders believed in availability and approachability. One leader echoed the voice of the other administrative team members: “I believe the most important thing a school leader can do is to be accessible and approachable with these two characteristics—teachers will be willing to offer their input in both formal and informal settings.”

Question 5. In what ways have you developed a professional learning community at your school? School leaders believed that collaboration among the teachers helped
them become a professional learning community. Sharing ideas, coaching other faculty members, and jointly working toward the goal of student achievement were typical examples of this collaboration. One school leader explained,

You have to provide opportunities for teachers to work together. Not just within their teams, but outside of that realm. For example, during vertical teaming meetings, teachers have the opportunity to share ideas about what strategies work best with students from different ability levels. Teachers learn best from each other because it brings credibility to what is and is not working in the classroom.

The school leaders believed it was just as important to grow professionally as well as the teachers. Principals had discussed how they needed to model this practice by leading and/or participating in school-based staff development. One principal had shared that she presented several workshops on analyzing student data. Another principal had mentioned that he had presented workshops to the faculty on best reading practices.

Question 6. In what ways have you empowered your staff to develop their leadership skills inside and outside the classroom? Leadership opportunities were created in several ways, such as book studies and presenting workshops. One administrative team participant replied,

We have encouraged teachers to share responsibility for student achievement by ability grouping, which has allowed teachers to become leaders via their expertise within their team. We have also encouraged teachers to become “expert” leaders for their team in curriculum areas such as Successmaker, and asking them to present staff development workshops.

Another school leader stated, “Teachers are encouraged to act as mentors. They have also been offered the opportunity to present information at staff and team meetings.”

Question 7. Describe a time when you felt satisfied with the work environment among the teachers at your school. Can you describe a time when you felt dissatisfied?
Most statements describing a time when they were satisfied were summed up by this reply: “I’m pretty happy with the teachers at this school. They really care about the students and school.” One school principal shared a specific example:

I was excited with our Study Group Showcase. Teachers were divided into several teams, and they had selected a book to study. They met over six weeks, then the entire school got together and each group presented their information to the rest of the groups. I was extremely proud of how smooth it went and how much the teachers enjoyed it.

Two of the schools had undergone leadership changes. Some of the administrative team members at one of the schools shared instances of when they were dissatisfied with the previous leadership regime:

Three years ago when the new principal came, the staff was really unhappy and divided. The entire staff came together for a series of school-wide team-building activities. At first, there was resistance, but it was a wonderful experience for all involved. Our school was truly one community of learners. We were not divided by grade level or specialty area.

The new principal of this school described her experience of her initial arrival:

When I first arrived to the school, I came mid-year. One of the tasks I was responsible for was hiring new teachers for the next school year. As expected, I had several teachers leaving to go work with the new principal. This created seven vacancies at my current school. Several teachers from my old school inquired about the vacancies I had. Since I knew they were great teachers, I offered the jobs to them. I had planned an end-of-the-year ice cream social for the teachers and I had invited the new teachers to come and meet them. It was a bad idea! My new teachers thought I was making a big deal about the teachers I had worked with before. It took a long time for the teachers to get past that. I brought in a consultant to help us work on some trust building and community building with the staff.

Another school leader commented,

It has been as though a black cloud has been lifted from this school. Before, teachers were unhappy and unprofessional. It was as though they came to punch in their time cards, do their job, and leave at the end of each day. We went through a series of community-building workshops to discuss our problems, and then things started to change. Teachers are happier and more professional with
their dealings with students, parents, and each other. I am so happy she is here. She has changed our school around. I have learned a great deal from her.

*Questions for the Teacher Interview*

*Question 1. In your own words, define the word leader.* Nine out of the 12 teachers interviewed defined *leader* in a way consistent with one teacher’s response: “I think of a leader as someone who guides or inspires others through their words, actions, and character. A leader is someone that others look up to and respect.”

*Question 2. Do you consider yourself a leader at this school? Describe your position.* All teachers responded “yes” to this question. I noted a usual phrase in their answers: “inside and outside the classroom.” One teacher commented, “Yes, I feel I am a leader. Not just in my role as team leader that involves keeping my team informed and unified through meetings and social activities, but in my relationships with my peers.” Another teacher shared, “I am a leader. I model behaviors for my students in the classroom such as respect, listening, empathy, and teamwork. I apply these same behaviors when I am interacting with my colleagues and parents.”

*Question 3. In what ways has your principal provided opportunities for teacher input?* Teachers shared a variety of ways principals provided opportunities for input. A theme that emerged from the data were surveys via e-mail or handouts. One leader shared, “He uses surveys and has an open-door policy that allows teachers to come in any time with ideas or needs.” Another teacher noted,

My principal is always sending out e-mails asking for our input on curriculum and instruction—what affects the children most. During faculty meetings, we are given index cards to address any issues or concerns we have that were not discussed. She follows up with a summary of the questions and answers in an e-mail.
Another teacher added, “Our principal gives us a survey at the end of the year. It asks [about] a variety of things, such as scheduling, staff, and academic programs.”

**Question 4. In what ways has your principal developed a professional learning community at your school?** One example of developing a professional learning community at the schools was the professional development of teachers and staff. One teacher explained, “She asks the staff for input about what training opportunities they want or need through a survey. She offers workshops as voluntary, respecting teachers’ time and planning needs. The optional book talk was a great learning opportunity.” A teacher echoed the same response: “During our staff development Wednesdays, we can collaborate with others about instructional strategies. This is done as a staff and as a grade level.”

**Question 5. In what ways has your principal empowered you to develop your leadership skills inside and outside the classroom?** Arising from the data analysis, all teachers supported their principal in allowing teachers to take advantage of professional development opportunities. One teacher commented,

[The principal] provides funding and professional days for teachers to attend trainings off campus. His only requirement is that we present the information to the staff. He offers the opportunity to be a part of a variety of committees.

Another teacher expressed giving input through committees:

At the beginning of the school year, the principal asks all teachers to be involved in at least one committee. Committees range from staff development, social committee, media and technology, literacy council, discipline, and parent-leadership council. These committees have an active role in the creation of school policies.

**Question 6. Have you been involved in a decision that has affected the students at your school as a whole? If so, describe.** When answering this question, responses
centered around two themes: hiring new teachers and selecting classroom curriculum. An elementary teacher remarked, “I was asked to sit in and give feedback regarding the new assistant principal. Being a part of the interview process was an honor because it was such an important decision for our school.” Another teacher testified,

When we are hiring new teachers, whether classroom or resource, teachers are asked to sit in on the interviews. We have to find individuals that meet our vision and mission of the school. I sat it on the interviews for the new fourth-grade teacher and the curriculum resource teacher. After each candidate interviewed, committee members gave pros and cons about the candidates. My principal valued my input, as well as the other committee members’. She listened to what we were saying, and we went with majority rules.

*Question 7. Describe a time when you felt satisfied with the work environment among the teachers at your school. Can you describe a time when you felt dissatisfied?*

A pattern that emerged from the transcribed data were professional collegiality. Teachers felt satisfied with the work environment when they recollected a positive experience with a colleague. A respondent remarked,

The last time I dropped off the ESE [exceptional student education] progress reports, I had delivered them to each of the teachers and took a few minutes to conference about each student’s strengths and weaknesses. We also compared and contrasted information about the academic and behavior concerns in both of our classrooms. It was great having such professional and supportive conversations about our students. Having a good working relationship between ESE and general education teachers is very satisfying.

Still another teacher expressed the following viewpoint:

We were having a staff development on student writing. Each teacher was asked to bring three student samples. During the workshop, we were paired up with other teachers from various grade levels to get an idea of the writing continuum. It was great to see the link between what a kindergarten teacher does in writing helps build the foundation to when I get them in third grade. During the workshop, we were talking about the students and what could we do to help them academically grow. Some of us had the same students in different grades. We talked about different strategies that were successful and unsuccessful. That workshop helped me to remain focused on why I am a teacher. It is about the kids.
One teacher shared his dissatisfaction when he served on a committee devoid of good communication between the principal and the committee:

I served on a technology committee that was preparing to establish a computer lab. We were at an advance process when the principal decided not to fund the program anymore. We were left in the cold. It felt as though we did all that work for nothing. [The principal] never explained to us fully that she ran out of money for the program. Later, we also found out that her boss and the district did not support the program we were looking into implementing at the school.

Only one school shared instances when teachers were unsatisfied. Responses focused on when the new principal had taken over the school. Her predecessor had been selected by the school board to open a new elementary school, and several teachers left the school to work with this principal, thus creating critical faculty vacancies. The new principal had hired nine teachers from her previous school to fill all of the vacancies and introduced the new hires to the current faculty in an e-mail message. Administrators shared their thoughts during this period at the school. Teachers shared their opinions about the situation:

I felt very hurt that we were not included in making the decision for the new teachers. I do not think it was so much the decision rather in the way it was handled. It appeared as though it was an “oh by the way” type of mentality. It was just not a good way to start your administrative career at the school.

It was a bad time 3 years ago. When the new principal came in, she brought nine of her teachers with her from her old school. She introduced them in an e-mail and told us to come to an after-school reception to meet them. I was thinking, “Are you kidding me with this?” When I was hired here, I did not get a reception for others to come and meet me, nor did the other teachers that came here the same year as me. It was as if she was putting them on a pedestal. She hired a consultant to get at the bottom of the team-building issue we had at the school. We got through it and things have been much better.

Discussion Prompts for Focus Groups: Administrative Team Members

The researcher created four semi-structured discussion prompts for the administrative team members and teachers’ focus groups. In addition, participants were
given a list of the survey and interview responses to validate the statements. Participants had a positive rapport with each other and enjoyed being a part of the study. It was easy to see the dominant personalities in the focus groups—there was always one member who consistently answered each question first and led the discussion. The other participants would nod their heads in agreement and not offer any additional insights. It was inferred from the teachers that some of them might have felt uncomfortable sharing ideas in front of others. The discussion prompts are displayed in appendices E and F.

**Question 1. What opportunities have you created at your school for teachers to develop their leadership inside and outside the classroom?** Participants gave examples of leadership roles they had listed before, such as staff development presenters, Successmaker leaders, team leaders, and trainer-of-trainers workshops.

**Question 2. Are there teachers on your staff that do not take leadership opportunities when presented? Why or why not?** All school team members unanimously said “yes.” Two reasons were given by the focus groups: teachers’ individual personalities and preferences. One leader replied,

There are several teachers on my staff that do not take leadership opportunities when presented with the occasion. Some teachers feel insecure about their abilities, some feel uncomfortable speaking in front of large groups of people. Others are concerned about the extra time required to prepare for said opportunities.

**Question 3. What are the characteristics that you look for when selecting teachers for leadership roles and/or opportunities?** The focus groups shared several characteristics that they look for in a teacher. One response to summarize the groups’ feelings was, “people that will get the job done using good judgment.” Another leader added, “People
skills, organization, knowledge, and dependability.” In addition, one administrative team member mentioned “an established reputation with the faculty.”

**Question 4. Describe how you have personally contributed to the success of this school.** Respondents described their current role in the school and used it to explain how they personally contributed to the success of the school. A school leader shared,

As a resource teacher, I make sure the teachers have the materials they need in order to teach. I train, coach, and support their growth as teachers. I also make time to be in contact with students by individually working with a group of third graders for after-school tutoring and writing groups.

Another school leader shared this viewpoint:

I am visible and approachable for teachers, parents, and students. I assist with the day-to-day operations that help the school run efficiently by handling the majority of the discipline referrals. Data folders are monitored. I also keep track of the FCAT scores and student registration updates. This lets teachers know the status of their students.

**Discussion Prompts for Focus Groups: Teachers**

**Question 1. What words would you use to describe your principal’s leadership style? Give examples to illustrate each word you selected.** Many of the participants offered “visionary.” One participant’s example illustrated her choice of the word:

She is able to see the possibility of a better school for students and teachers even when others could not. She knew what kinds of changes were necessary to make that happen. She is willing to try everything at least once.

Several participants described their principal as “supportive”; one teacher elucidated:

I had handled a situation with a parent completely wrong. I knew I messed up. I went to my principal to inform her of what happened and how I dealt with it. I knew the parent was going to call. We had a meeting with the parent and student the next day. My principal defended me to the parent and tried to smooth out the situation. After the parent left the meeting, my principal talked to me about the situation and how I could have handled it differently. She could have embarrassed me in front of the parent but she did not. I am glad she handled it the way she did.
A common idea was that principals were “efficient” and “got the job done.” An elementary teacher explained,

[The principal] gets the job done and in a timely manner. I needed a reference form filled out for graduate school and asked him to complete it for me. I told him that I needed it back in 2 weeks. The form was completed and handed back to me by the end of the same day. Another time I asked the custodians to take an extra table out of my classroom. When [the principal] was in my classroom for an observation, he noticed the table. He left my classroom and came back in 10 minutes. He brought a hand-dolly and moved the table himself.

One teacher responded,

[This principal] is so much better than my last one. He always lets us know what he is thinking. We meet to talk about students, data, and the meetings are not a waste of our time. Nothing is a surprise around here.

**Question 2. What experiences do you perceive have provided you with the knowledge and/or skills to take on leadership roles at your school?** The pattern that emerged from this question was staff development. Respondents believed that the various staff-development workshops, such as teaching vocabulary and making classroom accommodations and modifications for students, helped them develop their knowledge and/or skills. When teachers became confident with newly acquired information, they shared their knowledge and experiences with other colleagues. One teacher’s response mirrored the group’s: “The various leadership opportunities increased my skills and knowledge about the teaching profession, which gave me what I needed in terms of vital information for leadership.”

**Question 3. Describe how you have personally contributed to the success of this school.** Similar to the administrative team members, teachers defined their roles along the lines of how they contributed to the success of the school. Teachers that taught in the primary grade levels replied in a similar manner: “We are giving our students a strong
academic and social foundation for success in the upper grades.” Intermediate teachers related, “We are able to look at classroom data and identify students’ strengths and weaknesses. We continue to challenge our students and help them to be well-rounded citizens.”

Question 4. Do you think teacher leadership is encouraged at this school? If so, how? All respondents emphasized that teacher leadership was encouraged at the school. One elementary teacher explained,

[Teacher leadership] is emphasized, but not overemphasized. There are plenty of opportunities to lead and get involved. Yet those who choose not to lead are still great teachers. They are not made to feel negatively for their lack of leadership involvement.

Another teacher stated, “My principal is always encouraging us to be a part of the school. She says it takes all of us working together to help our students.” All principals acknowledged in their interviews that they understood their leadership roles and knew they could not do their job effectively without teacher leaders on their campuses.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to describe the processes by which principals enhanced teacher leadership roles within their schools and the leadership roles that the teachers undertake. The goals of this study are to: (a) identify the processes by which the principal participants started to create and develop teacher leaders within their schools, and (b) observe the principals’ selection of teachers for various leadership roles. The survey, interview, and focus group questions were presented in this chapter and explored using the response data collected from the administrative team members and teachers at three elementary schools. Although it was discovered that there were different perceptions between administrative team members and teachers of what constituted
leadership roles within the schools, principals nonetheless created numerous leadership opportunities at their schools, notably for math specialists, team leaders, reading/literacy council members. Elementary school teachers shared instances of suggested policies and procedures, such as discipline and arrival/dismissal procedures, that were implemented by their principals. School leaders used a variety of techniques to seek input from teachers, notably surveys, e-mail, and through open-door interaction. In addition, teachers felt their principals valued their personal opinions, as expressed by principals taking the time to listen to their concerns or sending a thank you note.

Participants disclosed their thoughts on what strategies and techniques helped their schools become and maintain a school grade of A, such as after-school tutoring programs and specific curriculums. Some of these were illustrated in their responses to other questions. Staff development opportunities and selection of new faculty and staff members were key themes. All teachers were encouraged by their principals to suggest ideas to improve their schools, and all principals were described as having an open-door policy.

All 12 of the administrative team participants provided opportunities for teacher leadership within their schools, primarily by forming or facilitating school-based committees. School leaders solicited opinions from teachers, especially when it came to curriculum and instructional concerns. When sharing best practices or participating in staff development opportunities with colleagues, teachers felt satisfied with their work environments. School leaders and teachers understood the roles they played in the overall success of their schools.
Based on the literature review and what has been discovered throughout this study, the researcher hoped to provide principals with a set of conditions for building teacher leadership capacities within their schools. The data collected for this dissertation carries with it implications for practice and future research within the educational leadership field. In the following chapter, the results of this study are summarized and its implications are highlighted.
Chapter Five

Conclusion and Recommendations

This chapter provides an overview of the resultant data from surveys, interviews, and focus groups with administrative team members and teachers at three elementary schools located in a large school district in central Florida. The researcher conducted all scheduled interviews and focus groups, and school leaders and teachers shared their thoughts regarding teacher leadership within their schools. Emerging themes are presented and discussed, along with recommendations for future research. The researcher concluded with some thoughts regarding my journey through the course of this study.

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore how public school principals develop teacher leaders and how this effort affects school performance. The idea of leadership distributed across multiple people and situations has proven to be a useful framework for understanding the realities of schools and how to improve them (Timperley, 2005). One principal interviewee shared, “There is no way I can do this job by myself. I rely on the expertise of the leadership team and classroom teachers in order to make our school the best it can be.” Another school leader added, “Running a school is much like that familiar proverb ‘It takes a village to raise a child.’ I believe it takes all of us to educate a child.”

After examining a variety of sources, such as journal articles and web-based search engines, it was concluded that there was limited information concerning how leadership was distributed, particularly about how principals establish these leadership
roles. Therefore, the researcher sought to discover what characteristics principals look for when selecting new teachers, what leadership opportunities were made available to teachers, and how these roles helped to sustain a high-performing school.

The researcher also explored recent school-based decisions made by teachers and administrative team members. In addition, the behaviors of three elementary school principals as portrayed by their teachers and their perceptions of their principals were depicted. Furthermore, teachers’ and school leaders’ views of their school cultures were examined. A main significance of this research was the specific focus placed on what elementary school principals do, primarily studying how these leadership roles and opportunities were created. At this time of this study, this research provided more insight than what the current literature on teacher leadership had to offer.

To accomplish the goals of this study, the researcher reviewed salient reports on teacher leadership. These reports aided with the task of developing data collection instruments for teachers and school leaders, and with conducting a pilot and the actual study (see chapter 3). In all, 165 surveys, 24 interviews, and 6 focus-group sessions with school leaders and teachers were completed between March and June 2006. Features of teacher leadership in high-performing schools were investigated. Finally, an analysis of the study’s results was undertaken (see chapter 4), and a written report followed addressing the need to continue research on teacher leadership (see chapter 5).

Conclusion

Based on this research and the connection among themes presented, three prominent conclusions of high-performing schools were identified:

1. The principal’s role
The Principal’s Role

Research consistently suggested that the principal was the key to shaping a school’s culture (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001; Lambert, 2003; Patterson, 2001). The principal sets the tone for the school by establishing the policies, procedures, and expectations. This system of meaning often influences how people think and act.

Questions from the surveys, interviews, and focus groups were designed to explore what principals do and how they act. When teachers were asked to describe a time when they served on a committee that presented an issue or concern to the principal, all participants had an incident to share. All issues shared had been resolved, with the exception of one. This was the result of the principal not following up with the technology committee at one school. This is significant because school leaders in this study were seen as completing tasks in a timely manner.

Principals were also viewed as having an open-door policy, inviting teachers to suggest ways to improve the school. Principals also treated their teachers as professionals and set high expectations for performance and achievement. This quote also brings home the theme of communication. Teachers respected their administrators when they understood what was expected from them.

The beliefs and perceptions formed by the teachers were reflective of the principals’ behaviors. Based on the data analysis, principal behaviors observed by the teachers included listening to concerns and issues, sharing the vision of the school, being
efficient in daily tasks, and demonstrating successful communication skills with staff members.

As an elementary principal, the teachers in this study have shared that they want a principal who is willing to listen, support them with the decisions they make within reason, and have trust in what they say and do. Teachers are willing to take on more responsibilities, such as leadership roles, if they respect and admire their principals and feel supported. The value of building collegial relationships among the teachers and between the teachers and administration is extremely powerful. Principals must strive to establish trust with their teachers before they can begin to share leadership responsibilities and develop teacher leaders within their schools.

School-Based Leadership Opportunities

When school leaders and teachers were asked if they were part of any school committees, numerous responses were given. All participants gave examples of leadership opportunities, such as acting as a member of the Discipline Intervention Team or Literacy Council and being a math specialist. It is important to note that the principals perceived the leadership roles in their schools differently than their teachers. After further investigation of this discrepancy, an additional theme emerged: Principals defined leadership opportunities as non-paid, as opposed to teachers receiving supplements for their roles. Teacher participants defined themselves as leaders and gave examples of their leadership in and out of the classroom.

At the beginning of the school year, or as new initiatives were being implemented, all school leaders created leadership committees. They were established by identifying needs and asking for volunteers or speaking with teachers individually. The
researcher categorized committees as: (a) mandatory school-based, (b) social, (c) curriculum, (d) professional development, and (e) discipline. Teacher participants and school leaders believed it was essential to be a part of the decision-making process, especially when it came to the hiring new faculty members, purchasing curriculum, and researching new instructional practices.

When teachers and school leaders were asked about situations when committees gave input into school-based decisions, (a) opinions and suggestions are solicited from stakeholders, except in emergencies and top-down district mandates, and (b) opinions are solicited when teachers are expected to implement a program. Although most public school districts select which curriculums are going to be adopted, schools do have control over supplemental materials and delivery of instruction. It is important to add that communication needs to be ongoing between the principal and the committee at all times. Open and honest communication is the most important way that principals can establish trust with their teachers.

Professional Learning Communities

Based on the teacher and administrative team members’ responses during the interviews and focus groups, study participants shared that they were satisfied with their work environment and enjoyed interacting with colleagues, with the exception of the transition of the principal at one school site. School principals created opportunities for teacher interaction within their schools, such as mentoring new teachers, discussing students’ strengths, and sharing best practices for classroom instruction and student achievement.
Based on the analysis of transcribed texts, principals initially created these professional learning communities by selecting new teachers. Several desired characteristics were given, such as curriculum knowledge and being a team player. Furthermore, school leaders understood that some teachers chose not to take on leadership roles. However, leadership opportunities were available to all and encouraged by the principals.

So what does all of this mean? The concept behind teacher leadership involves principals developing their schools as a community of leaders. Schools have become very complex and have to accommodate too many needs. One person can no longer address all of the demands placed on these institutions. In order to accomplish this goal, school leaders have to understand that the relationship between the faculty and principal is crucial. This relationship must exist in order for teacher leadership to thrive in a school. Teachers have to see themselves and others as leaders and understand the impact they have beyond the classroom. School leaders must establish a culture of trust, honesty, and professionalism between themselves and the teachers. In addition, principals must provide and support opportunities for leadership by, for example, aligning teacher strengths and roles.

What is the impact of teacher leadership on schools? In order for school reform and student achievement to be better facilitated as major educational goals, principals and teachers have to discuss and implement methods for improving schools. Principals and teachers are both continuous learners within the school, sharing strategies and ideas to make decisions that will affect them and their students. Furthermore, school leaders come and go. Schools should be able to carry on in their daily operations regardless of
leadership changes. It is important that teachers work with the principal when this happens. Based on this study and my personal experiences as an administrator, these are the reasons why teacher leadership is crucial to the educational profession. Teacher leadership instills lifelong learning among students and educators.

As noted in chapters 1 and 4, some of the conditions of teacher leadership offered may not be relevant to every site since all schools are different. This research or researcher does not assume that schools graded B to F are not utilizing similar teacher leadership roles and that principals in these schools are demonstrating different behaviors and have different teacher perceptions. In addition, this research or researcher does not assume that principals at these schools are in any way less effective if they are not developing their teachers as leaders. In fact, they may have created comparable leadership opportunities for their teachers at their schools and exhibit some of the same behaviors as the principals described in this study. However, those schools were not studied in this research project, which instead sought to provide a foundation of successful teacher leadership practices in high-performing, grade A schools.

Implications for Future Research

Throughout the literature, shared governance has been a popular educational reform strategy for schools (Hicks, 2006; Holloway, 2000; Schlechty, 2001). This exploratory study supports the need to continue to examine the principal’s role in developing teacher leaders in order to improve schools. Because of the qualitative methodology of this research and its use of a modest number of participants, user generalizability is limited. Expanding the number of participants by including more school districts within the state of Florida or within other states could increase
generalizability. In addition, schools with free and reduced lunch rates of 75% or more and schools rated a B to F by the Florida Department of Education could have been examined. Furthermore, the borders of this study could be expanded to include private educational institutions.

Additional implications for future research should include why some teachers choose not to take on leadership roles. Based on the 165 surveys collected in this study, only 2 teachers indicated why they did not take on leadership roles. Interviewing teachers who choose not to take on leadership roles would provide further research on teacher leadership. To expand this study to make it more global, states should be compared to determine what constitutes high-performance schools. For example, Texas has a series of standardized tests, similar to Florida, known as the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) (Texas Education Agency, 2006). TAKS reports the percentage of students in grades 3 through 11 on various assessments that scored high enough to meet the standard to pass the test. In addition, state educational statutes could also be examined to determine if the legal implications are the same for principals in Florida as compared to other states. Nonetheless, an abundance of data were collected at multiples sites that revealed critical insights. Regardless of the study’s limitations, this dissertation may help to continue dialogue and provide practical tips for principals in building leadership capacity within their schools.

*Examining the Principal’s Role*

As established, the purpose of this study was to discover prominent features of teacher leadership in high-performing schools. In addition, principal behaviors and
teachers perceptions were examined. Characteristics common to the three principals and what leadership opportunities teachers were undertaken at their schools were described.

This research took place at the end of the year, when leadership roles were already well established. Although principals described how leadership opportunities were presented to their teachers, this study neither addressed why teachers selected specific committees nor explored the conversations occurring between teachers and principals when teachers were asked to be on a committees. Researchers in the leadership field need to pursue a study that focuses on the initial interactions between principals and their teachers at the beginning of the school year.

*Teacher and Principal Retention*

Recent research has also examined school culture and its effect on teacher retention (Plecki, Effers, & Knapp, 2006; Young, 2007). Plecki, et al. (2006) suggested that little research exists nation-wide on the extent to which teachers move from one school or district to another or exit the profession, or the factors that may influence teachers to leave a school or the profession entirely. The researcher began to question whether school principals’ perceptions and behaviors could be a factor in whether teachers stayed at a school.

In addition, principal retention could also be studied more. There are principals that are moved from school to school and principals that remain at a school for several years. Why have some principals been moved from a school only after a few years? Why have some principals remained at schools for several years? Is there a correlation between principal retention and effective leadership? Knowing the reasons why principals stay at a school for years or move from one school to another could shed light
on knowing if their supervisors perceive them as possessing certain effective leadership behaviors.

Talent Keepers Trust Builders (2007), a central Florida organization that primarily works with school districts, found that the main reason teachers stay at a school is trust in the principal. Through a series of online training and workshops, Trustbuilders consultants work with school administrators on trust-building strategies with teachers. These strategies apparently help principals retain teachers at their schools. This company’s research suggests that researchers need to pursue study of the retention rates at these research sites, as well other schools with similar demographics.

Implications for Practitioners

This study’s findings have implications for school practitioners. In many situations, teachers valued their principals’ communication skills, efficiency in handling situations, having an open-door policy, and soliciting their input in school-wide decisions, such as curriculum and instructional practices. Teachers also believed they benefited from the opportunity to reflect upon and share their current instructional practices with colleagues. These are the conditions necessary for school principals to initiate and create teacher leaders within their schools.

The goals of this study were to identify the processes by which the principal participants started to create teacher leaders within their schools and to observe the principals’ selection of teachers for various leadership roles. Leadership roles were primarily created to assist with new school-based and/or district initiatives that were being implemented, such as math specialists and wellness representatives. Principals had selected teachers for leadership roles based on background information given during their
initial interviews, through informal conversations, and through classroom observations. If teachers are looking to go beyond the classroom and are seeking administrative roles, such as assistant principals and principals, they will ask their principals to take on additional roles to gain leadership experience. These examples provide a framework for principals who are beginning to create teacher leadership opportunities.

School leaders must be conscientious of their behavior when interacting with faculty and staff members. Early one morning when arriving to work as principal, I opened my office door to discover that a teacher was knocking on the lobby window. She startled me. I did not expect to find one of my teachers there at that time. The teacher proceeded to ask a question that I could not answer immediately, so I indicated that I would give her the correct answer after I made a call to the district office. Five minutes after my conversation, I left my office to distribute a memo to the faculty and staff. While in the lounge, another teacher approached me and said, “I heard you are in a bad mood.” I replied, “No. Why would you think that?” She responded, “[Mrs. Smith] said she asked you a question and you looked as though you were in a bad mood.” I commented, “No, I’m in a good mood. I was just in deep thought because I was busy with a task and knew that I would need to research the answer to her question.” This story highlights that teachers view principals’ behaviors under a microscope.

Shared governance resonated as another theme throughout the literature and the findings from this case study; principals created numerous opportunities for teachers to lead within their schools. This trend of involving teachers in the decision-making process is predicted to continue (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1996), as leaders are now recognizing the value of empowering staff and students and producing greater “buy-in” from all
educational community members (Johnson & Scollay, 2001; Ortiz & Ogawa, 2000). School leaders should focus greater attention on understanding how teachers and principals can work together toward school improvement.

Principals have a difficult balancing the management tasks and instructional tasks of their role. School leaders have to remember what their focus needs to be, that is, an instructional leader. Creating and empowering teacher leaders is one of these instructional tasks. The principal is the person who shapes the school culture, a practice that must be modeled in their daily actions with teachers, staff, parents, students, and community members.

**Implications for Scholars**

This study’s findings also have implications for scholars. This research contributes to the current literature by adding insights into the principal’s role in building teacher leadership capacity. Just as practitioners should focus on creating leadership roles within their school, perhaps some scholars should also center their research on identifying current leadership roles in schools. In addition, this study identified certain behaviors that teachers observed in their principals. Scholars could help their students by creating school-based scenarios and using role-playing formats to illustrate how the principal’s behaviors affect teacher perceptions.

University professors should consider offering leadership courses on or embed themes of trust building and establishing leadership capacity within their programs. Scholars could instruct their students using case studies at local public schools. Through this method, students could come to understand the nature of shared leadership within their schools. Future research in this area could center on studying whether shared
leadership has an effect on how long teachers remain at a school. Additional studies could consider the principal’s role in establishing teacher leaders at the beginning of a school year. Through the observation of this process in the school setting, scholars could begin to understand which leadership roles are created and which roles teachers select and why.

Summary

The researcher recommends that principals exhibit certain characteristics, such as taking time to listen to teachers’ concerns and soliciting feedback from staff via surveys or e-mails. Other pertinent actions included asking for input into decisions that affect students and showing appreciation for their work and ideas through face-to-face conversations or thank-you notes. The teachers participating in this study valued such behaviors. The researcher also proposes that principals create more opportunities for teacher leadership — school administrators and teachers must work together when making decisions involving classroom curriculum and instructional materials.

Lastly, the researcher suggests that future research in teacher leadership continue to examine the principal’s impact on teacher leadership and teacher retention at their schools. In addition, studying the teacher retention rates at these or similar schools are grounds for future study. Furthermore, principal retention should also be examined to determine the reasons why school leaders are retained at schools or transferred to other schools. Answering the question “Does the principal’s role in building leadership capacity impact teacher retention at a school?” would provide more insight into the teacher leadership phenomenon. By empowering practicing school leaders with
conditions to enhance teacher leadership within their schools, K–12 schools will continue to improve.

Researcher’s Final Thoughts

My journey simultaneously overlapped as researcher and practitioner. While writing this dissertation, I experienced some professional changes in my career. My school-based role changed from an assistant principal to principal, and this change helped me reflect on my own thoughts and emotions about leadership and the leader I want to be. As an assistant principal, I felt like all of the teachers in my building respected and valued me as an administrator and person. I felt that I had great rapport with the entire staff, and I had a minimal number of negative confrontations with faculty and staff—“life as an administrator” was relatively conflict-free. Then things changed when I became principal at a different school site. As a principal, I feel the effect of “all eyes on me”—teachers, students, parents, community members, and school board members. In general, a tremendous amount of pressure is placed on school principals concerning student success. As I was told by a deputy superintendent for a school district in central Florida, “We are living in a high-stakes environment where accountability is at the forefront and high student performance is expected.” As principal, I have learned that I am “on stage” every day and I have to model what I expect from the teachers and students at all times.

Before I began my first day as principal, I had a meeting with my area superintendent. During our meeting, she informed me that I had two goals to meet for the school: to take it to the next level in terms of student achievement and to work with the staff. I replied, “What can you tell me about the staff?” Prior to selecting the new principal for the school I lead, she had a principal input meeting with the teachers.
Teachers had shared with the area superintendent that they felt unappreciated and distrusted the previous principal. In order to move the school forward, I knew that I needed to work on the issue of trust with the staff.

When I arrived at the school in 2005, I met individually with the teachers that served on the interview committee. I wanted to ask them questions and ascertain their feelings about the school. After I gathered input from the faculty and staff, I understood their biggest concern with the previous administrator was that they felt they were not included in any decisions and never knew what was going on at the school. I spent my first year of administration making sure to keep the faculty and staff informed of district policies and procedures. When making school-based decisions, I solicited opinions from teachers and included them in the decision-making process. I also worked on developing a positive rapport with the teachers. I made sure to take time to talk to the teachers to learn something personal about them and their students.

I felt I had built the foundation for establishing trust during my first year of the principalship with the teachers. During my second year of administration, we had to implement two major curriculum initiatives. The teachers seemed open to and supportive of this idea. I felt “buy-in” had occurred with the staff largely because I had established trust with my teachers, solicited feedback from the teachers, and had open and honest conversations with them as to why the changes were needed for our students.

As I reflect upon this dissertation research, I learned about my strengths and opportunities for growth as a leader. I have also learned that I cannot solve all the school’s problems by myself. Building a positive and honest relationship with the teachers has proven critical to the success of the school and its students. Based on my
learnings from this study in addition to my current role, I strive to have positive and honest interactions with the teachers with whom I work involving such matters as students, data, curriculum, and best practices. When decisions must be made, I gather teacher input by sending out e-mail surveys targeting different concerns about the school. In addition, I create ways for teachers to be a part of the school, inviting them to pilot new curriculum and serve on interview committees for new teachers. The results of this study have helped me become a better principal by making me even more conscientious in my interactions with teachers and students toward creating a better school for the teachers and primarily our students.
References


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Appendices
Appendix A: Survey Questions for Administrative Team Members

My name is Rahim Jones, and I am a doctoral candidate at the University of South Florida. I am completing a case study as part of a doctoral requirement. Kindly respond to the following questions on the front and back of this survey. In addition, please give the number of teachers that participate on these committees. Thank you for your time. Please return the completed survey to me at the end of the faculty meeting.

Basic demographics of participant:

Number of Years Total in Education _______ Number of Years at This School _______
Number of Years in Administration or Administrative Role ________

Please mark the categories that apply to you with an X:

Gender: Male _______ Female _______
Age:  25 to 30 _____ 31 to 36 _____ 37 to 42 _____
      43 to 48 _____ 49 to 54_____  55 or over _____

Directions: Please list all the leadership opportunities or committees that are available at your school. Also, please give the number of teachers that belong to each of these.

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Appendix A: (Continued)

Directions: Please answer the following questions.

1. Describe when it is important to have teacher input.

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2. Describe when it is not important to have teacher input.

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3. Describe situations or instances when it is not important to have teacher input.

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Appendix A: (Continued)

4. Describe situations or instances when you have implemented or changed a policy or procedure due to suggestions made by a committee or teacher at your school.

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5. What strategies, techniques, and/or programs have helped your school to become an A?

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Appendix B: Survey Questions for Teachers

My name is Rahim Jones, and I am a doctoral candidate at the University of South Florida. I am completing a case study as part of a doctoral requirement. Please take a few minutes to respond to each question. Thank you in advance for your time. Before you leave the faculty meeting, please return the completed survey to me.

Basic demographics of participants:

Number of Years Total in Education _______ Number of Years at This School _______

Highest Formal Degree Obtained (i.e., Bachelor of Science [B.S.]) _______

Are you a National Board Certified teacher? __________

Please mark the categories that apply to you with an X:

Gender: Male _______ Female _______

Age: under 25 _____ 25 to 30 _____ 31 to 36 _____ 37 to 42 _____

43 to 48 _____ 49 to 54 _____ 55 or over _____

Directions: Please answer the following questions.

1. Are you a member of any school committees? __________ If yes, please list the name(s) of the committee(s) ______________________________________________

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2. What leadership opportunities have you taken on this past school year? Why or why not? _________________________________________________________________

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Appendix B: (Continued)

3. Describe when you have served on a committee that presented an issue or concern to your principal.

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How did the principal handle the issue or concern?

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4. Under what circumstances are you given the opportunity to have input into the important decisions that affect your school?

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Appendix B: (Continued)

5. How does your principal show that your opinion is valued?

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Appendix C: Questions for the Administrative Team Member Interview

1. In your own words, define the word leader.

2. In what ways do you use this definition of leader for yourself?

3. What are the characteristics you look for when hiring a new teacher?

4. In what ways have you provided opportunities for teacher input?

5. In what ways have you developed a professional learning community at your school?

6. In what ways have you empowered your staff to develop their leadership skills inside and outside the classroom?

7. Describe a time when you felt satisfied with the work environment among the teachers at your school. Can you describe a time when you felt dissatisfied?
Appendix D: Questions for the Teacher Interview

1. In your own words, define the word *leader*.

2. Do you consider yourself a leader at this school? Describe your position.

3. In what ways has your principal provided opportunities for teacher input?

4. In what ways has your principal developed a professional learning community at your school?

5. In what ways has your principal empowered you to develop your leadership skills inside and outside the classroom?

6. Have you been involved in a decision that has affected the students at your school as a whole? If so, describe.

7. Describe a time when you felt satisfied with the work environment among the teachers at your school. Can you describe a time when you felt dissatisfied?
Appendix E: Discussion Prompts for Focus Groups: Administrative Team Members

1. What opportunities have you created at your school for teachers to develop their leadership inside and outside the classroom?

2. Are there teachers on your staff that do not take leadership opportunities when presented? Why or why not?

3. What are the characteristics that you look for when selecting teachers for leadership roles and/or opportunities?

4. Describe how you have personally contributed to the success of this school.
Appendix F: Discussion Prompts for Focus Groups: Teachers

1. What words would you use to describe your principal’s leadership style? Give examples to illustrate each word you selected.

2. What experiences do you perceive have provided you with the knowledge and/or skills to take on leadership roles at your school?

3. Describe how you have personally contributed to the success of this school.

4. Do you think teacher leadership is encouraged at this school? If so, how?
Appendix G: Transcript of Teacher Interview 2 from School A

IN: Thank you for taking the time to participate in this interview. I have seven questions to ask. As I mentioned before, this information will not be shared with your principal. Do I have your permission to tape this interview?

T2A: Yes.

IN: First question: In your own words, define the word leader.

T2A: Someone who guides or inspires others through their words, actions, and character. A leader is a person that others look up to and respect.

IN: Do you consider yourself a leader at this school? Describe your position.

T2A: Yes, I feel I am a leader and not just in my role as team leader that involves keeping my team informed and unified through meetings and social activities, but also in my relationships with others.

IN: In what ways has your principal provided opportunities for teacher input?

T2A: He uses surveys and has an open door policy, which allows teachers to come in any time with needs or ideas.

IN: In what ways has your principal developed a professional learning community at your school?

T2A: He asks the staff for input about what training opportunities they want or need. He offers workshops as voluntary, respecting teachers’ time and planning needs. The optional book talk [Ruby Payne] was a great learning opportunity.

IN: In what ways has your principal empowered you to develop your leadership skills inside and outside the classroom?

T2A: He provides funding and professional or temporary duty days for additional training.
off campus. He offers the opportunity to be a part of a variety of committees as well.

IN: Have you been involved in a decision that has affected the students at your school as a whole? If so, describe.

T2A: I was asked to sit in and give feedback regarding the new assistant principal. Being a part of the interview process was an honor because it was such an important decision for our school.

IN: Describe a time when you felt satisfied with the work environment among the teachers at your school. Can you describe a time when you felt dissatisfied?

T2A: No, I do not have a recent example of feeling dissatisfied. The last time I dropped off the ESE [exceptional student education] progress reports, I hand delivered them to each teacher and took a minute of two to see if they needed anything and how they felt the students were doing. Having a good working relationship between ESE and general education teachers is very satisfying.

IN: That is all the questions I have. Is there anything else that you would like to share?

T2A: No, I think you covered everything.

IN: Again, thank you for taking the time to participate in this study. In a few weeks, you should receive a transcript of this interview with directions on what to do with it. If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact me.

T2A: Thank you for having me. I look forward to reading your study.
Appendix H: Transcript of Teacher Focus Group 3 from School D

IN: Thank you all for taking the time to participate in this focus group session. I have four questions to ask. As I mentioned before, this information will not be shared with your principal. Do I have your permission to tape this session?

T1D: Yes, you do.

T2D: Yes.

T3D: Yes

T4D: Yes, you have my permission.

IN: Ok, let us begin with the first question. What words would you use to describe your principal’s leadership style? Give examples to illustrate each word you selected.

T2D: Visionary. She was able to see the possibility of a better school even when others could not. She knew what kinds of changes were necessary to make that happen. She is willing to try everything at least once.

T1D: She is a good listener. Whenever I have a problem or concern, she always takes the time to talk thru it and help me come up with a solution.

T4D: Compassionate. I have seen her take her own money and buy supplies for a kid in need.

IN: What experiences do you perceive have provided you with the knowledge and/or skills to take on leadership roles at your school?

T3D: The various training opportunities increased my skills and knowledge about the teaching profession, which gave me what I needed in terms of vital information for leadership.

T4D: I agree. The staff development is very helpful. If we attend a workshop off campus,
Appendix H: (Continued)

our principal asks us to present the information the following week. If you know upfront that is the expectation, it helps people step outside their comfort zones.

T2D: I would say my principal’s encouragement. She is always letting us know of how to get involved in education other than teaching, such as forwarding e-mails from the National Education Association or Department of Education.

IN: Describe how you have personally contributed to the success of this school.

T4D: I think the changes I implemented with the ESE [exceptional student education] students made a big difference in their performance as well as the schools. Before I came, most ESE students were self-contained. Now, most spend the majority of their day in regular education classrooms and receive support through co-teaching, consultation, and pullout services.

T1D: I teach 3rd grade, which is a tested grade level. It is important for me to know what the standards are, make sure I know my kids know the standards, and then help them understand what the standards look like on a test. My kids have always done well year after year. That is how I contribute.

T2D: I teach Kindergarten students. I realize I have to give the necessary foundation for all of my students because so much depends on their performance on these standardized assessments in the years ahead. If not, then I know I have failed them.

T3D: I think it is important to collaborate with teachers and share your ideas. It is through these dialogues that we become better educators. I love team planning and working with my team.

IN: Do you think teacher leadership is encouraged at this school? If so, how?
Appendix H: (Continued)

T4D: It [teacher leadership] is emphasized, but not overemphasized. There are plenty of opportunities to lead and get involved. Yet those who choose not to lead are still great teachers. They are not made to feel negatively for their lack of leadership involvement.

T2D: If you want to get involved, you can. There are plenty of committees that our principal is always asking for volunteers. If not, you can always go the principal with an idea and she will support you in whatever way she can.

T1D: Exactly. If you want to get involved, do so. If not, it is ok too. No pressure to do join, but I think everyone is involved in some way.

T3D: I second what she said.

IN: I have no more questions. Is there anyone that would like to add to something that was said?

T1D: I do not.

IN: I guess this ends our session. Thank you again for your participation in my study. I will be in touch with each of you shortly to give you a transcript of our session. More details will follow at that time. If you have any questions about my study, please let me know. You are free to go. Thank you again.
About the Author

Rahim Jamal Jones earned his Bachelor of Science degree at Florida Southern College in Primary/Elementary Education. He taught various elementary grades for 5 years in public education while earning his Master’s of Education in Educational Leadership K-12 at the University of South Florida. Rahim was an elementary assistant principal for 3 years and is currently a principal for 2 years. He continued his schooling and graduated from the University of South Florida with a Doctorate of Education in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies K-12.