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# Teacher's and Teacher Leaders' Perceptions of the Formal Role of Teacher Leadership

Jerry D. Kelley  
*Georgia State University*

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## ACCEPTANCE

This dissertation, TEACHERS' AND TEACHER LEADERS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE FORMAL ROLE OF TEACHER LEADERSHIP, by JERRY D. KELLEY, was prepared under the direction of the candidate's Dissertation Advisory Committee. It is accepted by the committee members in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy in the College of Education, Georgia State University.

The Dissertation Advisory Committee and the student's Department Chair, as representatives of the faculty, certify that this dissertation has met all standards of excellence and scholarship as determined by the faculty. The Dean of the College of Education concurs.

---

Hayward Richardson, Ed. D.  
Committee Co-Chair

---

Sheryl Gowen, Ph.D.  
Committee Co-Chair

---

Bob Michael Ph.D.  
Committee Member

---

Toni Bellon, Ed.D.  
Committee Member

---

Jami Berry Ph.D.  
Committee Member

---

Date

---

Sheryl A. Gowen, Ph.D.  
Chair, Department of Educational Policy Studies

---

R. W. Kamphaus, Ph.D.  
Dean and Distinguished Research Professor  
College of Education

## AUTHOR'S STATEMENT

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Jerry Kelley  
4330 Elmhurst Lane  
Cumming, GA 30028

The director of this dissertation is:

Dr. Hayward Richardson  
Department of Educational Policy Studies  
College of Education  
Georgia State University  
Atlanta, GA 30303 - 3083

## VITA

Jerry D. Kelley

ADDRESS: 4330 Elmhurst Lane  
Cumming, Georgia 30028

### EDUCATION:

Ph.D.	2011	Georgia State University Educational Policy Studies
Ed.S.	2005	North Georgia College and State University Teacher Leadership
Add-On	2009	GA Educational Leadership
Add-On	2006	Instructional Supervision
Certification	2004	National Board of Professional Teaching Standards
M.S.	2003	North Georgia College and State University Elementary Education
Add-On	2003	GA Reading Endorsement
Add-On	2001	GA ESOL Endorsement
B.S.	2000	California State University, Fullerton Child and Adolescent Development

### PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE:

2001– Present Teacher  
Chestatee Elementary School, Gainesville, GA  
2000 – 2001 Teacher  
Lakeside Middle School, Santa Fe Springs, CA

### PROFESSIONAL SOCIETIES AND ORGANIZATIONS:

2006–Present American Educational Research Association  
2008–Present Curriculum and Pedagogy Group

### PRESENTATIONS AND PUBLICATIONS:

Kelley, J (2008, October). *Why do teachers become teacher leaders*. Paper presented at the meeting of the Curriculum and Pedagogy Group, Decatur, GA

## ABSTRACT

### TEACHERS' AND TEACHER LEADERS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE FORMAL ROLE OF TEACHER LEADERSHIP

by  
Jerry Kelley

The accountability and responsibilities of schools have intensified greatly over the past two decades and school improvement has become a strong focus of many schools, thus requiring a greater understanding and use of formal teacher leadership if schools are to meet high standards. This research studied teachers' and teacher leaders' beliefs concerning the formal role of teacher leadership in three elementary schools. A qualitative study was conducted, utilizing surveys and interviews to collect data concerning teachers' and teacher leaders' perceptions of the formal role of teacher leadership. All teachers at three elementary schools were invited to complete an electronic survey and nominate teachers they believed were formal teacher leaders. Nominated teachers meeting the study's criteria as a formal teacher leader were invited to complete a self-administered teacher leader self-assessment survey. Based on the results from the surveys, nine teachers, three from each school, were invited to participate in an interview process with the researcher.

Analysis of all data collected throughout the study suggests that even though formal teacher leadership is valued by most teachers, there exists a disconnect between teachers' and teacher leaders' beliefs of what formal teacher leadership should look like ideally in their schools versus their perceived reality of formal teacher leadership. Areas such as collaboration, recognition, and understanding of the formal role of teacher leadership, as well as policies that affects these areas were all found to hold discrepancies in these schools.

TEACHERS' AND TEACHER LEADERS' PERCEPTIONS  
OF THE FORMAL ROLE OF  
TEACHER LEADERSHIP

By  
Jerry Kelley

A Dissertation

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of Requirements for the  
Degree of Doctor of Philosophy  
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in  
the Department of Educational Policy Studies  
in  
the College of Education  
Georgia State University

Atlanta, GA  
2011

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## Chapter 1

### INTRODUCTION

Research has shown that many people are not satisfied with the state of schools, believing that the American public school system is in jeopardy (Beachum & Dentith, 2004; Donahoo & Hunter, 2007; Goodlad, 1984; Goodlad, 1997). According to (Darling-Hammond (2009, p.3), President Obama supported this contention of a failing school system while campaigning for presidency when he pointed out that “the bar for education is rising and U.S. performance has fallen further behind other industrialized nations on every measure.” The urgency of this contention was framed in Obama’s speech as an economic standpoint highlighting American jobs and competitiveness (Darling-Hammond, 2009). Events such as the launch of Sputnik (Atkin, 1997; Benham Tye, 2000; Hunter, 2007), technological advances, economical ideology shifts (Cuban, 2003; Lieberman & Miller, 2005), changes in public and government perceptions, and increased international communications, as well as private and government sanctioned reports have created a stronger awareness of comparative educational standings across the world (Stevenson & Stigler 2006; Tyack & Cuban, 1995). The United State’s continual focus on remaining globally competitive has also continued to be an underlying cause of increased awareness of student achievement (Schneider & Keesler, 2007).

The focus on student achievement has increased, and as a result, school change itself has come under heightened scrutiny. This interest in school change, with specific attention paid to increased student achievement, has been part of school improvement

models for more than 40 years (Barth, 1990; Cuban, 2003; Cuban, 2008; Glickman, Gordon, Ross-Gordon, 2004). Programs and structural models introduced to answer the perceived need to improve schools suggest that there has not been one true model that has met this need effectively (Fullan, 1993). Recent attempts at changing schools through leadership models such as site-based management, have evolved from a top down administration model to a local site-based school leadership team model comprised of lead teachers. This movement emphasized that a team approach of administrators, teachers, parents, and outside stakeholders could make a greater difference (Barth, 1991). In 1986, the Carnegie Foundation Forum on Education and Reform urged that principals be replaced with lead teachers. It argued that committees comprised of lead teachers would be a more efficient way to run schools (DuFour & Eaker, 1998). Fullan (1993) contended that the thought pattern of the role autonomous principal was inflated and could be flattened with the help of teacher leaders.

Lieberman (1995) viewed the new path of leadership as one where the principal acted as partner with the teachers, not to control, but to collaborate. Lambert (2002) and York-Barr and Duke (2004) have suggested that the principal as sole leader is no longer an effective model. This theory coupled with society's perception that structural change for school is needed (Goodlad, 1984; Goodlad, 1997) reinforces the need for teacher leadership. Teachers who take an active role in leadership can have a profound impact upon the change that is needed to sustain a higher quality of education (Pugalee, Frykholm, & Shaka, 2001). Teacher leadership has been recognized by many as a being a significant part of the answer to the question of how to increase student achievement (Suranna & Moss, 2002).

The process of education has become increasingly complicated (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1996) and as a result, changes in organizational structure, especially leadership models, have become necessary (Donaldson, 2006; Fullan, 2006). Teachers are expected to meet the varied needs of an increasingly diversified population of students (Cohen & Hill, 2000) as well as adapt to many changes occurring at the same time (Elmore, 1996), and take on administrative roles (van den Berg, 2002). Apple (1986) refers to these pressures as intensification (Apple, 1986). This intensification comes from increased demands of government and the larger society for accountability, as measured by standardized test scores. Further, a compounding factor of accountability and test scores are the rapid changes in our communities and population (Apple, 1986; Beachum & Dentith, 2004). Lieberman and Miller (2005) argue that our students must be trained for a knowledge-based society. “Schools must change if they are to educate a citizenry prepared for the future” (Lieberman & Miller, 2005, p. 52). These demands lead to an increase of educator responsibilities; intensification (Apple, 1986). This intensification has created a strong need for shared school leadership, that is, administrators and teachers leading together.

In considering the potential for teacher leadership to being a part of the process of increasing student learning, the complexity of schools themselves must be directly acknowledged and addressed as well as the inherent micropolitics; the use of power, cooperation, support, and ultimately the perceptions of individuals working together (Blase, 1991).

Within this complex political setting, many aspects influence the work of improving schools. Schools are complex organizations, made up of factors and

relationships that connect people through formal and informal networks (Morrison, 2002). They are open systems, influenced by turbulent changes within the educational system and public/political demand. When focusing on school improvement, schools are best viewed as systems that are made up of collections of interacting parts, grade levels, departments, and hierarchical levels. Within systems, the actions of each part, team or individual, affect many others (Senge, 1990). Formal teacher leadership, as part of the systems, offers the opportunity to facilitate better interactions, school change, and ultimately increased student achievement (Barth, 2001; DuFour & Eaker, 1998; Lieberman & Walker 2007; Muchmore, Cooley, Marx, & Crowell, 2004).

Leadership has many definitions, yet all rely on the same outcome: a form of power or influence, which promotes action on another's part (Donaldson, 2006; Gardner, 1990; Marzano, Waters, McNulty, 2005; Morrison, 2002; Schmoker, 1999; Zaccaro & Klimoski, R., 2001). A single term or phrase to describe the act of influencing others to adopt the same basic goals and or direction of another person remains elusive. When referring to the term teacher leadership, adding the term teacher to leadership does not clarify the word, it simply suggests the context of position or role. Teacher leadership is a broad term used in a variety of ways to describe teachers in a leadership role, whether formal or informal. For purposes of this study, teacher leadership is defined as, "Teachers who are leaders lead within and beyond the classroom, identify with and contribute to a community of teacher learners and leaders, and influence others toward improved educational practice" Katzenmeyer and Moller (2001, p.5). Teacher leaders influence the work of school improvement to increase student achievement (Durant & Frost, 2003; Leithwood & Riehl, 2003; Pugalee, Frykholm, & Shaka, 2001; York-Barr & Duke,



2004). Silva, Gimbert, and Nolan (2000) support this definition describing teacher leadership as “sliding the doors open” (p. 2) and influencing other teachers’ practices of instruction concerning increasing student achievement through collaboration and discussion. Wetig’s (2002) study of teacher leaders at a professional development school cites teacher leaders as offering similar definitions of teacher leadership, all concerning influence of their peers. Katzenmeyer and Moller (2001) and Wetig (2002) state that teacher leaders step up from traditional classroom roles to become visionaries, problem solvers, organizers, and communicators; they pursue improvements and are responsible in promoting others to join and help with the given tasks. They are a community of learners and leaders.

Teacher leaders are reported in Katzenmeyer and Moller’s (2001) book, *Awakening the Sleeping Giant of Teacher Leadership*, and York-Barr and Duke’s (2004) meta analysis of twenty years of teacher leadership, as typically being self-starters; professionals who go beyond their job descriptions. They are professionals who hold a clear understanding of their purpose, professionally and personally, and have a true love for education (Krisiko, 2001). Teacher leaders are thought to respond well to both children and adults, hold professional and superior knowledge in education, possess organizational skills, and use specific as well as varied strategies to meet differentiated needs and display leadership qualities (Kull & Bailey, 1993).

Whitsett and Riley (2003) offer a further description of teacher leadership, adopted from Hersey and Blanchard (1982), as being the process of influencing the activities of an individual or group in efforts directed toward goal achievement in a given situation. Leadership also involves the components of leader, follower, and situational

variables (Hersey & Blanchard, 1982). Strodl's description resembles Katzenmeyer and Moller's (2001). Strodl (1992) described leadership as the influence a person asserts upon the behavior of others. Strodl adds that leadership is the quality of a person to motivate people to change individual behavior to cooperative group behavior and to give direction and purpose to the lives of other people; successful leaders depend on trust and shared decision-making, rather than on power. Formal teacher leaders receive authority in the course of their assigned role through influential power. Formal teacher leaders earn power within their role through their work with both their students and their colleagues (Danielson, 2006). Formal teacher leadership is both a behavior and a position. Many teachers may not see themselves as leaders, formal or informal, yet they are influential in forming group opinions, taking initiatives in communications, anticipating, and articulating responses, empowering others, and participating in innovative movements within the school (Strodl, 1992). By the very nature of their work, teachers are leaders in their own classrooms; teacher leader refers to influence outside of the classroom as well.

Katzenmeyer and Moller (2001) state, "Confusion and expectations of teacher leaders abound" (p.4-5). The term teacher leader is fluid and contextual, formal and/or informal. Many authors have described the term using different words and ideas, but all are synonymous with the idea that the term teacher leader refers to a leadership role - influence of leaders over followers (Anderson, 2004). As Katzenmeyer and Moller (2001) have stated, teacher leaders "...influence others toward improved educational practice" (p. 5). The term formal teacher leader in this paper refers to a teacher who has a formal role within a specific committee, as either a member or a chair, whose charge is directly related to student achievement and school improvement.

## History of Teacher Leadership

The history of teacher leadership has been identified by Silva, Gimbert, and Nolan (2000) as a three-phase process. The first phase, more than five decades ago, was a managerial role. Teachers assumed roles such as department chair, head teacher, master teacher, and union representative. These positions implied a structure of power that created isolation between teacher leaders and teachers, much like the barrier between teachers and administrators. When teachers led, they gained power and influence, which threatened traditional lines of control. Their professional lives changed as they collaborated and differentiated their responsibilities; micropolitics played a great role (Lashway, 1998). This phase of teacher leadership focused on efficiency and effectiveness of the system, and did not work toward influencing others or practicing instructional leadership.

Silva, Gimbert, and Nolan (2000) identified the second wave of teacher leadership as emerging in response to the first wave's shortcomings of instructional leadership. It took the form of positions that capitalized on teacher instructional knowledge. Positions such as team leader and curriculum developer, and staff development opportunities allowed teacher leaders to work with their peers in a formal, yet collaborative manner not seen in the hierarchy of the first wave. This form of leadership is prominent in many schools today.

The third wave, which arose in the 1990s, followed the second closely. This phase marked increased collaboration and informal leadership; teachers enabling other teachers. Phase 3 blurred the lines between formal and informal roles. The ideas and

structure of the second and third waves can be readily found in most recent literature to demonstrate a positive model of informal and formal roles of teacher leadership (Silva, Gimbert, & Nolan, 2000).

In the past, a teacher's basic role in leadership was one of a representative, not an actual leader or change agent (Whitsett, 2003). Administrative leadership entered the arena as the size and demands of the schools grew, and the suppression increased. This was primarily a result of workplace democracy creating higher roles to satisfy larger egos (Smylie, Conley, & Marks, 2002). What has been fairly new over the past two decades is the form teacher leadership has taken. The shift in ideology as a response to new and fluctuating pressures has developed different views or definitions of the position and its responsibilities. This shift has created a need for effective teacher leadership, which not only involves a move from top-down, hierarchical designs to shared leadership opportunities, but it also requires an understanding of the definitions and roles of the position. Teacher leadership differs greatly from standard thoughts of leadership due to its shift from top-down models to a shared-decision making design that emphasizes a strong sense of teamwork (Wynne, 2001).

#### Practice of Teacher Leadership

Leadership roles in schools have evolved to more than a managerial position; they are an opportunity to mobilize others to share aspirations and an attitude that expresses a sense of responsibility for making a difference (Swanson, 2000).

Teacher leaders often take part in ensuring that changes affecting classrooms and schools are either implemented or challenged depending on how the initiatives will affect the students (Ackerman & Mackenzie, 2006).

The need for school change has been building for decades. While names and plans have been developed to represent the idea of school change for improved student achievement, the underlying idea has remained the same: more innovative thinking to meet new demands. This need has prompted an exploration of hybrid school management, such as shared leadership. The demand for change has included accountability and site-based shared decision-making. Increased accountability is tied directly to a need to work within an environment increasingly dependent on state and federal funding, as well as widespread systemization - common design and expectations. These continual changes have caused a need for increased teacher leadership (Beachum & Dentith, 2004; York-Barr & Duke, 2004).

The idea of teacher leadership is not entirely new. Although the phases representing a formal sense of teacher leadership as recognized by Silva, Gimbert, and Nolan (2000) has been identified as starting fairly recently, approximately five decades ago, teachers have always filled some form of leadership role. Teachers have been in the role of leader since the one-room schoolhouse, and have always held roles as grade/department chairs, team leaders, and curriculum developers (Silva, Gimbert, & Nolan 2000). Fullan and Hargreaves (1996) stated that teacher leadership involves the need for both capacity and commitment to contribute beyond the classroom, to contribute to the school. A calling that requires extensive motivation to move out of a comfort zone, teacher leadership involves greatly increased responsibilities.

It includes recognizing a need and working toward meeting it whether formally or informally within a shared leadership setting.

### Focus of Teacher Leadership

Changing the American school system as a whole is an overwhelming task (DuFour & Eaker, 1998). Current demands require that our public schools must now provide a first-rate academic education for all students (Darling-Hammond and Friedlaender, 2008; Schlechy, 1997). Contextually, first-rate is defined as one that is comparable to other leading nations and prepares students to be successful contributors to society (Schlechy, 1997). This is most often measured through standardized test scores as well as international math and science test comparisons that focus on increased student achievement.

Bracey (1997) and Tye (2000) suggested that we first identify why past improvements have not been successful, and then what course of action might offer the best success based on a review of history. Fullan (1993) wrote that current methods of training educators and operating schools only support the status quos. The key to the future lies not in attempting to overhaul such a complex system, but rather in focusing on how the inner workings of the education system influences behaviors in the schools, most importantly, in the classrooms.

Throughout the literature, researchers have identified teacher leaders' work as being that of working with colleagues and administration with the goal of ultimately improving student learning (Beachum & Dentith 2004; Fullan, 1993; Lambert, 2002, York-Barr & Duke 2004). The literature suggests many reasons why teacher leaders are

an important cornerstone in today's schools (Barth, 1991; Crowther, Kaagan, Ferguson, & Hann, 2002; Donaldson, 2006; DuFour & Eaker, 1998). Crowther, Kaagan, Ferguson, and Hann (2002) stated that a large amount of educational literature suggested the traditional view of the teaching profession is outdated. It discounted teachers' abilities to contribute to school improvement. Katzenmeyer and Moller (2001) supported the idea of traditional leadership models as being outdated designs not intended for modern times. Katzenmeyer and Moller (1996) further supported teacher leadership by stating that America's schools draw strength from the creativity and commitment of their teacher leaders. Donaldson (2006) recognized American schools as unusual organizations that do not fully benefit from classic or traditional leadership models. Donaldson suggested the unique design called for a stronger communal design involving teacher leadership. Barth (2001), DuFour and Eaker (1998), Lieberman and Walker (2007), and Muchmore, Cooley, Marx, and Crowell (2004), reported that teacher leadership is essential to student achievement. Katzenmeyer and Moller (2001) stated that teacher leaders engaged in professional development opportunities to increase their own knowledge, which in turn empowers them to increase student learning. Ackerman and Mackenzie (2006) stated that teacher leaders close the gaps between an ideal educational setting and the current reality at schools. School improvement based on student achievement is central to much of the teacher leadership literature. Researchers such as Durrant and Frost (2003), Hickey and Harris (2005), Leithwood and Riehl (2003), Lord and Miller (2000), Mayo (2002), Surrana and Moss (2002), Silva, Gimbert, and Nolan (2000), Smylie (1995), and York-Barr and Duke (2004) all furthered the concept that foundations of school improvement are based on teacher leaders. Thus, teachers are strong candidates for leadership roles.

In addition, Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, and Wahlstrom (2004), stated, “Leadership is second only to classroom instruction among all school-related factors that contribute to what students learn at school” (p.3). According to Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, and Wahlstrom (2004) teachers are in an ideal position for leadership roles. Their proximity to students and the relationships they develop with them put teachers in the best possible situation to contribute to curricular decisions and implement innovative and necessary strategies. Teacher leaders also share responsibilities with administrators that include building trust and developing rapport among faculty, diagnosing organizational conditions, dealing with processes, managing the work, and building skills and confidence in others (Ackerman & Makenzie, 2006; Lieberman, Saxl, & Miles, 1988; York-Barr & Duke, 2004).

Future success for schools using formal teacher leadership is based on the ability to communicate meaningful information and build relationships among organizational members (Pearman, 1998). Teachers have to be involved in the decision making process as part of the school communication loop. Schools, as currently structured, depend too greatly on the principal as ultimate leader, exercising isolated control. Schools depend on skilled, effective principals in order to grow, but they also depend on skilled individuals, teacher leaders, to outgrow their dependence on the principal’s leadership and move to a level of self-sustained growth (Donahoe, 1993). Dufour & Eakers’ (1998) work with Professional Learning Communities speaks to the idea that, “Change is always a threat when it is done to people, but it is an opportunity when it is done by people” (p.83).



### Statement of the Problem

Today's educational system is faced with greater demands than ever before (Beachum & Dentith 2004; Lieberman & Miller, 2005; Nelson, Palonsky, McCarthy, 2004; Stevenson & Stigler, 2006). As society undergoes economic and political changes, the need for change in schools is evident. The necessity for schools to reflect society has created an intensification of the educational system. This intensification has created greater demands on teachers and administrators (Apple, 1986; Stevenson & Stigler, 2006)), increasing the need for shared leadership. This increased need in expanding leadership beyond its traditional administrative role has been attributed to ever expanding responsibilities (Surrana & Moss, 2002).

Higher expectations are accompanied by greater accountability of school systems across the nation. Policies such as No Child Left Behind, the federal law that requires all students meet state prescribed standards and improved international communication/awareness of educational standings, have contributed to a heightened belief that change is needed (DuFour & Eaker, 1998; Benham Tye, 2000). Government sponsored programs such as The Excellence Movement as prompted by the Nation at Risk report (Yow, 2007), as well as the Goals 2000 initiative and No Child Left Behind have addressed the need for school improvement. Each one has identified deficits in the educational system and suggested policies directed at achieving desired results. Schneider and Keesler's (2007) review of school reform asserts that Goals 2000 and NCLB were conceived as a response to perceived educational crises, and they have not fared well over time. Their short-lived successes suggested the need to examine traditional

organizations in an attempt to understand possible shortcomings in design and create new, effective models to increase schools' performances (Newman, 1993).

The urgency associated with this higher accountability has forced many administrators to make frequent changes in their leadership practice rather than focus on the optimal conditions for sustainable improvement. The demand for improvement has been such that for many schools, trying to keep up with which structures have changed or are to change, hides those forces within the schools that have been successful (Apple, 1986). This lack of understanding supports Schneider and Keesler's (2007) assertion that federal policies have not been successful. The response of increasing administrative responsibilities has not replaced previous responsibilities. It has added new and increased responsibilities on top of existing ones, adding to the already complex role of leading a school.

According to Spillane and Seashore (2002), many school leaders find themselves being reactive instead of proactive due to the ever-increasing accountability demands placed on the educational system. It is not always possible for a single individual to sustain an effective school setting, especially given increased responsibilities with demands for accountability. Many educational policy makers have come to realize that the problematic design of top down leadership is not as effective as widely distributed leadership (Elmore, 2000; Nelson, Palonsky, & McCarthy, 2004). As demands on schools and their leaders have increased, the historical top-down administrative design has encountered great difficulty adjusting or changing traditional structures while maintaining high expectations (Datnow & Castellano, 2002).

The traditional design of top-down hierarchy has allowed limited access to the sharing of administrative burdens (Beachum & Dentith, 2004; Fullan & Hargreaves, 1996). Today's administrators are left isolated under increasing bureaucracy and expectations for improvement. All educators face higher accountability; the principal as leader is not the only one faced with the responsibility of student achievement as a whole (Crowther, Kaagan, Ferguson, & Hann, 2002). The standards based movement and other school improvement efforts have developed a need for the school and all persons in it to be responsible (Crowther, Kaagan, Ferguson, & Hann, 2002; Elmore, 2000; Lambert 2002). As intensification of education continues to grow, so does the complexity within schools. This complexity growth increases the need for shared leadership.

Keeping leadership to administrative levels only, not sharing responsibilities among the teachers in some form, removes the advantage of teachers to contribute key knowledge and influence. Such restrictions create an assumption that teachers neither encounter nor successfully handle conflict. It discounts teachers' actions toward inspiring students to achieve ever-higher goals. It leaves teachers out of school-wide policy issues, and restricts participation in the formation of consensus or contribution to the overall culture and climate of the school (Strodl, 1992). Teachers are the most prominent advocates of student academic success in the school due to their close personal position (Cuban, 2003). To accept teacher leadership as a necessary factor of school change supports the need for extensive teacher involvement throughout the operation of the school beyond the classroom walls (Berends, Bodilly, & Kirby, 2002; Cuban, 2003; Gonzales, 2004; So, Sharpe, Klockow, & Martin, 2001; Suranna & Moss, 2002).

Historically, responsibility and resources for student success have been directed to top down administration, but recent research shows this model does not support today's school change for student achievement as well as shared leadership does. Recent research suggests that the majority of responsibility and resources should not go to the top or the bottom, but to the teachers and their development as teacher leaders (Elmore, 2000; Lambert, 2002; Nelson, Palonsky and McCarthy, 2004; Spillane, Halverson, and Diamond, 2001). Therefore, teachers and administrators working together toward school improvement, create a stronger model for school improvement.

The need for school improvement in an effort to increase student achievement is a major focus for many schools. As society changes and advances, so does the need to produce stronger teachers who are able to meet the current needs of their students and schools. Research has shown that teacher leaders are an important part of professional development and school improvement (DuFour & Eaker, 1998; Lieberman & Walker, 2007; Muchmore, Cooley, Marx, & Crowell, 2004), perhaps more so than systematic reform. Therefore, greater development of teachers' knowledge, abilities, cultural perceptions, and commitment may ultimately play a greater role in the organization and climate of the school, resulting in greater school improvement (Smylie, Conley, & Marks, 2002). Research has also shown that such improvement is dependent on teacher development in school improvement through collaboration of teachers and teacher leaders (Ackerman & Mackenzie, 2006; Beatty, 1999; Conley & Muncey, 1999; Martin, 2002; Mayo, 2002; Riordin & da Costa, 1998; Rogers, 2006). These relationships must evolve in response to current needs and may benefit from an increased presence of formal teacher leadership.

Continued school improvement ultimately benefits from increased formal teacher leadership at all levels (Beachum & Dentith, 2004; York-Barr & Duke, 2004).

The need for increased teacher leadership has been established in the literature (Anderson 2004; Beachum & Dentith, 2004; Leithwood, Jantzi, & Steinbach, 1999; Donaldson, Bowe, L., Marnik, L., & Mackenzie, 2004; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). According to Evans, superintendent of Vesta County school district (pseudonym) where this study is conducted, Vesta County is dependent on formal teacher leadership as well (Evans, personal communication, April 27, 2009). What is missing, is a greater understanding of how the formal position of teacher leader equates to the perceived practice; the field needs a greater understanding of formal teacher leadership and how it is viewed by those individuals involved (Blase & Blase, 2002; Camburn, Rowan, & Taylor, 2003; Coburn & Russell, 2008; Leithwood & Mascall, 2008; Leithwood & Riehl, 2003; Moss, & Suranna, 2002; Woods, Bennett, Harvey, & Wise, 2004).

### Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to explore teachers' and formal teacher leaders' perceptions of the formal role of teacher leadership, what it ideally should look like, and what the actual practice is. Conceptualization and implementation are two different entities. Through gaining greater knowledge into how teachers and formal teacher leaders understand the role of formal teacher leader, administrators, districts, universities, and policy makers will be better able to create environments and policies that foster the development and implementation of successful formal teacher leadership experiences.

The questions that guided this study are:

1. What do teachers perceive the responsibilities of formal teacher leadership should be and what constitutes the actual practice of teacher leadership by their colleagues in these roles?
2. What do individual teachers engaged in formal leadership roles believe their responsibilities and practice of the position should be and what do they believe to be their reality?

Vesta County School District has designed its district philosophy and school improvement plan to meet the complex needs of schools using formal teacher leadership. Vesta believes that formal teacher leaders are the foundation of school improvement and their work is critical in all aspects of their schools (Evans, personal communication, April 27, 2009). Vesta has experienced continued growth in both the number and diversity of students. As a result, the district has engaged in continual expansion programs and creating new roles for teacher leadership within its schools. This increase has created amplified formal teacher leadership opportunities. Current budget restraints and increased district autonomy, which has recently been granted to Vesta through a state partnership contract, Investment in Educational Excellence (IE<sup>2</sup>), has furthered the opportunities and need for increased formal teacher leadership in all areas.

IE<sup>2</sup> is a transactional policy, which approximates a hybrid charter, between Vesta County School District, the State Department of Education, and the Governor's Office of Accountability, allowing increased flexibility within the district concerning state regulations and mandates, in exchange for increased district accountability as measured

through student test scores and other prescribed markers. Through IE<sup>2</sup>, Vesta County School District can adjust prescribed budgets, class sizes, use of personnel, program designs, and other guidelines, which dictate school district operations and expenditures of state funds and particular federal funds. Greater local control is granted to the district based on its strategic plan. In exchange for this increased flexibility and independence, Vesta School District is bound to increasing student learning as measured through No Child Left Behind's keystone, AYP, or average yearly progress. AYP measures student achievement from year to year and is calculated using standard test scores, attendance, and graduation test results.

Based on this change in Vesta's educational process, the district's operations and schools are changing to include a greater reliance on formal teacher leadership. The areas of professional development of all teachers, collaboration among all faculty, and curriculum implementation have been cited by the district as areas requiring increased formal teacher leadership. Vesta acknowledges that school leadership needs to address the complexity of schools themselves, and supports the idea that school improvement starts in the classroom, with the teachers (Evans, personal communication, April 27, 2009). Therefore, the success of school-based committees, whose charge is school improvement for increased student achievement, is essential within each school.

In an informal survey, Vesta elementary school principals cited three committees that they believed yielded the greatest influence on school improvement. They are:

1. Leadership Team - The leadership team is comprised of grade level and Special Areas (e.g. art, physical education, and music) chairs and the administrative team. The leadership team's function is to identify areas of

student learning that require greater attention through review of data and communication with the staff. Once needs are identified, the team works toward the creation and implementation of methods and programs to achieve the desired goal.

2. Professional Development Team - The professional development team is comprised of individuals who are seen as possessing strong skills in the identification and design of school wide professional development training that targets the school's greatest needs. Based on the leadership team's input and the professional development team's understandings of student and teacher needs, the professional development team develops appropriate training designed to improve teachers' instruction, ultimately resulting in greater student achievement.
3. Response to Intervention Team (RTI) - The RTI Team, which is made up of Title 1, Early Intervention Program (EIP), and English as a Second or Other Language (ESOL) teachers is charged with the monitoring and development of programs designed to assist students who are below grade level in their learning. This committee also collaborates with teachers to help them develop specific instructional skills specifically for working with these students.

Each team is comprised of individuals who have been identified based on criteria that can be different at each school. Barth (2001) stated that relationships among teachers and principals have an impact on student learning that is equivalent to no other factor. When teachers and leaders work together toward the common goal of increased student



achievement, student learning is improved. When teachers meet in teams, or work collaboratively with colleagues in less formal settings, the uniqueness of the inherent differences in the understandings of all individuals creates an exclusive panel. The collective and individual actions taken by persons on formal teams, and the underlying reasons supporting the actions, supports the theory of micropolitics, which is the use of power, cooperation, support, and ultimately the perceptions of individuals working together (Blase, 1991).

As teachers are prompted to assume new roles and participate more in leadership, a better understanding of teacher leadership is necessary (Anderson, 2004). Through the increased understandings of teachers' perceptions, the formal positions available to teacher leaders, along with and compared to the understandings of teachers fulfilling these roles, schools and districts will have greater insight into the creation of opportunities for formal teacher leaders to develop, support, and lead school improvement efforts.

## Chapter 2

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Research on teacher leadership is plentiful (Robinson, Loyd, & Rowe 2008; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). A plethora of research concerning theory-based analysis has been written (Ackerman & Makenzie, 2007; Beachum & Dentith, 2004; Crowther, Kaagan, Ferguson, & Hann, 2002; Harris, 2002; Donaldson, 2006; Elmore, 2000; Day, Harris, & Hadfield, 2001; Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001; Krisko, 2001; Leithwood & Riehl, 2003; Webb, Nuemann, & Jones, 2004; Wetig, 2002). The literature cites a large amount of research based on qualitative and quantitative investigations in the field of teacher leadership. These studies cover a wide range of topics including examinations of leadership styles (Anderson, 2004; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000; Lucas & Valentine, 2002; Harris, 2002; Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2001; Ross & Gray, 2006; Tickle, Brownlee & Nailon, 2005), job satisfaction and motivation (Bye, Pushkar, & Conway, 2007; Herzberg, 2006; Janman, 1987; Nygard, 1981; Remedios & Boreham, 2004), descriptions and models for structure (Barth, 1990; Bauer, Haydel, & Cody, 2003; Beachum & Dentith, 2004; Cuban, 2008; Hatch, White, & Faigenbaum, 2005; Katzenmeyer & Moller, 1996), as well as how to promote teachers and the barriers involved in teacher leadership (Beachum & Dentith, 2004; Zinn, 1997). In addition to teacher leadership itself, many scholars have written on the topic of identifying traits of teacher leaders. These traits include identity and efficacy (Leithwood & Beatty, 2008; Nieto, 2003; Scribner, 1998; So, Sharpe, Klockow & Martin, 2001; van den Berg, 2002) and teacher leader perspectives and perceptions (Barth, 2001; Bowman, 2004; Crowther, Kaagan, Ferguson, & Hann, 2002; Dozier, 2007; Gonzales, 2004;

Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001; Lieberman & Walker, 2007; Rogers, 2005). This investigation has been complimented by research supporting student achievement through the use of teacher leadership models (DuFour & Eaker, 1998; Lieberman & Walker, 2007; Muchmore, Cooley, Marx, & Crowell, 2004), understanding that school improvement through teacher leadership is an ongoing task that must consistently adapt to societal changes. Many researchers have conducted studies and written on the ideas of teacher leaders' professional development (Hickey & Harris, 2005; Lord & Miller, 2000; Pugalee, Frykholm & Shaka, 2001) and their roles in collaboration and mentoring (Ackerman & Mackenzie, 2006; Beatty, 1999; Conley & Muncey, 1999; Mayo, 2002; Riordin & da Costa, 1998; Rogers, 2006).

Despite the volume of research on teacher leadership over the past thirty years, there remains a dearth of information concerning administrators', teachers', and teacher leaders' perceptions of the role of teacher leader.

### Choosing To Be A Teacher Leader

Teacher leadership is a role that is open to those who choose to pursue it when the opportunity is available. Darling-Hammond, Bullmaster, and Cobb's (1995) research concerning the training of teacher leaders in professional development schools posits that a large pool of literature exists suggesting all teachers can be formal/informal teacher leaders in their own right. Barth (2001) contended that all teachers can and must be leaders in their schools; school improvement is dependent on it. Barth (2001) created an ambiguous meaning for teacher leadership by stating his view of leadership as "making happen what you believe in" (p.85). While this blurs formal lines of the role, it lends to

Katzenmeyer and Moller's (2001) assertion of teacher leaders influencing others. Applying Barth's statement in a general sense would imply virtually any teacher could step up to the role of teacher leader. This assertion involves two main themes. The first is that the conditions are right, and the second is that the teacher is personally ready and capable. Herzberg (2006) suggested that human nature supports a teacher's ability to accept, adjust, or resist extensive extra work based on one's personal position in life at the respective point in time.

Katzenmeyer and Moller (2001) stated that the reality of teacher leadership is that it may not be for every teacher at all points in a career. There are times when participation may be inviting, and times when teachers may need to avoid extra responsibilities (Katzenmeyer & Moller 2001; Barth, 2001; Crowther, Kaagan, Ferguson & Hann, 2002). Teachers must make a choice; the first step in becoming a teacher leader is to choose such a responsibility. Whether purposeful or not, all teacher leaders make choices that lead to accepting or avoiding extra responsibilities outside the classroom (Swanson, 2000). As is the case with all human judgments leading to decisions, something internally, externally, cognitively, or emotionally promotes all acts of movement and involvement. Teacher leadership manifests itself in different forms depending on the actors and the current need of the school where the role is enacted.

Katzenmeyer and Moller (2001) suggested that factors influencing a teacher's decision to engage in leadership roles include excellent professional teaching skills, a strong and developed personal philosophy, and being at a point in life where the necessary energy level and time are available. Katzenmeyer and Moller (2001) proposed many factors that influence teacher leaders.

They suggested that expectations of shared decision-making and leadership, accompanied by collaboration directed at student achievement, learning, inquiry, and reflective practice encourage teacher leadership.

### Teacher Leader Traits and Qualities

Ryan's (1999) qualitative multisite case study of the impact of teacher leadership on a school revealed that the identified teacher leaders shared similar qualities to those identified by Katzenmeyer and Moller (2001). Both studies referred to contributions of responsible influence, which encompasses many traits, as being crucial to school improvement efforts. Ryan concluded that teacher leader influence promoted a positive effect on student learning and instructional practices of colleagues, as well as being part of the school's shared decision-making process. Teacher leaders by the very nature of their formal or informal role, make a conscious choice to extend themselves to serve others. This act requires motivation to go beyond contract duties in stretching their abilities and talents across their given network. Their choice to serve in this function has deep personal roots.

Liebermann, Saxl, and Miles' (1988) study has been cited in much of the literature as being one of the most extensive of its time. Their study was designed to follow seventeen teacher leaders over a two-year period. These teachers had each recently moved into full time formal teacher leadership roles, and their experiences of the transitions were the focal point of the research. The data collected suggested that these teacher leaders felt instrumental in building trust and developing rapport among their school's faculty. They felt skilled in diagnosing organizational conditions and helping

colleagues navigate school politics. They also assisted in managing the organizational work, and continually worked toward building instructional skills in others through collaboration and professional development. As seen throughout this literature review, the studies and expert beliefs of researchers have continued to support these findings.

Included in much of the research on teacher leadership, there is the concept of traits of teacher leaders. While this study is not concerned directly with trait theory, this theory can inform an understanding of teacher leadership. Therefore, it is important to include a brief discussion of the traits that may be inherent in those engaging in leadership acts. Teacher leaders are both teachers and leaders; they exercise professional responsibility both in and out of the classroom as well as school settings (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2009; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Much of the literature indicates teacher leaders often have significant teaching experience and demonstrate expertise, collaboration, reflection, and a sense of empowerment (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Rosenholtz's (1989) research of collaborative elementary schools suggests teacher leaders are innovative risk takers who inspired colleagues to be problem solvers. Conley and Muncey's (1999) study of the perceptions of teachers teaming or collaborating confirmed Rosenholtz's findings. Through their study, they discovered teachers valued attributes of organization, open thought, integrity, investment of time and resources, and a desire to grow.

According to Wilson (1993) and York-Barr and Duke (2004), teacher leaders seek challenges and growth, and they go out of their way to find innovative and challenging programs to increase the learning of their students and their colleagues. Teacher leaders enabled others to act, were risk takers and collaborators. As a result they enabled others to act. Descriptions of these teachers included attributes of assuming desirable personal

traits such as being dependable, supportive, and informally reassuring to colleagues. Strodl (1992) adds that among group members there are individuals who communicate better than others communicate and seem to have the unusual competence to overcome conflicts and solve problems, which are strong traits for a teacher leader.

Crowther, Kaagan, Ferguson, and Hann (2002) conducted a five-year study of disadvantaged schools in Australia. The authors constructed a framework, which identified teacher leader traits as found in their study. Crowther, Kaagan, Ferguson, and Hann concluded teacher leaders in these schools demonstrated strong qualities of school based leadership by articulating positive beliefs towards students; a student-first philosophy was found to be dominant. Further, they exemplified a professional image and they were trustworthy. Teacher leaders identified in the study held the respect of the community and remained professional through tough times. The authors concluded that teacher leaders teach and learn with student success in mind. They also facilitate communities of learners and confront barriers in their school cultures. Finally, the study found that teacher leaders nurtured school success and successfully translated ideas into actions.

Wilson (1993) surveyed over four-hundred teachers and asked them to nominate colleagues as teacher leaders and to describe the qualities that personified them as teacher leaders. Her analyses revealed that these teachers viewed the traits of teacher leaders as being that of hard workers, innovative, motivational, collaborative, and dedicated to the school and learning process. Suranna and Moss' (2002 ) study, which included interviews with twelve teachers concerning their perceptions of teacher leadership, supports Wilson's findings.

York-Barr and Duke's (2004) extensive literature review also supports Wilson's recognition of traits and included qualities of being knowledgeable, flexible and having superior teaching skills.

### Teacher Leaders as Facilitators of Learning Communities

When teachers collaborate, they share their knowledge, resulting in improved instruction and increased student achievement. Teacher interactions based on sharing knowledge and teaching each other creates a learning community. A professional learning community is one that shares a common mission, vision, and values; it promotes collaboration (DuFour & Eaker, 1998). Learning communities are an integral, collective commitment of guiding principles that guide the decisions and actions of the school (DuFour & Eaker, 1998). This design and commitment to collaboration alleviates the pressures that often fall on a few persons and distributes responsibility to all. This distribution in turn motivates teachers to take part in leadership activities, it fulfills Maslow's apex of self-actualization, and feeds the basic psychological needs of relatedness and belonging through contribution (Deci & Flaste, 1995) based on continual life-long learning.

The role of teacher denotes a role of learner. Teachers' work as professionals demands performance toward goals, most often student achievement. As professionals, teachers focus on improving their performance, most notably in relation to student achievement. Teacher leaders may choose to lead through a need to learn, to find a better way, to answer a question, or seek to resolve issues within their classroom or school (Hatch, White, & Faigenbaum, 2005). The interactions occurring within the school



setting and collaboration with other teachers sets the stage for a learning habitus, an informal social network of learners (Herzberg, 2006). Krisko (2001) supports the teacher leader as teacher learner by stating teacher leaders seek to improve their knowledge and skills, developing expertise, engaging in higher order thinking skills, and drawing meaning from situations. Rogers (2005) and Bowman (2004) support the idea of learning through their research, which suggested teachers acting in roles of leadership, experience the opportunity to grow professionally through their experiences.

### Teacher Leader Personality

Collins and Toppins (1987) examined personality differences between teachers who chose to engage in teacher leadership activities and equally qualified teachers who did not. They found that overall there was no statistically significant difference between the two groups. The study compared personality strengths of risk taking versus thinking in independent and dependent contexts. Teachers who engaged in leadership had higher risk-taking traits compared to those who did not engage in such acts, but the numbers were not significant. All teachers were identified as being more practical than abstract thinkers are. More recently, research by Donaldson, Bowe, Mackenzie, and Marnik (2004), Krisko (2001), and Wilson (1993) suggested that teacher leaders are risk-takers. These studies found that teachers who chose leadership were stronger independent thinkers who engaged in higher levels of risk taking.

A host of options, which all lead to the behaviors that will determine perceived success and failure, regulate teachers' choices (Nygard, 1981). Motives dictate choices made. Using Atkinson's theory of Achievement Motivation, Nygard (1981) and Janman

(1987) argued that some people are drawn to more difficult tasks, such as leadership. To these individuals, the more challenging, the more inviting. While being drawn to the higher challenge, achievement motivation also drives teacher leaders through success/ and failure options. When success is perceived as achievable or when teacher leaders achieve personal goals, their desire to accept challenges is elevated, thus renewing energies (Leithwood & Beatty, 2008). Atkinson's theory stated that a need to achieve and avoid failure pushes people to work that much harder (Janman, 1987; Nygard, 1981; Remedios & Boreham, 2004).

These studies denoted teacher leaders as having personality traits that supported their choice to step up and out of their classroom to influence others. Teacher leaders as described in the reviewed literature are willing to take risks, to realize there are consequences to their choices, and remain driven by the prospect of being as successful as possible to achieve the positive consequence of increased student learning.

### Benefits of Teacher Leadership

Teacher leadership directly benefits schools by supporting the organizational structure and the culture of the building, which supports increased student learning. School improvement is accomplished through increasing teacher collaboration and professional development, with a direct goal of improving student learning. Muijs and Harris (2007) discussed the idea that effective leadership is a central component to school improvement efforts. York-Barr and Duke's (2004) study of twenty years of literature concerning teacher leadership found that teacher leadership promotes "continuous improvement of teaching and learning... with the result being increased achievement for

every student” (pg. 255). Sergiovanni (1999) and DuFour and Eaker (1998) state that a true learning community is needed to sustain school improvement. Coburn and Russell’s (2008) analyses of a longitudinal study focused on social networks in a school district, as well as Senge’s (1990) concept of Systems Thinking, also support the assertion of teacher leaders facilitating collaboration and supporting school improvement. In essence, increased student learning is influenced the greatest through the teachers, who are able to exercise quality leadership (Fullan, 2006; Muijs & Harris, 2002; Sergiovanni, 1998).

York-Barr and Duke’s (2004) extensive literature review determined four categories of benefits of teacher leadership. The first is that of teacher participation in decision making which promotes ownership. When teacher leaders contribute directly to school curricular and organizational policy making, they become empowered and improve their sense of commitment. As Barth (2001) stated, “The teacher who leads...gets to sit at the table with grown-ups” (p. 445). The second benefit is that of teacher expertise. Teachers work the closest with their students. They know more about their students’ abilities, motives, and needs than anyone else does in the school building (Cuban, 2003; Shulman, 1996).

York-Barr and Duke’s third benefit concerns recognition and growth. Teacher leadership opportunities are seen here as a means of standing out, allowing teachers to be recognized for their work. Teacher leaders have an opportunity to view and participate in decision making outside of their classroom. Teachers acting in this role have the opportunity to participate in an area that affects their students, but in a different form than direct classroom instruction. At the teacher leader level, teaching and leading are juxtaposed; one does not exist without the other (Barth, 2001; Ryan, 1999). The fourth

benefit cited sums up the first three - student achievement. York-Barr and Duke's review found that teacher leaders' work with curriculum and instruction improved teacher knowledge and skills, all contributing to increased student achievement.

### Teacher Leader Roles

A strong point in Katzenmeyer and Moller's (2001) research suggests, "teachers can select appropriate leadership roles for themselves, given their own expertise, confidence level, skill, and knowledge" (p.11). Senge (1990) sets the stage for teacher leadership when describing traditional leadership roles as being filled by special people who create the vision, set the direction, and make key decisions. He continued by referring to the endorsement of this power to leaders being a direct assumption of individuals' "perceptions of powerlessness, [individuals'] lack of personal vision and inability to master the forces of change" (p.340). This perception of traditional leadership roles is concluded by Senge stating that the assumed inability of the majority creates deficits, which can only be filled by a few great leaders. Senge challenges versions of traditional leadership roles by offering a model where leaders are not heroes among the few who can lead; leaders are teachers in the organization. Leaders, teacher leaders, are designers, stewards, and teachers. "[Leaders] are responsible for building organizations where people continually expand their capabilities to understand complexity, clarify vision, and improve shared mental models - that is, they are responsible for learning" (Senge, 1990, p.340).

Swanson (2000) conducted a two- year study of teachers who were recognized as exemplary teacher leaders based on their involvement with standards reform at district and state levels. While engaged in a focus group held at the end of the two years, the teacher leaders cited the idea that teacher leadership positions are not completely formal responsibilities, but a combination of the actions taken in the role, mixed with personal attitudes and behaviors.

Barth (2001) stated that learning and leadership are inseparable. The notion that the best way to learn is to teach is commonly accepted in many areas. These two assertions juxtaposed create an understanding of teacher leaders as leaders who teach. Senge (1990) stated that this idea of leaders who teach is one that creates an environment open to learning by all.

#### Informal/Formal Teacher Leader Roles

In schools, teacher leadership takes on many forms. This form of leadership involves teachers engaged in collaboration and school decision making processes, as well as demonstrating and sharing instructional expertise. It can be a formal position, positing authority, or the informal role of revealing expert classroom practices, engaging in dialog aimed at improvement, mentoring, collaborating, modeling practices, and helping to broaden other's understandings (Ackerman & Mackenzie, 2006). Teacher leadership surfaces as a way for teachers and administrators to support one another, helping each other transform their practices in this current environment of ever-increasing accountability (Beauchum & Dentith, 2004).

Barth (2001) stated that all teachers can and should be teacher leaders. Darling-Hammond, Bullmaster, and Cobb's (1995) study discussed teachers' ability to lead without holding a formal position. Donaldson (2007) identified teachers who gathered to collaborate and learn from each other in informal manners, as leaders themselves. Informally, teacher leadership occurs wherever and whenever one person's action purposely influences another's.

Formal areas have been identified within the literature also. Indeed, it is the formal role that began much of the teacher leadership movement (Silva, Gimbert, & Nolan, 2000). Barth (2001) identified areas of essential teacher leader work as being: textbook selection, curriculum, standards for student behavior, student tracking, staff development, promotion and retention policies, budgets, teacher evaluations, selecting new staff, selecting new administrators, budgets, and professional development. Wetig's (2002) study of teacher leaders revealed that those studied, facilitated change, were involved in mentoring, and were expert teachers. Wetig also suggests teacher leaders are instrumental when acting in roles as team leaders, department chairpersons, mentors, master teachers, grade level chairs, curriculum coordinators, and consultants. Dozier's (2007) survey of 300 accomplished teacher leaders revealed their personal beliefs of contribution included their work of building relationships through professional development facilitators, working in curriculum development, serving as department chairs, grade chairs, and mentors to other teachers. Ackerman and Makenzie (2006) and Silva, Gimbert, and Nolan's (2000) studies of teacher leadership identified department chairs, school improvement team leaders, and leaders of professional development for teachers as formal roles which are inexplicably associated with teacher leadership.

Muijs and Harris' (2007) case study argued that implementation of teacher leadership, lead to shared decision making, opens paths for innovation and change, and enhances curricular work directed toward school improvement.

### Teacher Perceptions of Teacher Leaders

The concept of teacher leadership equates to different meanings for different people (Donaldson, 2007; Wasley, 1992). A review of the literature reveals an assortment of behaviors perceived to be inherent to the role of teacher leaders. Hickey and Harris' (2005) study of one school district suggested that teachers perceived the strongest areas of teacher leadership contributions as that of professional development, collaboration, and sharing of expertise and knowledge. Lieberman and Miller's (2005) literature review of empirical studies in teacher leadership echoed Hickey and Harris's study, with an added emphasis on teacher leaders' contribution to building school wide vision.

Dils' (2001) study of self-professed teacher leaders revealed that these teachers felt their main contributions as teacher leaders laid within the area of mentoring, design, and implementation of curricular work based on standards and benchmarks, working with teachers in professional development opportunities, organizational management as department/grade level chairs, and influencing others through collaboration. Whitsett and Riley (2003) studied the perceptions of teachers participating in a teacher leader preparation course. Their study revealed that these teachers perceived that the core of teacher leadership is concerned with building relationships with peers and influencing colleagues' work toward school improvement. Supporting these assertions Ackerman and Makenzie's (2006) and Silva, Gimbert, and Nolan's (2000) studies both suggested that

teacher leaders are agents for change. They viewed teacher leaders as challenging the status quo, and designing and implementing various programs directed at school improvement.

Dozier's (2007) survey of 300 accomplished teachers found that these teachers believed their leadership traits were that of building and maintaining relationships as well as facilitating professional development and curriculum development. They also reported their leadership activities as being involved in the school as department chairs, grade chairs, and mentors to other teachers.

#### Teacher Leader Collaboration

“Teachers have always been leaders as leaders have always been teachers” (Gardner, 1990, p.18). Theoretically, the act of leadership influences persons to act in a particular way. The actions taken and beliefs developed are manifested from both formal and informal acts of leadership. Teacher leadership involves teachers partaking in such influential endeavors in an effort to promote student learning throughout the school by influencing the written and unwritten policies and culture of the school. Their actions require a relationship between themselves and members of their school because leadership cannot be a solo action (Donaldson, 2006).

Collaboration is a necessity for teacher growth and student achievement (Lucas & Valentine, 2002). Smylie, Conley, and Marks' (2002) research stated that teachers reported enhanced feelings of contributing to the school when collaborating. These teachers grew professionally as a result of their leading. In contrast to the idea of collaborating, the nature of our educational system isolates teachers through most of their



work. Without mentoring and collaboration, many teachers would leave the field long before they were ready to take on teacher leadership roles, ending the reciprocity that renews the role.

Collaboration has a history of being accepted as a force in school improvement efforts. Rosenholtz (1985) found that increasing collaboration improves student achievement, thus catering to teacher identity. As a result, teacher efficacy became greater, lining the path to teacher leadership. Johnson and Birkeland's (2003) study of new teachers' perceptions supports the idea that collaboration is necessary at the lowest level of experience, in which teachers are simply trying to survive, as well as the highest; experienced teachers. As teachers work with mentors and collaborate with each other, personal efficacy builds and leadership desire is enticed. Manthei's (1992) study of mentor teachers' motives found that teachers primarily sought new opportunities for growth and stimulation. By helping novice teachers, these mentors were in fact helping themselves, renewing their commitment and efficacy. When educational leaders design collaborative experiences to include the learning of specific knowledge concerning learning together, a stronger bridge is built (Murphy, Manning, & Walberg, 2002).

Teachers work lives are full; responsibility after responsibility has been placed on teachers (Barth, 2001; Conley & Muncey, 1999). When working in isolation, many teachers are less likely to exert extra effort outside of their classroom, and leadership roles are avoided (Rogers, 2006). Collaboration lightens the load and allows teachers to exercise leadership skills. Teachers who have experience, credibility, and expertise are often sought after by other teachers for their help and guidance. Conley and Muncey's (1999) qualitative study of teacher collaboration offers testimonies of teachers who share

their perceived reasons to engage in leadership. These teachers reported good interpersonal and communicative skills, experience and expertise, knowledge, and understanding of school history as attributes, they were able to offer others. All teachers said their individual skills and desire to work as a team benefited all of their colleagues in their leadership practice.

Hatch, White, and Faigenbaum (2005) reported that research from organizational and institutional theories suggested the learning of one's peers, and development of one's organization rests on sharing tacit knowledge in a collaborative setting. Hence, teachers are able to reach out to others while maintaining their identities. Teacher leaders often emerge as leaders due to a need; they seek an answer to a problem. Through sharing and collaboration, teacher leaders engage in leadership activities and are supported through their own expertise and skill. Formal power and control often accompany leadership positions, but collaborative informal leadership does not focus on such concepts. Through collaborative leadership, teachers can influence others informally.

### Teacher Leader Professional Development

Professional development is an avenue of leadership in line with collaboration. Through professional development, ideas supporting school improvement and student achievement are supported (Breault, 2007, Pugalee, Frykholm & Shaka, 2001). According to Hickey and Harris (2005) teachers engaged in facilitating professional development, a form of leadership, because they saw their efforts translated as increasing colleagues' effectiveness as well as promoting themselves as capable leaders. Effective professional development empowers teachers to feel more in control and confident about

their skills. Keeping teachers connected to their satisfaction in work is important to their work (Beatty, 1999). Aspiring teacher leaders need continuous professional development that focuses not just on the development of teachers' skills and knowledge but also on the aspects specific to their leadership role. Whether it is leading groups and workshops, collaborative work, mentoring, or action research, teacher leaders must continuously be involved (Harris & Muijs, 2003).

### Teacher Leader Influence

The concept that stands out the greatest in the literature is the influence teacher leaders exercise in their work. Whether formal or informal positions were identified, most alluded to or directly named responsibilities supported by the idea of influencing others toward improved student achievement through school improvement efforts (Barth, 2001; Crowther, Kaagan, Ferguson, & Hann, 2002; Kochran & Reed, 2005). Harris and Muijs' (2002) research suggested that collaboration concerned with improved student learning is at the heart of teacher leadership. Donaldson (2007) spoke to the idea of teacher leaders influencing instructional practices of their colleagues.

“Leadership is an empty term when there is nothing to lead, nowhere to go, and no one who follows” (Little, 2000, p.395). The very term “leadership” denotes a relational power base and hierarchical structure. Ultimately one leads and one follows, the degree of separation of the two being the determining factor. Ryan (1999) interviewed twelve teacher leaders in three schools and found that the need to exercise influence made up a large part of their power base or desire to lead. The motivation to be part of the decision making process, a feeling of personal tendency to leadership, strong ethics and

values, and the belief that colleagues looked up to them were cited as their motivating factors. These teacher leaders felt that their work positively influenced the teaching of their colleagues and the achievement of the students as well as the overall well being of the school.

Power is an underlying force, but who holds the power is a strong influence. When a critical lens is used to view shared leadership models as practiced at a school site, the role of leader and follower becomes reciprocal. The leader becomes follower, teacher to learner and the reverse (Webb, Nuemann, & Jones, 2004). This absence of absolute structure invites a greater participation in leading, allowing teachers to share their expertise.

Beauchum and Dentith (2004) interviewed twenty-five teacher leaders, studying their roles' impact. After identifying several areas, they concluded that teacher leadership consists of many factors, all leading to influence of other teachers' practices concerning student achievement. Katzenmeyer and Moller (2001) identified the main responsibilities of teacher leadership as influencing others, engaging in curriculum innovations and implementation, contributing to all aspects of student achievement. The idea of influence extends through their work as including leadership of other teachers and students, leadership of operational tasks, and shared decision making. York-Barr and Duke's (2004) meta-analysis of teacher leadership literature argued that influencing others through facilitation of strategies to improve student learning is a main theme in the literature. Coburn and Russell (2008), Donaldson (2007, and Kochran and Reed's (2005) studies all highlighted relationships and influence of other teachers as a main focus of teacher leaders.

### Additional Lenses to View the Role of Teacher Leadership

Teacher leadership is a broad area. One way to understand teacher leadership is to view it through micropolitics. Within the overarching lens of micropolitics, other lenses provide an understanding of the internal works, which support educators' perceptions of the role of teacher leadership. Three sub-models that offer greater insight are Systems Thinking embedded in Learning Organizational Theory, Distributive Leadership, and Transformational Leadership. These lenses work with micropolitics and role theory allowing a more defined understanding of the phenomenon of teacher leadership as reported in the literature.

Systems Thinking (Senge, 1990) is a model that views the system as a whole and concludes that the individual parts of the whole would act differently if isolated. It studies the connections and links that promote interaction amongst the parts. Systems Thinking recognizes that all human activity systems are open systems; therefore, the environment in which they exist (Senge, 1990) affects them. Systems Thinking acknowledges that a change in one area of a system can adversely affect another area of the system; thus, it promotes organizational communication at all levels. This concept is an intricate part of the micropolitics of teacher leadership based on the literatures' strong allusions to relationship building and influence as being central to school reform. The understandings and perceptions of people collaborating in school improvement processes forms the relationships, effort level, and strategies that will be implemented. The stronger the understanding of the role and benefits of teacher leadership an educator has, the closer the two can work together toward increased student learning.

As Systems Thinking suggests and Learning Communities promotes, the whole is made up of many different parts that would act differently, less enthusiastically, upon isolation (Senge, 1990). For this reason, a method of coherence is necessary. The theory of Distributive or Shared Leadership informs this idea. Smylie (1992) identified Shared Decision Making to be one of education's strongest models. Spillane, Halverson, and Diamond (2004) explained that Distributive Leadership is juxtaposed with a complex social component, which involves all teachers and administrators. Supporting this complex process is the idea that no one individual could possibly hold and act upon all the knowledge needed to run a school (Spillane & Seashore, 2002). The work of leadership is an interactive process (Bauer, Haydel, & Cody, 2003). It is a social and cultural event, which creates meaning and understanding among community members (Harris, 2003). A number of persons share the work, in turn leading smaller groups - a network of multiple leaders, teacher leaders, who interact with one another to obtain a common goal in a micropolitical environment. Distributive leadership theory is in direct contrast to traditional notions of hierarchic leadership. Distributive leadership supports teacher leadership by creating opportunities for teacher leaders to participate in decisions affecting the school, its culture, and mission. Teachers invited to take part in decision-making develop ownership of not only their own actions, but also the actions of the school. This ownership promotes a stronger drive to band as a community of members focused on student learning. The hard lines of leader and follower are blurred creating agency through shared responsibility. School capacity increases when a sense of ownership and trust is established amongst all (Polglase, 2003). The school culture becomes a community where teachers participate in all aspects.

They share in decision-making, collaborate in the designing of learning, and share joint responsibility for the fruit of their labor (Harris, 2003).

As established in this review, teacher leadership is predominately about a sphere of influence. Influencing others through acting in the role of teacher leadership translates to transforming one's beliefs or actions concerning his or her education practice.

Transformational Leadership theory accents Distributive Leadership by its basic nature. Transformational theory is the idea of persuading one's ways of thinking, hence inducing change in the desired direction as established by the leader (Burns, 1978; Tickle, Brownlee, & Nailon, 2005). Transformational leadership emphasizes inspiring changes for all involved through engagement in shared decision making, higher level goals, school-wide success plans, and moving beyond self (Lucas & Valentine, 2002). It posits the leader as influencing the followers in such a manner that they will want to copy the actions and or beliefs of the leader. If the leader is effective in setting high standards and demonstrating critical thinking skills, so the follower will also evolve and follow suit. This approach appears singular in description, but it contains reciprocal values. The idea of transformation is not one-way; it allows growth from all parties involved. In an open, trusting, environment, teachers and administrators learn from each other. This style of leadership contains key elements of transformational value identified as charisma or idealized influence (attributed or behavioral), inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999). It opens the channels of intrinsic motivation and desire for self-growth achieved in formal and informal leadership roles. Through transformational leadership practices, teachers are

able to share a part of themselves with others, they renew and deepen their commitment to education (Ross & Gray, 2006) and engage in leadership.

Anderson (2004) conducted a qualitative study, interviewing teachers at schools noted for shared leadership in an effort to understand the nature of teacher leadership. His study produced distinct categories of influence within the schools. These influences concerned relationships between principal and teacher. Characterizing the influence was the ability to share expertise, exercise power, and achieve a sense of ownership. It also had a reciprocal nature. It allowed principals to gain the limited control they needed to maintain their hierarchy, even if not greatly pronounced, and teachers to move out of the follower position and extend their expertise outside the classroom.

Lucas and Valentine (2002) conducted a quantitative study of transformational leadership styles present among 12 middle school principals and leadership teams. The results of the 475 participants surveyed suggested that the stronger the shared decision making process, the stronger the collaboration, thus creating an environment for leadership in which people wanted to be included. The sense of commitment, feeling of ownership, and involvement in change was noted as being elevated. Principals' actions of building a stronger sense of community was noted as increasing more than collegiality, it promoted collaboration.

Ross and Gray's (2006) study of the effect of transformational leadership on teacher commitment demonstrated that transformational behaviors positively influenced collective teacher efficacy. They also found that increased teacher efficacy led to increased commitment to colleague relationships. The third finding of their study represented increased commitment and independent agency in beliefs. Commitment to



school mission was the largest correlation attributed. These factors all come to play when examining teacher leaders' roles. Increased efficacy leads to greater commitment, which ultimately affects teacher participation in school improvement efforts.

### Summary

In summary, the literature suggested the roles of teacher leadership are informal as well as formal. Informal teacher leadership is primarily collaborative in nature; one teacher influences another in idea and instruction. The formal aspect appears to be a positional role, with designation of who will enact the formal role of teacher leader. This role shares the attributes of the informal with the exception of the addition of greater organizational management responsibilities and granted authority. The informal and formal roles both highlight influence of colleagues and school operations, which promote school improvement. The act of supporting improved student learning is reported as being dependent upon fostering relationships between colleagues, as well as teachers and administrators, bridging the two different roles. Teacher leaders' influence is predominately involved in all areas of instruction, curriculum design, professional development, and school culture. Teacher leaders' knowledge and expertise in education are strong contributions to efforts of improved student learning.

CHAPTER 3  
METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore teachers' and teacher leaders' perceptions of the formal teacher leader role; what they believe it should be, and what they perceive is actual practice. The research cited in this study supports the idea that such an understanding may offer a more plausible insight into the world of teacher leadership. This increased understanding could be very beneficial to leaders at all levels, schools, and institutions of higher education that are focused on teacher leadership, as well as to educational policy makers at all levels. Guiding questions included the following: What do teachers perceive the responsibilities of formal teacher leadership should be and what constitutes the actual practice of teacher leadership by their colleagues in these roles? What do individual teachers engaged in formal leadership roles believe their responsibilities and practice of the position should be and what do they believe to be their reality?

Each of these questions was designed to offer data informing the overall idea of how the perceptions of teachers fulfilling the formal teacher leader role compare to teacher perceptions of what constitutes teacher leadership and the actual practice in their schools.

Examining such phenomena is a way of developing a better understanding of the perceptions and perceived reality of formal teacher leadership roles.

### Research Design

The study of teacher leadership is a study of relationships and interactions as they are lived and conceptualized. By virtue of the study, the results as discussed in Chapters 4 and 5, offer a greater understanding of perceptions, which influence teachers' and teacher leaders' roles in teacher leadership. It is also hoped that the participants reached a better understanding of themselves and their personal understandings. A qualitative study with phenomenological elements, which produces rich, thick, personal data (Willis, 2007) was chosen as the best method for this research. The qualitative design allowed for exploration of the phenomenon, granting a greater holistic understanding. The added aspect of phenomenological elements created a lens through which the researcher was better able to understand the participants' understood beliefs, interpretations of their roles, and accepted notions of common sense regarding their role in leadership (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982).

Crotty (2006) refers to the understanding of individual experiences as constructionism; the creation of a meaningful reality. Using the theory of constructionism, meaning is not inherent in objects; the individual knower constructs meaning. Crotty (2006) uses a line from writer Merleau-Ponty to add a poetic understanding to this theory when he asserts, "The world and objects in the world are intermediate. They may be pregnant with potential meaning, but actual meaning emerges only when consciousness engages with them" (p. 43). Understanding this concept in the

intended form means that the individual's engagement forms or constructs his or her own interpretation of the meaning.

This study intended to examine the way teachers perceive, or experience the role of formal teacher leadership. This research focused on a study of perceptions and beliefs, and described personal beliefs attributed to the phenomena, as understood through the participants' experiences. Examining such phenomena is a way of developing understanding and theory of the interactions that influence one's individual beliefs about teacher leadership. Thus, this study's exploration qualities juxtaposed with elements of phenomenological design, which is in essence, an exploration of lived experience (Crotty, 2006; Krathwohl, 2004; Van Manen, 1990), required a qualitative design.

As with all research, assumptions exist which direct or initiate the research process and guide the questions used in researching and producing the literature. Many theories surface and among these, some stand out for the individual researcher as stronger than others do. Based on this study's established definition of teacher leadership and established fluidity of understanding and interpretation, a naturalistic inquiry accented with a phenomenological methodology was chosen. This methodology compliments the study well due to the nature of the information sought, being personal point of view, and differing for each participant and subsequent readers (Krathwohl, 2004; Van Manen, 1990; Willis, 2007).

Phenomenology appeals to our immediate common experiences; phenomenology conducts a structural analysis of what is most common, most familiar, and most self-evident (Crotty, 2006; Van Manen, 1990). Phenomenology is a way of examining lived experiences in an effort to understand the realization of the experiences of the participant.

Such an understanding placed in a textual form allows others to relate to the stories, develop a better understanding, and create a relationship of understanding based on personal interpretation of the experienced feelings and events. Utilization of phenomenological elements allows the reader to grasp the essence of a lived experience, in order to gain a better understanding of the nature of an event (Van Manen, 1990).

### Data Collection: Participants, Instrumentation, and Procedure

#### Participants

The study's participants were educators from a school district in a North Georgia county. For the purpose of this study, the district shall be referred to as Vesta School District. Vesta's demographics represent both rural and suburban communities. The district has experienced rapid growth in the past ten years and currently has nineteen elementary schools, eight middle schools, and five high schools.

Teacher leadership is in part a manifestation of a school's culture, which is developed over a period of time. Based on analysis of ideas present in the literature review, it was determined that schools which exemplified the greatest stability in teacher retention, teacher experience, and teacher professional development were among the strongest contributing factors of teacher leadership. Fiore (2004) suggests changing a school's culture can take three to five years. Therefore, Vesta elementary schools, which have been operating for a minimum of five years, were selected for initial consideration.

In an effort to identify schools that had a developed school culture, Georgia Department of Education's equity reports dating back five years were obtained for all selected schools. These reports offered an equity score based on teacher retention,

culminating teacher degree levels, as well as average years teaching for all teachers in the school for the given year. The scores were derived from a formula that assigns a number based on the level of occurrence, with the higher the value equating to a higher level of occurrence and or achievement level. The numeric score assigned by the Georgia Department of Education was used to calculate mean scores for each school. The mean of the most recent five years of equity scores were analyzed. The selected schools were identified by geographical location; south, central, and north. Schools yielding the highest scores in their zone, South, Central, and North, in regards to their geographic location, were invited to participate in this study. The school with the highest scores within each geographic location received an invitation to participate, with the second highest noted as a possible choice if the first choice was unable to participate for any reason.

Schools were categorized by the logistical selections offering the greatest diversity of vantage points possible (Rubin & Rubin, 1995) because the schools locations placed them in different district groupings, limiting the collaborative efforts they shared with one another. Administrators at each school were contacted and the selected schools, which accepted the invitation to take part in the study, became the participating schools.

### Surveys

As was the case in Wilson's (1993) and Ryan's (1999) approach that asked teachers at participating schools to nominate colleagues they believed were teacher leaders, teachers at each participating study site received an invitation to participate in the study as well as a link to the study via school email. Such participation solicited teachers' perceptions concerning the formal role of teacher leader, as well as an opportunity to nominate peer teachers as teacher leaders.

The first phase of the study involved administration of an electronic survey (Appendix A), which asked all teachers to rate pre-determined traits they believed inherent in the ideal role of formal teacher leader as well as the reality present at their school. The survey consisted of multiple questions derived from York-Barr and Dukes' (2004) extensive meta-analysis of teacher leadership literature. Their meta-analysis identified recurring concepts present in the teacher leadership literature. These concepts were incorporated into the electronic survey in a Likert scale fashion. Participants had the opportunity to rate their beliefs of each selection by choosing a number from 1-5, with 1 representing *never* and 5 representing *always*. The survey solicited data regarding teachers' and teacher leaders' perceptions of the role of teacher leadership (Peterson, 2000). The data collected through the electronic survey yielded information describing teachers' perceptions of formal teacher leadership roles (Peterson, 2000).

The survey also asked participants to nominate persons they perceived as being teacher leaders. The responses were collected and combined per school, eliminating duplicate nominations, and used as a database for identifying nominated teacher leaders. Using the established pool of nominated teacher leaders for each school, the names of nominees were matched against those identified by the schools' administrators as being members of either the Response to Intervention Committee (RTI), the Leadership Committee, or the Professional Development Committee. These committees were used as criteria based on an informal survey of Vesta County elementary school principals, which was conducted previous to and outside of this study by the researcher and two Vesta County administrators. As a result, the fore mentioned committees were identified to be primary forces in school improvement efforts.

Many of the teachers who were nominated by their peers were members of these cited committees. Individuals who met the criteria of first receiving peer nominations, and second, being identified as serving in the role of formal teacher leader, by virtue of select committee service, were contacted and invited to participate in the second phase of the study. These teacher leaders were invited to complete Katzenmeyer and Katzenmeyer's self-administered Teacher Leader Self Assessment survey (Appendix B). Participants accepting the invitation were given the Teacher Leader Self Assessment survey along with a letter of invitation (Appendix C) including a letter of consent to be signed, directions, and a self-addressed stamp envelope to send information back to the researcher.

The Teacher Leader Self Assessment Survey was designed to be scored in a numeric manner. The survey results were totaled by the researcher. Along with the directions sent to participants concerning phase two, phase 3 was also referred to and teacher leaders were informed that they may be contacted concerning invitation to continue participating in the program should they be chosen.

Phase 3 consisted of interviews. Three teachers at each school, who responded positively to the idea of participating in further researcher via invitation, and stood out the strongest as formal teacher leaders per survey scores, were invited to participate in the formal interviews.

### Interviews

Teacher leaders selected per the three-tiered selection procedure were invited to participate in the interview process. The participating teacher leaders were asked to choose a time and place where they would be most comfortable conversing with the



researcher. All participants, with the exception of one, who chose a public venue, were interviewed at their school sites using a qualitative approach to partially structured interviews (Peterson, 2000; Rubin & Rubin, 1995) lasting 20 - 40 minutes. Interviews were kept private and confidential. The participants were asked to talk about their beliefs concerning what they believe the formal role of teacher leadership should be, and what they perceive their personal practice is, as well as the reality of teacher leadership in their schools. The interview questions/prompts were designed as a guide in bringing about true experiential conversation where participants were able to offer their personal understandings (Rubin & Rubin, 1995).

Van Manen (1990) suggests both partners in an interview need to reflectively orient themselves to the common ground, which brings the significance of the question into view. Therefore, the interviews began with opening questions designed to provide background information as well as set the tone for participant and researcher. Following the initial questions, transition questions designed to solicit data directed toward the purpose of the study were utilized. A deep understanding of the data is critical. Therefore, each interview concluded with closing questions designed to reaffirm the researcher's understanding. Adjustment of the questions occurred as necessary to remain consistent in the theme of the topic. The researcher used prompts, consistently guiding the focus, staying fixed on experiences and beliefs of teacher leadership, while allowing the interviewees to control the answering process from their personal understandings (Kratwohl, 2004). In an effort to support this format, the researcher engaged as minimally as possible in the conversation.

Understanding the personal nature of the interview process, all possible actions were taken to establish a relationship where the interviewees would be comfortable describing in detail their beliefs and personal understandings of teacher leadership and their personal roles (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed. A copy of the written transcription was delivered to all participants so that they could approve or amend the transcripts for the sake of accuracy (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). All participants approved of the transcripts, agreeing the transcripts reflected their perceptions and beliefs of their role and the ideal formal role of teacher leadership. Further, all participants confirmed the transcripts did not contain any material they would not want reported.

#### Analysis of Data

After completion of all interviews, a thematic analysis review of the transcripts identified similar outstanding beliefs among the participants (Krathwohl, 2004). The data was both systematically and selectively coded, with core categories and descriptive categories identified (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). In an effort to ensure the study is conducted in such a way that an account, which assures quality, was present, the researcher solicited the help of colleagues familiar with the field of teacher leadership to assist in the analysis. Analysis included categorization of information obtained from respondents and was subjected to constant comparison, as well as cross-categorical comparisons based on the whole of the data (Krathwohl, 2004).

The researcher and his colleagues, in coding interview transcripts, which were first coded independently, used the data reduction analysis method. The researcher and his colleagues posted all identified themes as data display. Group analysis of the data

occurred through collaborative dialogue and individual explanations of coding selections. Inductive analysis of the transcripts identified themes that reflected both positive and negative perceptions concerning teacher leadership, and all were measured against the research topic and purpose of study. Identified themes that were deemed outside the nature of the study were discarded, and all subsequent themes were categorized. Each category and the category's associated items were discussed by the researcher and his colleagues and underwent extensive inductive analysis, with a focus of keeping the number of categories less than or equal to five categories per Miles and Huberman (1994). The final product yielded four categories containing 28 items.

This data was compared to the literature in order to identify supporting and or lack of supporting concepts associated with teacher leadership literature reviewed in this study, as well as other concepts not previously identified. The resulting descriptions resound that of a clearly understood and acceptable conception of the participants' personal and professional understandings as understood by the researcher (Van Manen, 1990).

#### Difficulties Collecting the Data

Understanding that not all persons would accept an opportunity to participate in this study, the researcher consistently identified a higher number of sites and individuals than required, to be able to default to the next strongest option, if needed. This was the case in the selection of the North and South schools. The administrators at the North and South area schools that were chosen based on equity scores declined the initial invitation to have their schools participate. One administrator cited a lack of time and resources due to overwhelming responsibilities, the second chose not to elaborate.

As a result, the subsequent highest schools in the North and South areas, which both held equity scores nearly equal to the highest schools, were invited via conversation with the principals. Both accepted the invitation to have their schools participate.

The first school, located in the south part of the district, invited the researcher to visit the school personally and present the study information to the staff during their faculty meeting. This opportunity proved to be prolific as a clear understanding was developed through question and answer opportunities for the staff, resulting in successful collection of data with a timely response. After meeting with administrators of the second and third sites, both administrators chose to have the initial study information disseminated electronically. An email explaining the study was sent to the administrators who in turn sent it to all staff with a personal note asking the faculty to complete the study. This method was not as conducive to obtaining the desired results within the specified timeframe of two weeks, therefore it was deemed necessary by the researcher to extend the collection period by one week for each school. The researcher obtained permission to contact the staff personally to solicit their participation in the study. All schools ended with greater than 90% participation.

### Quality

In all studies, it is important for the researcher to implement measures that ensure the study is conducted in such a way that an account, which assures quality, is present. This study utilized a qualitative approach with phenomenological elements, which is openly subjective by design. In any setting, identifying teacher leaders is subject to the personal bias of the evaluator. In an effort to maintain reliability, the researcher solicited

the help of colleagues familiar with leadership and teacher leadership literature and concepts. Eight colleagues worked with the researcher in analyzing the data, with no less than five working together to identify major themes via the data reduction process (Miles and Huberman, 1994).

The researcher believes the professionalism inherent in educators' positions ensured the initial nominations of quality participants, which led to participants chosen through the three-phase process. This study also operated under the assumption that teacher leaders identified by their peers were also of sufficiently high caliber, thereby contributing to valid data collection.

#### Study Pilot

Prior to implementing questionnaire and interview protocols with selected participants, a pilot study was conducted with a convenience sample of teachers and teacher leaders of a non-participating school which had student demographics and equity scores similar to the participating schools. The researcher explained the study to the staff via presentation at a school wide faculty meeting, and invited all faculty members to complete the electronic survey, the Teacher Leader Self Assessment survey, as well as participate in interviews to assure the information collected was that which was sought by the researcher (Cox & Cox, 2008; Krathwohl, 2004; Peterson, 2000). It was found that the design's questions did foster necessary data, yet not in the most efficient manner. Therefore, the survey and questions were adjusted, as minimal as possible (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), incorporating the same survey questions with the change being a Likert scale design.

## Interviews

The initial opening of the interviews allowed for the researcher to present himself as having had experience as a teacher leader. This understanding was believed to have added credibility to the idea that the conversations need not be staged in anyway; that a personal understanding of the role of formal teacher leader was known by the researcher. It also served as a reminder to the researcher that personal biases existed, and required an extra level of attention to conduct the interview conversation accordingly. The interview questions were open, yet similar in direction for each participant; the researcher's role was to keep the conversation on topic, allowing the participants to share their own experiences (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). Each interview was audio recorded for transcription. Participating individuals were offered the opportunity to amend or approve personal transcripts before analysis.

The researcher kept a journal of the process, logging key moments, and biases that occurred throughout the study as well as all procedures and changes (Booth, Colomb, & Williams, 2003). The act of journaling is suggested to add to the overall sense of trustworthiness, credibility, transferability, and dependability of the research process (Krathwohl, 2004).

Trustworthiness is compared to scientific rigor by Guba (1981) and seen as a critical part of quality research. Achieving and maintaining an audience's trust is essential because qualitative research is comprised of leaps of faith and piecing ideas together (Krathwohl, 2004). Therefore, details are of the utmost importance. Sanjek (as cited in Krathwohl, 2004) referenced the three canons of ethnographic validity as being comprised of the following: the research needs to provide a chronological, intellectual,

and personal account of how the analysis evolved; the research needs to contain information about with whom researchers interacted , in what sequence, and how; and the procedures of assembling and processing the data and the method of presenting the data in the report will all be reflective and shared through an included narrative of phenomenological procedures. Krathwohl follows this up by referencing Miles and Huberman (1994) as suggesting that it is essential to keep a good auditing trail. The ability to retrace the steps and changes of the research process must be clear.

### Credibility

It was understood that the potential for bias in nominating teacher leaders was strong. It was further understood, and accepted, that the design of the questionnaire may have resulted in the nomination of formal as well as informal leaders. However, the triangulation design, which included selection of teacher leaders whom peers nominated before being identified by role, identification of formal committee membership by administrators, and self- administered teacher leader survey, was expected to have controlled for quality teacher leader selections.

### Transferability

When studying a phenomenon such as leadership, there are no absolutes, or single truths. Studying persons' perceptions and beliefs also holds no single truths, as reality is different for each person (Krathwohl, 2004; Van Manen, 1990). Leadership is a social function; leadership is the result of cultural understanding and construction of perceived norms. Social understanding is derived from the interpretations of the individual;

constructing personal knowledge while engaged within one's own cognitive environment. Leadership directions may thus be juxtaposed against one another in the same culture and context, but will never carry the exact same meaning for all individuals.

### Ethical Considerations

A study such as this will undoubtedly harbor concerns of power relations and anonymity. To ease the anxiety that may have been present, participants were assured that all information they offered would be kept confidential. All participants were informed that pseudonyms would be used if analysis of the data revealed that descriptions of understandings taken from the study, which would identify individuals or schools, as being beneficial as being included. Steps were taken to communicate with and meet with these individuals privately. All information was kept locked at a private location other than the school system. All equipment used was private and no school district property was used for any reason other than some meeting locations. All participants in the interviews were asked to sign an informed consent form and all participants completing the electronic questionnaire were notified of informed consent in the introduction of the questionnaire.

### Representation

The purpose of this study was to explore teachers' and teacher leaders' perceptions of the role of teacher leadership. This understanding, as interpreted from the surveys and interviews became the data that created the descriptive text of Chapters four and five. The information from this study is directed toward administration/leaders in



elementary schools, universities, and educational policy makers who are interested in the phenomena of how the perceptions of teachers fulfilling the formal teacher leader role compare to teacher perceptions of what constitutes teacher leadership. Therefore, the format is designed for such an audience. The format is representative of both formal and narrative research presentation (Willis, 2007).

Qualitative research is unique by virtue of its design; one description cannot possibly account for all experiences (Krathwohl, 2004). Each description has the potential to be richer or more complementary than another (Van Manen, 1990). Thus, the research presentation includes rich, thick data intended to allow the individual reader to form his/her own general beliefs and understandings as discovered through the personal interpretation of the research results (Willis, 2007). Personal anecdotes of the participants are a strong part of the discussion section. Suggestions of future actions concerning teacher leadership conclude the paper in a strong narrative, realistic-fiction mannerism, which represents the perspectives of the participants involved in the study (Willis, 2007).

### Limitations

There are several limitations inherent to this study. The first is the realization that the focus of this study, discovering the perceptions of teachers and teacher leaders' concerning the ideal formal role of teacher leadership compared to the reality they believe to be in their schools, should take into account a larger pool of participants than was used in this study. Restricting the interviews to three teachers at each of three schools, limits the database used to create the rich narrative and limits the ability to see the whole picture of this phenomenon because it intertwines with so many other issues in

the complexity of the school setting. It is also difficult to identify teacher leaders, as the definition is fluid and allows for a great deal of subjectivity. Therefore, true to the qualitative design of this study, the results can only speak to the perceived understandings of the participants (Krathwohl, 2004). The results can inform future work with teacher leaders, but cannot be generalized to the population of teacher leaders as a whole.

The minimal narrative form of response solicited from teachers may have limited the understandings of respondents, as well as the depth of responses. The design of the research followed selection of pre-determined traits, because a narrative form was thought to yield less information overall. In an effort to reach a greater number of individuals, the survey design was selected. It was understood that the depth and clarity inherent in individual interviews would not be available for the teacher subgroup as a whole. The design of soliciting responses electronically also negated the researcher's ability to gain a deeper understanding of each individual teacher's perception due to the inability to probe and measure based on participants' emotional responses as well as possible nuances that may have presented themselves in a personal setting (Peterson, 2000). Although perception is best represented by the individual, people tend to write less than they will say (Krathwohl, 2004).

Accepting the premise that each person's perceptions will differ from others, it is not possible to obtain a response that is derived from a uniform understanding. Each participant will decide if the questions are sensitive enough to warrant a guarded response (Pryor, 2004). Explaining anonymity and confidentiality upfront to each participant via written or verbal message, was believed to reduce any apprehension.

Participants in this study were all employed in the same school district as the researcher. This commonality of affiliation held a potential limitation based on the idea that participants may not have been as open with responses. All participants were informed their identity would be kept anonymous in the study. They were also informed that they would have the opportunity to review their transcripts as a form of member check. These measures were in place in part to alleviate the possible hesitancy to be completely honest in interviews. This study was also limited by the researcher bias that is inherent in its design. “Qualitative research rejects the very idea that you can be objective and neutral in research. You pick certain things to study because you have an interest” (Willis, 2007, pg.210) The researcher himself is employed by Vesta School District and has participated numerous times in the role of informal/formal teacher leader. These acts have occurred at various places and times. Such involvement creates a bias of personal understanding. This bias may have affected the interview process and reporting of the derived understanding. The researcher entered the research with the understanding that potential for bias existed throughout the process and took steps to avoid possible bias. The researcher entered each interview with an open mind and kept good journal notes, employed data triangulation, worked with a team of colleagues to analyze data, and identified data through a joint coding process.

### Summary

Teacher leadership is a complicated issue that is as different for each person as his or her own individuality. The conversations that took place in the interviews in this research undoubtedly show the complicated nature of teacher leadership and the diversity

of factors, which influence perception. By gathering teacher responses, as well as interviewing teacher leaders, this study acts as a reinforcement of the idea that teacher leadership is extremely complex by its design. This complexity is seen through the multifaceted organization of a school and its leadership, and presents data describing the beliefs of a cross sectional group of educators who comprise the main stratus of the school. Qualitative research is especially useful for exploring such a phenomenon as leadership. “These [qualitative] methods humanize situations and make them come alive. They are particularly useful in describing multidimensional, complex interpersonal interactions where the limited focus of quantitative measures would be inadequate (Kathwohl, 2004, p. 243).

## Chapter 4

### RESULTS

#### Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore teachers' and teacher leaders' perceptions of the role of teacher leader. Teacher perceptions were chosen because conceptualization and implementation are two different entities. Van Manen (1990) described conceptualization as a person's understandings of a phenomenon or idea, it is his personal belief, or interpretation of what may or should happen in a given situation. Deci and Ryan (2004) suggest that a person's conceptualization of a given factor, and his perceived implementation of said event, heavily influences the future actions taken on the individual's part. Thus, the design of the research instrumentation and protocol used in this study reflect an attempt to gain a greater understanding of how teachers and teacher leaders perceive the formal role of teacher leadership both ideally and as reality in their schools. Understanding these perceptions can guide future actions taken to bolster school improvement efforts through the actions of all individuals involved with school process improvement efforts. The overarching questions, which guided this study were:

1. What do teachers perceive the responsibilities of formal teacher leadership should be and what constitutes the actual practice of teacher leadership by their colleagues in these roles?

2. What do individual teachers engaged in formal leadership roles believe their responsibilities and practice of the position should be and what do they believe to be their reality?

The results of the survey administered and interviews engaged in between researcher, teachers, and teacher leaders in Vesta School District are discussed in this chapter. Vesta school district is comprised of schools located in both rural and suburban settings. Student enrollment at time of data collection was approximately 35,700 and Vesta employed approximately 2,550 certified staff. The district manages nineteen elementary schools, eight middle schools, and five high schools.

Teacher leadership is in part a manifestation of a school's culture, which is developed over time. Based on the literature review, it was determined that schools which exemplified the greatest stability in teacher retention, teacher experience, and teacher professional development were among the strongest contributing factors of teacher leadership. Fiore (2004) states it takes an average of three to five years to establish a school's culture. Therefore, Vesta elementary schools, which have been operating for a minimum of five years, were chosen for initial consideration. Thirteen of Vesta's nineteen elementary schools have been operating for a minimum of five years, and were selected for initial consideration, with final selection based on the Georgia Department of Education equity reports dating back five years as discussed in Chapter three. The equity reports offered a numerical score based on the schools' percentage of teacher retention and culminating teacher degree levels, as well as average years teaching for all teachers in each school for the given year.

The numeric score assigned by the Georgia Department of Education was used to calculate mean scores for each school. The mean scores of reports highlighting the most recent five years of equity scores available were analyzed to determine which schools scored the highest. It was understood by the researcher that the schools yielding the highest mean would represent school cultures that have been existent and experienced stable operational parameters for the greatest amount of time. The selected schools were identified by geographical location; south, central, and north. Schools yielding the highest scores in their zone were invited to participate in this study. Schools in this discussion of results will be referred to as South, Central, and North, in regards to their geographic location.

The initial electronic survey was completed by 165 (85%) of the 182 certified teachers actively employed in a teaching position within the three schools combined. Reported demographics of these teachers reflect three (.02%) teachers with 1-3 years experience, 38 (25%) teachers with 4-10 years experience, 45 (29%) teachers 11-20 years experience, 25 (16%) teachers who have taught more than 20 years, and with 44 (28%) teachers choosing not to respond to this question (Table 1). Teachers responding to the survey reported that 48 (31%) have taught at their current school for 1-3 years, 63 (41%) have taught at their current school for 4-10 years, 19 (12%) have taught at their current school for 11-20 years, and 10 (6%) teachers have taught for more than 20 years at their current school, with 15 (10%) teachers choosing not to respond (Table 2).

Table 1

*Years Experience as Certified Teacher*

	1-3 Years	4-10 Years	11-20 Years	20+ Years
	3	38	45	25
Number of Teachers	.02%	25%	29%	16%
<i>n = 111</i>				

Table 2

*Years at present school*

	1-3 Years	4-10 Years	11-20 Years	20+ Years
	48	63	19	10
Number of Teachers	31%	41%	12%	6%
<i>n = 140</i>				

Phase 1 Electronic Survey

The first two questions of the initial electronic survey consisted of multiple items derived from identified traits of teacher leaders reported in York-Barr and Dukes' (2004) extensive meta-analysis of teacher leadership literature. York-Barr and Dukes' meta-



analysis identified recurring concepts present in the teacher leadership literature. These concepts were presented in question format. Respondents were asked to identify the degree of their perception (Always, Almost Always, Often, Almost Never, and Never) of an item being an ideal part of the role of formal teacher leader and the reality of teacher leadership present in their school. The items teachers were asked to rate in questions one and two were the same, with the order of presentation randomly assorted in each individual administration via the survey software program. This allowed for questions one and two to reflect the same information, with a different purpose; question one being the participant's perception of the ideal components of teacher leadership and question two reflecting their perception of their school's reality without this connection being obvious to the participant.

Questions three, four, and five, all referred to teachers' perceptions of how teacher leaders benefit their school and what the reality of their school might be if teacher leaders were not an active part of school improvement efforts. Questions three and four utilized the same text to elicit responses based on ideal and reality with the responses tabulated to identify discrepancies. The identified discrepancies were compared to question five responses. These questions were designed to offer a broader look at teachers' perceptions of teacher leadership as well as identify possible areas of notable discrepancies.

The open-ended format of questions six and seven, concerning the self identified actual practice of teacher leadership, allowed for further identification of perceptions of teacher leadership responsibilities. This section was included in an effort to allow teachers who relate closely to working with or participating in the role of teacher leader

an opportunity to offer input in areas that may not have been included in initial sections of the survey. As this study evolved, it was determined by the researcher that the data collected from these questions held strong merit in their own right, but do not play a strong part in the study's goals. Based on the study's design, it is not possible to determine which statements from questions six and seven relate to this study's definition of the role of formal teacher leadership. Therefore, this information is reported as a means of demonstrating the perceptions of individuals who identify themselves as assuming the role of teacher leader or interacting as with teacher leaders as an additional viewpoint. Question 8 asked for nominations of teacher leaders. These nominations were used as the first step of the selection process for possible participants for the second phase of the survey, the Teacher Leader Self Assessment survey.

#### Teacher Leader Nominations

The electronic survey asked participants to nominate teachers they perceived as teacher leaders. Four hundred seventy-three nominations were received from ninety-eight respondents; many teachers received multiple nominations. Analysis of individual nominees yielded one hundred thirteen different teachers recognized as teacher leaders, comprising sixty-two percent of teachers actively employed at the three different locations included in this study.

Matching nominated names against information obtained from the administrators allowed the researcher to determine which teachers met the second criteria, that of being members of the Leadership, Professional Development, or Response To Intervention committees. This filtering process yielded forty-six teachers who met the criteria of both nomination by their peers as a teacher leader and involvement in a role of formal teacher

leadership as qualified by their committee affiliation. These formal teacher leaders received an invitation to complete the Katzenmeyer and Katzenmeyer Teacher Leadership Self Assessment survey (see Appendix B). Thirty-five (76%) completed and returned the survey to the researcher. Twenty-nine of the thirty-five (83%) responding teachers agreed to participate in phase three interviews, should they be selected.

The researcher analyzed the surveys completed by the formal teacher leaders and calculated the nominal rating as per the survey's rating scale. Based on the total score a total of nine teachers, three from each school, were selected for invitation to the interview process. All invited teachers participated and their responses were used in supporting the data results, which shall be discussed in this chapter.

#### Phase 2 Teacher Leader Self Assessment

During phase 2, the Katzenmeyer and Katzenmeyer self-administered Teacher Leadership Self Assessment survey tool was completed by the selected teachers. The Teacher Leader Self Assessment survey assigned a numerical score representing teacher leaders' self-reported levels of effectiveness in areas of the role of teacher leadership. The ratings of this survey represent a nominal value that is an average suggesting a self-perceived level of proficiency in cited areas of teacher leader behaviors. The survey assigned a subjective rather than an absolute value. The nominal value indicated a level of the frequency teacher leaders reported behaviors in the given areas.

#### Phase 3 Interviews

Teacher leaders, identified per the three-tiered selection procedure, received invitations to participate in the interview process in an effort to collect data targeted at the second research question, "What do individual teachers engaged in formal leadership

roles believe their responsibilities and practice of the position should be and what do they believe to be their reality?" These teacher leaders were interviewed using a partially structured qualitative interview (Peterson, 2000; Rubin & Rubin, 1995). Through engagement in conversation with the participants via the interview process, the researcher learned of their perceptions of what the formal role of leadership should be, and perceptions of their personal practice, as well as the perceived reality of teacher leadership in their schools. The interview questions were designed as a guide to bring about true experiential conversation, opening a path that enabled participants to offer their personal understandings (Rubin & Rubin, 1995).

#### Data Management

In an effort to manage the data, all items comprising survey questions one and two, as well as interview transcripts, underwent data reduction and were coded by the researcher and five colleagues who are knowledgeable in the area of leadership, including teacher leadership. Responses to survey questions one and two, along with the Katzenmeyer and Katzenmeyer Teacher Leadership Self Assessment survey, were analyzed and through the process of data reduction (Miles & Huberman, 1994) inductive analysis, as well as content and thematic analysis (Krauthwohl, 2004). Each item was assigned to one or more of the seven identified categories present in the Katzenmeyer and Katzenmeyer Teacher Leader Self Assessment survey framework. These subsequent categories were reviewed and underwent continued refinement. Through the process of employing data display techniques (Miles & Huberman, 1994), all items and proposed categories were reviewed by the researcher and his team of colleagues who assisted in the

analysis process. Continuing the data reduction process in an effort to produce four to five categories as recommended by Miles and Huberman (1994), the proposed categories were discussed. Through dialogue and individual explanation of reasoning, all coded survey items were assigned to categories, which were derived from the Katzenmeyer and Katzenmeyer Teacher Leadership Self Assessment survey framework. The categories and survey items were then adapted to become superordinate categories.

Data reduction analysis techniques were also employed by the researcher and his colleagues in coding interview transcripts. The transcripts were first analyzed and coded independently by the researcher and each of his colleagues. The researcher and his colleagues then posted all identified themes as data display, writing all themes on a large computer based interactive white board for easy viewing and manipulation. Through the process of collaborative dialogue and individual explanations, each person's reasoning for their choices of theme identification was explained. Inductive analysis of the transcripts determined that of all the themes that emerged from the interviews, some were that of individuals only, and others were shared. Also identified were themes that reflected both positive and negative connotations of teachers' perceptions concerning teacher leadership. Identified themes that were deemed outside the nature of the study were discarded, and all subsequent themes were categorized. Each category and the category's associated items were discussed and underwent extensive inductive analysis, with a focus of keeping the number of categories limited to four or five per Miles and Huberman (1994). The final product yielded four categories containing a total of twenty-eight items.

### Phase One Survey Questions One and Two Overview

Questions one and two of the electronic survey (Table 3) were rated by respondents as to the degree they perceived the items occurred, choosing from a numeric identifier of 1 representing 'never' to 5 representing 'always'. The identified values of each item were tabulated to yield the nominal representation mean of each question. The derived mean represented levels of both alignment of and discrepancies between the ideal belief versus the perceived reality of teacher leadership within the schools. The Teacher Leader Self Assessment scores also solicited interval data supported by the same 1 to 5 format, and were tabulated as a single data set yielding a mean and percentage of self-reported frequency of behavior in each category. The assigned nominal values of the tabulations were then compared based on the whole of the data (Krathwohl, 2004), identifying the areas of greatest inconsistency. The electronic survey was tabulated to reveal the means of the perceptions of ideal ratings and the reality ratings. The difference between these two numbers represents the discrepancy of what teachers believe should be a part of formal teacher leadership in their schools, and what they believe is the reality.

Table 3

#### *Question 1 and 2 Items*

All Schools		Ideal Avg	Reality Avg	Difference	
1	Participates in school management and decision making	3.92	3.76	0.16	3.20%
2	Builds trust and rapport with peers	4.83	4.2	0.63	12.60%
3	Confronts and challenges status quo in a school's culture	4.02	3.56	0.46	9.20%
4	Facilitates parent and school relationships	4.15	3.96	0.19	3.80%
5	Facilitates community and school relationships	4.18	3.7	0.48	9.60%

6	Participates in formal professional organizations	3.97	3.62	0.35	7.00%
7	Is politically involved with issues concerning education at all levels	3.46	3.21	0.25	5.00%
8	Monitors school improvement efforts	4.2	3.89	0.31	6.20%
9	Understands how to interpret and use data concerning student abilities	4.68	4.11	0.57	11.40%
10	Understands how to enhance school wide student learning	4.57	4.02	0.55	11.00%
11	Develops and leads professional development programs	3.95	3.76	0.19	3.80%
12	Promotes colleagues professional growth	4.28	4	0.28	5.60%
13	Engages in peer coaching	4.17	3.65	0.52	10.40%
14	Models professional growth	4.57	4.06	0.51	10.20%
15	Leads school wide Learning Communities	3.89	3.69	0.2	4.00%
16	Works collaboratively with peers	4.73	4.23	0.5	10.00%
17	Understands how to guide colleagues in improving instruction	4.52	3.88	0.64	12.80%
18	Views themselves as positive role models	4.72	4.29	0.43	8.60%
19	Holds a strong understanding of their role as a leader	4.7	4.06	0.64	12.80%
20	Has excellent teaching skills	4.73	4.19	0.54	10.80%
21	Has taught more than 3 years	4.34	4.07	0.27	5.40%
22	Has a clearly developed personal philosophy of education	4.52	4.11	0.41	8.20%
23	Is organized and flexible	4.52	4.02	0.5	10.00%
24	Is able to take on extra responsibilities	4.37	3.99	0.38	7.60%
25	Is a strong communicator	4.61	3.99	0.62	12.40%

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N= 155

Never = 1, Almost Never = 2, Often = 3, Almost Always = 4, Always = 5

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The results of the data reduction process produced the following categories:

1. Awareness/Instructional Proficiency – this refers to teacher leaders’ strengths, values, philosophy of education, and behaviors. It also includes teacher leaders’ personal expertise in classroom instruction and their modeling of such instruction.
2. Leadership /Communication – refers to teacher leaders’ abilities to lead school improvement efforts via various strategies, which ultimately work toward increasing student achievement. This includes a teacher leaders’ ability to communicate vision and strategy, as well as listen to and understand other’s ideas and interests relating to school improvement as measured through increased student achievement.
3. Collaboration/Diversification – references teacher leaders’ competencies in working closely with colleagues. This involves exercising collaborative and personal/transformational influences directed at colleagues concerning school improvement efforts. Such efforts are consistently adjusted through an understanding approach that takes into account personal diversity of others.
4. Continuous Improvement/Self-Organization – refers to teacher leaders’ engagement in professional development and behaviors designed to improve their own and others’ understandings of student instruction as well as working with adult learners. Teacher leaders put into action, strategies both taught and learned through modeling, coaching, and implementation of professional development instruction. Professional actions taken are purposeful, thought out, and designed to elicit professional and organized modeling as well as demonstrate efficiency.



5. Community Oriented – refers to teacher leader’s involvement with the school’s community in realizing school improvement efforts. This includes political involvement on issues concerning schools at different levels of legislation.

Analysis of the data revealed the mean and differences of all items within each respected category. The three categories that held the greatest percentage of difference between perceptions of the ideal role of teacher leader and the perceived reality of teacher leaders’ work in schools were selected to undergo further examination. The selected areas were Awareness/Instructional Proficiency, Collaboration/Diversification, and Continuous Improvement/Self Organization.

The selection of these categories was made based on both the ideal ratings and the differences. The ideal ratings represent the perceived strength of the necessity of the concept of teacher leadership as being a reality in schools, while the difference is key in that it represents a nominal degree to which the teacher respondent population may perceive a disconnection between what they believe should be occurring and what they perceive as reality. The resulting analysis of the five categories revealed the following categories as yielding the greatest discrepancies: 1 – Awareness/Instructional Proficiency, 3 – Collaboration/Diversification, and 5 -Continuous Improvement/Self Organization. As a result of the discrepancy levels, these categories were selected as the main focus of this study.

### Awareness/Instructional Proficiency

Questions one and two of the electronic survey contained seven items designed to gain a greater understanding of teachers' perceptions concerning the level of teacher leader awareness and instructional proficiency (Table 4). These items have been disaggregated by the level of perceived importance as identified by mean ideal ratings.

Table 4

#### *Ideal Teacher Leader Awareness and Instructional Proficiency*

	Ideal Mean	Reality Mean	Difference	
Has excellent teaching skills	4.73	4.19	0.54	10.80%
Views themselves as positive role models	4.72	4.29	0.43	8.60%
Holds a strong understanding of their role as a leader	4.7	4.06	0.64	12.80%
Understands how to interpret and use data concerning student abilities	4.68	4.11	0.57	11.40%
Understands how to enhance school wide student learning	4.57	4.02	0.55	11.00%
Has a clearly developed personal philosophy of education	4.52	4.11	0.41	8.20%
Has taught more than 3 years	4.34	4.07	0.27	5.40%

[A teacher leader] *has excellent teaching skills* was rated 4.73 or 94.6% rate of importance ideally. This represents teachers' perception that the most important skill of a teacher leader is their capability to teach. It follows that as school improvement measurement is ultimately measured against student test scores, teachers who take part in leading the school should have a strong set of teaching skills.

Their expertise is also beneficial in their work with other teachers toward increased student learning (Duke, 2004; Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001; Liebermann, Saxl, & Miles 1988).

Items *views themselves as positive role models*, and *holds a strong understanding of their role as a leader*, asked teachers to rate their beliefs of the importance of teacher leaders understanding the impact they have in their role as leaders. Teachers rated their perception of teacher leaders ideally viewing themselves as positive role models as 4.72 or 94.4% rate of importance. Similarly, the idea that teacher leaders should hold a strong understanding of their role as a leader received a rating of 4.7 or 94% rate of importance. These ratings represent the idea that teachers expect teacher leaders to be self-assured in the understanding of their roles. Senge (1990) challenges the traditional leadership roles by offering a model where leaders are not heroes among the few who can lead, but rather, leaders are teachers in the school. To lead, a clear vision, an understanding of where the school needs to go and how to get there is a necessity for all teacher leaders. Teacher leaders are designers, stewards, and teachers, engaging in dialog aimed at improvement, mentoring, collaborating, modeling practices, and helping to broaden other's understandings (Ackerman & Mackenzie, 2006). This rating suggested that teachers believe teacher leaders must understand their role and own it.

Item 9 of the survey prompted teachers to rate their perception of what level of teacher leaders' abilities to *understand and interpret data concerning student abilities* should be present. As a whole, the data revealed that the average ideal belief related to understanding and interpreting data concerning student abilities is 4.68, on a scale from 1-5. Specifically teachers reported that this ability of teacher leaders held a 93.6% rate of

importance. Following closely, both in categorical similarity and teacher rating, teachers reported that teacher leaders' abilities to *understand how to enhance school wide student learning* was also important. This item received a rating of ideally being a 4.7 or 91.4% rate of importance. In today's high stakes testing environment, understanding assessment and subsequent instruction concerning issues in student achievement are imperative. Research supporting student achievement using teacher leadership models (DuFour & Eaker, 1998; Lieberman & Walker, 2007; Muchmore, Cooley, Marx, & Crowell, 2004) support the idea that understanding students' strengths and areas of needed improvement is an ongoing task that must consistently adapt to changes, which are reflected in student academic abilities and performance.

[Teacher leader] *has a clearly developed personal philosophy of education*, conveys the belief that teacher leaders should have a clearly developed philosophy of education, which guides their work, received a lower rating in this section of 4.52, 90.4%, yet is still important. As is the case with teachers recognizing themselves as leaders, identifying with Senge's (1990) model where leaders are not heroes, but are among the few who can lead, teacher leaders must have a clear vision, a philosophy of education, and an understanding of which direction the school needs to advance and how to achieve this movement.

The survey item, *has taught more than 3 years*, was rated the lowest of the section as being ideal at 4.34, 86.8%. Although the literature does not offer an abundance of research directly stating that experience is a prerequisite of teacher leadership, it does refer to experience as a key component.

Conley and Muncey's (1999) qualitative study of teacher collaboration reports good interpersonal and communicative skills coupled with experience and expertise, knowledge, and understanding of school history as attributes that enhance teacher leaders' abilities to help others.

Teachers reported that they felt the most important areas of teacher leadership in the *Awareness/Instructional Proficiency* category (Table 4), in ordinal form are as follows: teacher leaders must have excellent teaching skills, view themselves as positive role models, hold a strong understanding of their role as a leader, understand how to interpret and use data concerning student abilities, understand how to enhance school wide learning, have a clearly developed personal philosophy of education, and ideal teacher leaders would have at least three years of experience. However, those same teachers perceived the reality differently. By looking at the perceived reality, the data reveals areas that fall short of expectations. The data suggested a nearly 13% discrepancy rating concerning teacher leaders holding a clear understanding of their role. More than an 11% discrepancy is reported in the area of teacher leaders' competency to interpret data concerning student abilities. Similarly, an 11% discrepancy is perceived to exist concerning teacher leaders having the necessary knowledge to improve student learning in their schools. Ideally, teacher leaders' personal understandings are believed to be very important, yet in reality, it appears that the perceptions of teacher leaders' skill sets are not meeting teacher expectations.

Teachers' nominal rating of *teacher leaders having excellent teaching skills*, ranked as the highest in this section ideally. Yet the perceived reality demonstrated an 11% discrepancy. This implies that teachers view the reality of teacher leaders in their

schools as not meeting the expected criteria of responding teachers. The discrepancy rating of teacher leaders viewing themselves as positive role models was rated similarly in both areas of ideal and reality. [Teacher leaders] *have a clearly developed personal philosophy of education and have taught more than 3 years* both ranked at the bottom of both lists. Apparently, teachers feel these areas are important, although not as important as other items in this area; they also believe teacher leaders' reality align near their expectations of ideal in both areas.

#### Collaboration/Diversification

Questions one and two of the electronic survey contained items designed to provide a better understanding of teachers' perceptions of the importance and reality of a teacher leader's work concerning collaborating with colleagues and their ability to work in a diverse environment. The survey contained four items designed to address this area (Table 5).

Table 5

#### *Ideal Collaboration/Diversification*

	Ideal Mean	Reality Mean	Difference	
Builds trust and rapport with peers	4.83	4.2	0.63	12.60%
Works collaboratively with peers	4.73	4.23	0.5	10.00%
Understands how to guide colleagues in improving instruction	4.52	3.88	0.64	12.80%
Promotes colleagues professional growth	4.28	4	0.28	5.60%

Item 2 of survey questions one and two addressed teacher leaders' abilities to *build trust and rapport with peers*, and received ratings establishing it as the most important in this category. Responding teachers rated this item as a 4.73 on a scale of 1-5, translating to an importance of 96.6% ideally. Polglase (2003) suggested that school capacity increases when a sense of ownership and trust is established amongst all members. Liebermann, Saxl, and Miles' (1988) landmark study suggested that formal teacher leaders felt instrumental in building trust and developing rapport among their school's faculty. Bass and Steidlmeier (1999) and Ross and Gray (2006) both reported that trust and rapport building are essential parts of transformational leadership which supports school improvement. Teachers' beliefs aligned well in this area with the literature that supports culture as both a foundational and driving force in school improvement.

Following suit, *works collaboratively with peers*, and *understands how to guide colleagues in instruction* (Table 6), ranked second and third highest, respectively. Teachers responding to their beliefs of the importance of the reality of working collaboratively with peers rated this as a 4.73 or 94.6% rate of importance. Working collaboratively with peers is in some ways similar to understanding how to guide colleagues in instruction and was comparably rated. Teachers rated the ideal teacher leader's understanding of guiding instruction as having a 4.52, 90.4% rate of importance. Collaboration is cited in the literature as being heavily responsible for setting the stage for a learning habitus (Herzberg, 2006), bolstering school improvement (York-Barr & Duke, 2004), and underlying school improvement efforts (Katzenmeyer & Moller 2001).

As was the case with Category 1 and the highest ranked item of this category concerning trust and rapport amongst peers, collaboration stands out as an important area for teachers.

Interestingly, item 12, *promotes colleagues professional growth* rated a 4.28 or 85.6% rate of importance as being ideal. Wilson (1993) analyzed teacher leader interview data and compared the commonalities to Kouzes and Posners' (1990) model of leadership behaviors of 1300 middle and senior managers in both public and private organizations and determined that the idea of teacher leaders seeking challenges and growth, and going out of their way to find innovative and challenging programs to increase the learning of their students and their colleagues, was a behavior that was comparable in business leaders and teacher leaders. This assertion suggested a strong part of teacher leadership was viewed by Wilson's participants as being that of promoting growth among colleagues within their schools. This study's reported rate of importance for this item shows that such an endeavor did not rank high in the participating schools at the time the data was collected. It appears that teacher leaders' roles in promoting growth amongst their colleagues are less valued.

Teacher leaders' roles in understanding how to guide colleagues in improving instruction placed third most important in the area of collaboration. This item possessed the highest percentage of discrepancy, 12.8%. This score ranks very closely to perceptions of teacher leaders enhancing school wide learning, and suggested a deficit in this area. Collaboration ranked highly in all ideal areas describing the formal teacher leadership role, and a strong part of collaboration is guiding peers in improving their instruction.



A 12.8% discrepancy implies teacher leaders were perceived as not actively taking a strong enough part in or perceived as not being as successful in this endeavor compared to the perceived ideal level.

Similarly, working with their peers would be beneficial to improving *trust and rapport with their peers*. The discrepancy score of this item was 12.6%, placing it as the second highest of the area as well as in close alignment with guiding colleagues in improving their instruction. *Works collaboratively with peers* follows a close third with a 10% discrepancy. These areas share a natural juxtaposition within the realm of collaboration. Moreover, these ratings demonstrate a scarcity of perception of collaboration by teacher leaders.

*Promotes professional growth*, was located at the bottom of this category both ideally and in reality. Teachers reported that both the importance of teacher leaders being involved with promoting their personal growth, as well as the reality of this occurring, were less important than collaboration. While 85% of teachers feel that teacher leaders should be involved, with 80% actually being involved, many teachers appeared to be satisfied with their professional growth needs being met by their principal, district, or own personal efforts.

#### Continuous Improvement/Self Organization

Teachers are the crux of student achievement. A teacher's skills and knowledge are essential in moving students forward (Hatch, White, & Faigenbaum, 2005; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Therefore, the survey included a large portion, ten items, dedicated to eliciting responses perceived as reflective of teacher leaders' abilities and skills concerning professional development of self and others (Table 6).

Table 6

*Ideal Continuous Improvement/Self Organization*

	Ideal Mean	Reality Mean	Difference	
Is a strong communicator	4.61	3.99	0.62	12.40%
Models professional growth	4.57	4.06	0.51	10.20%
Understands how to guide colleagues in improving instruction	4.52	3.88	0.64	12.80%
Is organized and flexible	4.52	4.02	0.5	10.00%
Is able to take on extra responsibilities	4.37	3.99	0.38	7.60%
Engages in peer coaching	4.17	3.65	0.52	10.40%
Participates in formal professional organizations	3.97	3.62	0.35	7.00%
Develops and leads professional development programs	3.95	3.76	0.19	3.80%
Leads school wide Learning Communities	3.89	3.69	0.2	4.00%
Is politically involved with issues concerning education at all levels	3.46	3.21	0.25	5.00%

In all areas of collaboration and leadership, communication is a key factor. It represents a significant part of the micropolitics model of teacher leadership. As demonstrated through teacher survey ratings, teacher leadership surveys and interviews, which comprised this research, a strong part of the formal teacher leadership role involves lines of communication between many areas. Reflective of the ideal section of the survey, teacher leaders as *strong communicators* received the highest rating of this category, 4.61 (92.2%). In all areas of collaboration, which ranked among the highest,

communication received ratings suggesting it played a strong role. A teacher leaders' ability to convey meaning in a coherent and positive manner, which maintains the integrity of the information, is crucial.

Ranking second and third highest respectively, *models professional growth*, received a rating of 4.6, or 91.4% and *understands how to guide colleagues in improving instruction* received a 4.5, or 90.4% rate of importance. Similar to these items, ranked sixth, is *engages in peer coaching*. Teachers rated teacher leaders' involvement in peer coaching as 4.17 or 83.4% ideal. These three areas share a commonality of teacher leaders promoting and leading teachers' professional growth and learning. In the survey, peer coaching received a much lower score than similar items, which referred to teacher leaders guiding their peers. These ratings suggest that the term *coaching* may be understood as the teacher leader holding more responsibility and power in the relationship, whereas the word *guiding* may lend more to the idea of collaborating as peers with an absence of hierarchy. Whitsett and Riley's (2003) study of teacher leadership preparation programs revealed that influencing teachers' practice toward school improvement was at the heart of teacher leadership. Their study referred to *guiding* as the operative word, which negates some of the negative connotation that may be associated with the term *coaching*.

Items ranked as sixth and seventh, *organized and flexible* and *able to take on extra responsibilities*, reflect the idea that teacher leaders should be organized, flexible and at a point in their lives where they are able and willing to take on extra responsibilities. *Is organized and flexible*, received a rate of importance of 4.52, or 90.4% ideal. Fairing somewhat close, [teacher leaders'] *ability to take on extra responsibilities*,

received a rating of 4.37, or 87.4% ideally. Herzberg (2006) suggested that human nature supports a teacher's ability to accept, adjust, or resist extensive extra work based on one's personal position in life at the respective point in time. This idea of personal position might be a result of professional development as well as personal circumstances that might tax a person's ability to accept the increased workload. These items placed near the median of the category, demonstrating many teachers found they are important, while others did not deem it so. Flexibility in personal understandings, possibly based on differences of individual abilities and philosophy may explain, in part, the ratings in this area.

While not perceived as being high in importance based on rankings under 80%, items referring to teacher leaders' work outside of their school, which directly affects their schools, were in reality important to all schools. The idea that formal teacher leaders *participate in formal professional organizations*, rate of importance reported as being 3.97 or 79.4%, is directly juxtaposed to [teacher leaders are] *politically involved with issues concerning education at all levels*, ideally rated as 3.46, or 69.2%, the lowest in the survey. Commonly, these items refer to work primarily done outside the school, work that involves solicitation of individuals and organizations located outside of the school building. Both items received low ideal ratings as well as minimal ratings of discrepancy. The responses of participants suggest a perceived level of importance that is lower than all others. Such reduced levels of perceived importance may illustrate a tendency of teacher leaders' efforts to focus energies on formal leadership roles and interactions within the school, more so than outside of the school.

[Teacher leaders] *develop and lead professional development programs* was rated 3.95 or 79%) ideally and *leads school wide learning communities* received a rate of importance as being ideally 3.89, or 77.8%. Both reflect ratings that are significantly lower than scores referring to guiding colleagues. As was the case with the *peer coaching* rating, it is believed that the idea of a teacher leader holding an implied or pronounced level of responsibility and/or position, which is perceived as being greater than their peers, may not be considered favorable by many teachers. Another possibility is the idea that school structures supporting effective training and implementation of peer coaches may not exist in all schools.

#### Discrepancy

As stated throughout much of the school improvement literature, professional growth must consistently occur amongst teachers (Breault, 2007, Dozier, 2007, Pugalee, Frykholm & Shaka, 2001). Teachers' ratings demonstrated that formal teacher leaders participating in a role that is intended to bolster their peers' professional learning ranks at the top of the discrepancies when comparing perceptions of ideal and reality.

The differences of the items describing teacher leaders' direct work with colleagues concerning the guidance of their professional development as well as modeling their own, and peer coaching, range from 12.8% - 10%, enough to possibly make a notable distinction in a school. Closely related to the idea of modeling and guiding teachers' professional development is teacher leaders' abilities to be strong communicators. This area received a rating representing a discrepancy of 12.4%.

Such a difference goes against much of the literature, which discusses the importance of communication skills amongst teacher leaders (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001; Strodl, 1992).

Teacher leaders' abilities to remain organized and flexible, as well as take on extra responsibilities, were perceived as a shortfall based on teacher input. Teacher responses identified these areas as having a 10% discrepancy. The current education system often demands doing more work with fewer resources; teachers are under increased pressure, and are often having to accept amplified responsibilities. As teachers try to accept and cope with additions to their workload, it may be more difficult for them to realize the increased magnitude of additional responsibilities experienced by teacher leaders, which may be greater than their own.

Teachers ranked teacher leaders' involvement in developing professional learning opportunities, as well as establishing learning communities, as low in an ideal sense. Teachers reported their perception of the reality as also holding a similar value. These areas had the lowest discrepancy rates, suggesting that teacher leaders are in close alignment in this area. Developing professional learning opportunities and learning communities is closely related to guiding professional development and peer coaching, both of which were not closely aligned when perceived levels of importance as shown through survey ratings as being ideal within schools versus the understood reality were compared. The term *developing* does not directly suggest that the teacher leaders' are necessarily taking charge of the related activities as guiding and coaching do; it blurs the idea of a hierarchical order amongst teacher leaders and their peers.

### South Elementary Questions One and Two

Specific data from South Elementary concurs with the data collected from all schools when comparing categories having the highest amounts of discrepancy. The three compared categories include Awareness/Instructional Proficiency, Collaboration/Diversification, and Continuous Improvement/Self Organization.

#### South Elementary Awareness/Instructional Proficiency

Questions one and two of the electronic survey utilized six items intended to increase understanding of teachers' perceptions of the level of awareness and instructional proficiency required and demonstrated by teacher leaders (Table 7).

Table 7

#### *South Awareness/Proficiency*

	Ideal	Reality	Difference	
Holds a strong understanding of their role as a leader	4.64	3.95	0.69	13.80%
Understands how to enhance school wide student learning	4.58	3.92	0.66	13.20%
Has excellent teaching skills	4.74	4.16	0.58	11.60%
Understands how to interpret and use data concerning student abilities	4.57	4.08	0.49	9.80%
Has a clearly developed personal philosophy of education	4.44	3.97	0.47	9.40%
Views themselves as positive role models	4.63	4.21	0.42	8.40%

Analogous to the undivided data set, items 19 and 20 also describe a strong difference in perception between what should be and what is perceived as reality. Item 19 asked teachers to rate their beliefs of the importance of teacher leaders *understanding their role as a leader*. The average rating of this item as being ideal was 4.64, which correlates closely with the combined score of 4.7, while the reality of teacher leaders understanding their roles as leaders was rated 3.95 as compared to 4.06, revealing a difference of 13.8% which is only 1% greater than all schools combined. Similarly, item 20, [a teacher leader] *has excellent teaching skills* was rated ideally as 4.74 compared to the complete data set's 4.73, with a reality rating of 4.16 as compared to 4.19 of the overall mean.

Item 10, which scored a difference of 13.2%, followed the rated 11% difference of all schools combined. Teachers reported that teacher leaders' abilities to *understand how to enhance school wide student learning* was important, yet not enacted as fully as necessary. This item was rated as ideally being a 4.7 by all schools and a 4.8 by South Elementary. This near absence of difference suggested that the perceptions of the teachers at South Elementary may align well with the other schools in this study. Again, South Elementary is near equal on their beliefs of what should ideally be a trait of formal teacher leadership and the reality they perceive.

#### South Elementary Collaboration/Diversification

Questions one and two of the electronic survey contained question items intended to offer an increased awareness of teachers' perceptions concerning the importance and reality of a teacher leader's collaboration with colleagues and their ability to work in a diverse environment (Table 8).



Table 8

*South Collaboration/Diversification*

	Ideal	Reality	Difference	
Builds trust and rapport with peers	4.74	4.05	0.69	13.80%
Works collaboratively with peers	4.79	4.21	0.58	11.60%
Understands how to guide colleagues in improving instruction	4.42	3.87	0.55	11.00%
Promotes colleagues professional growth	4.14	3.82	0.32	6.40%

Item 2 of survey questions one and two addressed teacher leaders' abilities to *build trust and rapport with peers*. Responding teachers rated this item ideal 4.74, aligning well with the 4.73 mean for all schools. Question 2, which addressed the reality perceived, received a rating of 4.05 for South Elementary with 4.2 for all schools. Tabulation of these ratings revealed a 13.8% difference, suggesting trust and rapport are less than efficient in this school. Relationships are built on trust and rapport; a weakness in this area can be directly linked to weaknesses in all areas of teacher leadership. Teacher leaders cannot promote learning amongst their peers or affect school wide learning without acceptance of those with who they work (Duke, 2004; Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001; Liebermann, Saxl, & Miles 1988).

Following suit, item 16, *works collaboratively with peers*, and item 17, *understands how to guide colleagues in instruction*; both reveal differences that correlate with the overall study. Teachers responding to their beliefs of the importance of the reality of working collaboratively with peers rated this as ideal 4.79, in turn, the reality of

this item was rated as a 4.21, suggesting a 1.6% difference between the all school mean and South Elementary. The reality perceived by teachers at South translates to an 11.6% discrepancy between ideal and reality. Also *understands how to guide colleagues in improving instruction* received a rating of 11% discrepancy. Working collaboratively with peers in improving instruction and all areas of teaching is directly juxtaposed with building trust and rapport. Without collaboration, fulfillment of most teacher leader roles cannot be realized. Despite the fact that the mean is within 1.8% of the overall study's mean, this rating suggested there exists a need for attention in this area.

#### South Elementary Continuous Improvement/Self Organization

When schools are broken down into the simplest of models, the end-result of student achievement lies with teachers. Teachers are at the core of student achievement (DuFour & Eaker, 1998; Lieberman & Walker, 2007; Muchmore, Cooley, Marx, & Crowell, 2004). Consequently, the study's design included 12 items dedicated to eliciting responses, which are reflective of teachers' abilities and skills concerning professional development of self and others (Table 9).

Table 9

#### *South Continuous Improvement/Self Organization*

	Ideal	Reality	Difference	
Engages in peer coaching	4.1	3.47	0.65	13.00%
Works collaboratively with peers	4.8	4.21	0.58	11.60%
Is organized and flexible	4.5	3.89	0.58	11.60%
Is a strong communicator	4.5	3.92	0.57	11.40%

Models professional growth	4.4	3.87	0.55	11.00%
Understands how to guide colleagues in improving instruction	4.4	3.87	0.55	11.00%
Participates in formal professional organizations	3.9	3.46	0.44	8.80%
Is able to take on extra responsibilities	4.2	3.87	0.36	7.20%
Promotes colleagues professional growth	4.1	3.82	0.32	6.40%
Is politically involved with issues concerning education at all levels	3.3	3	0.3	6.00%
Develops and leads professional development programs	3.8	3.54	0.3	6.00%
Leads school wide Learning Communities	3.8	3.57	0.24	4.80%

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Items 13, *engages in peer coaching*, 14, *models professional growth*, 17, *understands how to guide colleagues in professional growth*, and 25, *is a strong communicator*, were all rated as discrepancies in teachers' perceptions of what the ideal teacher leader should be versus their perceived reality. All but item 25, *the teacher leader being seen as a strong communicator*, held rating discrepancies greater than the average of the data set. Teachers rated teacher leaders' involvement in peer coaching as having a discrepancy of 13% compared to 10.4% for all schools averaged. Related to this, item 17, which refers to teacher leaders' abilities to understand how to guide colleagues in professional growth, received a rate of importance of 11%, which is lower than the overall mean difference of 12.8%. Collaboration, peer coaching, communication, the foundations of working together as peers, all share a difference greater than 10%, identifying these areas as less than positive.

As teachers are the cornerstones of education, their ability to be effective is cited throughout much of the school improvement literature as dependent on ongoing professional growth. Teacher leaders are seen as being the strongest liaisons in delivering professional development as well as influencing colleagues' personal growth (Hickey & Harris, 2005; Lord & Miller, 2000; Pugalee, Frykholm & Shaka, 2001). They also play an important part in collaboration and mentoring which are directly related to professional development (Ackerman & Mackenzie, 2006; Beatty, 1999; Conley & Muncey, 1999; Mayo, 2002; Riordin & da Costa, 1998; Rogers, 2006). Teachers rated the modeling of this growth, item 14, as being ideal for a teacher leader 4.42, and the reality of the modeling being 3.47. This 13% difference is greater than the 10.2% difference of all schools, yet keeps within close alignment with the study. Adjacent in theory to the idea of modeling, is teacher leaders' abilities to be strong communicators. South Elementary reported an 11.4% difference as compared to the all school mean of 12.8%; again, the difference is not grand, yet the school is in closer alignment between what is believed to be ideal versus reality than are the other schools in this area. Teacher leaders are viewed as being the crux of influencing other teachers in an effort to better prepare them to move student learning forward.

#### North Elementary Questions One and Two

Specific data from North Elementary concurs with the overall data when comparing categories to those that have the highest amounts of discrepancy. North Elementary teachers reported a difference of ratings greater than 10% for twenty-one of twenty-five items, with the remaining four rated between 5% and 10%. All items report a higher difference as compared to the overall study.

Among the categories which stand out as having the greatest differences, Awareness/Instructional Proficiency, Collaboration/Diversification, and Continuous Improvement/Self Organization are included as is the case of the overall data.

North Elementary Awareness/Instructional Proficiency

The first two questions of the survey utilized six items intended to better understand teachers' perceptions of the level of awareness and instructional proficiency required and demonstrated by teacher leaders (Table 10).

Table 10

*North Awareness/Instructional Proficiency*

	Ideal	Reality	Difference	
Holds a strong understanding of their role as a leader	4.69	3.67	1.02	20.40%
Understands how to interpret and use data concerning student abilities	4.67	3.79	0.88	17.60%
Has excellent teaching skills	4.69	3.83	0.86	17.20%
Understands how to enhance school wide student learning	4.47	3.76	0.71	14.20%
Has a clearly developed personal philosophy of education	4.56	3.91	0.65	13.00%
Views themselves as positive role models	4.72	4.14	0.58	11.60%

Advancing in terms of differences, survey item 19 [teacher leader] *holds a strong understanding of their role as a leader* revealed a discrepancy of 20.4% as compared to the combined schools average survey result of 12.8%. This nearly doubled percentage of difference suggested that the perceptions of the teachers at North Elementary are skewed from their ideal beliefs, and do not align well with the other schools in this study. If teacher leaders at this school do not understand their role, and/or if teachers do not perceive them as being competent in their understandings, the teacher leaders may not earn the respect of their peers that is needed to enable them as leaders. The term leadership denotes both leader and follower, such a great disconnect in beliefs suggested teachers may not be supportive of their teacher leaders' efforts to move school improvement forward.

Items 9, *understands how to interpret and use data concerning student abilities*, and 10, *understands how to enhance school wide student learning*, which were rated as having differences of 17.6% and 14.2% as compared to 11.4% and 11% of all schools, suggested a large discrepancy between teacher's beliefs and perceived reality exists at North Elementary, as well as compared to other schools in the study. Both of these items averaged a rating of 7.5% concerning the perception of reality in the school. This perception coupled with a great discrepancy in the idea that a teacher leader *has excellent teaching skills*, rated at a difference of 17.2% between ideal and reality compared to the combined schools mean of 10.8%, reflects a low level of faith in the school's teacher leaders. School improvement relies on teacher leadership.

Formal teacher leadership is embedded in the school improvement movement, with the ultimate goal of enhancing student learning (Ackerman & Mackenzie, 2006; Barth, 2001; Silva, Gimbert, & Nolan, 2000; Muijs & Harris, 2007).

As was the case for teacher leaders understanding their roles as leaders, teacher leaders will not be able to move teacher and overall school learning forward without the support of their peers. North Elementary teachers reported that a teacher leader should have a *clearly developed personal philosophy of education* 4.56 or 91.2% ideal and 3.91 or 78.2% reality rate of importance, and *view themselves as positive role models* 4.72 or 94.4% ideal and 4.14 or 82.8% reality rate of importance. Survey results of 13% and 11.6% discrepancy demonstrate that a great disconnect exists. As is the case for all items in this area, if teacher leaders' peers do not believe in and support them, they cannot reach their full potential in the service of advancing school improvement models.

The data collected in the survey cannot predict why teachers rated the items in this area as low as they did. It does suggest that these areas require specific attention at the school level, as these areas are major components of school culture and school improvement efforts. Distinct differences also exist between the overall data set and North Elementary. These differences suggest perceptions between what should be and what is perceived as reality are not well aligned. Item 21[teacher leader] *has taught more than 3 years* received ratings which equated to a 10.8% difference versus 5.4% rate of importance of all schools combined, and item 22- [a teacher leader] *has a clearly developed personal philosophy of education* rated a difference of 13% compared to the all schools combined average of 8.2% rate of importance. Such differences beg the question of better understanding what these teachers believe constitute the responsibilities

and skills included in the items. It is noted that the school has recently undergone a change of administration, but the current ratings suggest a vast disconnect between beliefs and perceived reality regarding teacher leaders.

#### North Elementary Collaboration/Diversification

Four items written into questions one and two of the electronic survey were designed to better understand teachers' perceptions of the importance and reality of a teacher leader's work concerning collaborating with colleagues and their ability to work in a diverse environment (Table 11). As was the case with the entire data set, three items stood out as being different, as determined by a discrepancy rating greater than 10%, with one identified item being similar to the combined mean.

Table 11

#### *North Collaboration/Diversification*

	Ideally	Reality	Difference	
Builds trust and rapport with peers	4.81	4	0.81	16.20%
Promotes colleagues professional growth	4.31	3.83	0.48	9.60%
Works collaboratively with peers	4.64	3.84	0.8	16.00%
Understands how to guide colleagues in improving instruction	4.5	3.49	1.01	20.20%

Item 2 addressed teacher leaders' abilities to *build trust and rapport with peers*. Responding teachers rated this item as maintaining a difference of 16.2% between their perceptions of ideal and reality at North Elementary as compared to 12.6% discrepancy mean for all schools combined. Building trust and rapport with peers, as questioned in



item 2, is a natural part of item 3, *confronting and challenging status quo in a school's culture*. This item received a 9.2% rating of importance for the overall schools mean, but was identified by teachers at North Elementary as having a rating difference of 13.4%.

Keeping pace with the previous differences, item 16, *works collaboratively with peers*, and item 17, *understands how to guide colleagues in instruction*, both reveal discrepancies that correlate with the overall study. Teachers responding to their beliefs of the importance of the reality of working collaboratively with peers rated this item as having a difference of 16%, suggesting a 6% difference between the complete set and North Elementary. Working collaboratively with peers appears to be an area that warrants greater concern for North Elementary. Following suit, the 20.2% discrepancy between ideal and reality concerning teacher leaders' understandings of how to guide colleagues in improving instruction, suggested attention is required in this area. This rating is 9.4% greater than the all school mean. Common themes amongst many responses suggest pessimism in this area. Compared to analysis of other items in this study, a theme of teachers rating roles of collaboration, which command a thought of formality, such as guiding others, peer coaching, and mentoring, appear to shed a more negative connotation in responses.

#### North Elementary Continuous Improvement/Self Organization

Teachers interact directly with students on a daily basis. The strategies and skills a teacher brings to the classroom determine, in large part, student achievement. As a result, a considerable portion of the survey, 10 items, dedicated to probing responses reflective of teachers' abilities and skills concerning professional development of self and others was included (Table 12).

Table 12

*North Continuous Improvement/Self Organization*

	Ideal	Reality	Difference	
Understands how to guide colleagues in improving instruction	4.5	3.49	1.01	20.20%
Is a strong communicator	4.61	3.61	1	20.00%
Is organized and flexible	4.53	3.77	0.76	15.20%
Engages in peer coaching	4.19	3.48	0.71	14.20%
Models professional growth	4.58	3.94	0.64	12.80%
Is able to take on extra responsibilities	4.39	3.76	0.63	12.60%
Participates in formal professional organizations	4.06	3.48	0.58	11.60%
Is politically involved with issues concerning education at all levels	3.6	3.06	0.54	10.80%
Develops and leads professional development programs	4.03	3.66	0.37	7.40%
Leads school wide Learning Communities	3.94	3.61	0.33	6.60%

Teachers are the very foundation of education; they control the instruction being delivered in the classroom. Their ability to be effective and keep up with changing times is heavily influenced through continued professional growth. Teacher leaders have always been a primary source behind professional development (Dil, 2001; Hickey & Harris, 2005; Lieberman & Miller, 2005). At North Elementary, *teacher leaders' abilities to understand how to guide colleagues in professional growth* does not reflect the magnitude present in the literature nor did the three schools' combined mean.

A discrepancy of 20.2% appeared in North's ratings, which is significantly higher than the all school mean overall difference of 12.8% in this area.

Following closely is the discrepancy of North's teacher leaders *being strong communicators*, which described a 20% discrepancy. This difference in the ideal belief and perceived reality of communication within North Elementary is not surprising. Many elements of the discussed categories contain notable discrepancies between rating differences. These areas each have an underlying component of communication.

*Engages in peer coaching*, and *models professional growth*, share similar ratings. Inherent in each are also ratings that show a discrepancy. Teachers rated teacher leaders' involvement in peer coaching as having a discrepancy of 14.2% compared to 10.4% for the all school mean. These ratings suggest a consistent theme of disjunction between teachers and teacher leaders at North Elementary concerning collaborative interactions of all types.

Item 6, [teacher leaders] *participates in formal professional organizations*, rated a difference of 11.6% compared to 7% for all schools combined and item 7, *is politically involved with issues concerning education at all levels*, rated a difference of 10.8% as compared to the all schools mean score of 5%. Both of these items are very similar in scope not only based on the value of the differences, but also based on their ideal ratings. Broader analyses of responses reveal that these two areas do not appear to be as important an area for formal teacher leaders at North Elementary as compared to most other areas.

Teacher leaders' ability to influence teachers to become the best they can be at delivering student instruction, translating into enhanced student learning, as well as influencing all school factors affecting student learning, has repeatedly been identified as a foundational part of teacher leadership in this research as well as the greater body of literature (Barth, 2001; Beatty, 1999; Conley & Muncey, 1989; Crowther, Kaagan, Ferguson, & Hann, 2002; Hickey & Harris, 2005; Kochran & Reed, 2005; Rosenholtz, 1989; York, Barr, & Duke, 2004) . North Elementary has repeatedly demonstrated large discrepancies between ideal and reality. These disconnects speak directly to a teacher leadership base that is perceived as being weakest of the three schools comparatively.

#### Central Elementary Questions One and Two

Central Elementary reported ratings with differences between ideal and reality being smaller than the all schools mean in all areas. A noteworthy observation, which emanated from the data, shows Category 4, Continuous Improvement/Self Organization, as holding the highest amount of discrepancies when comparing South Elementary and North Elementary. Yet in this same area Central reported the highest amount of ratings where the perception of the reality was rated higher than the ideal belief.

#### Central Elementary Awareness/Instructional Proficiency

Teachers' perceptions of the level of awareness and instructional proficiency required and demonstrated by teacher leaders received ratings, which translated to less than 5% discrepancy in four of six areas (Table 13).

Table 13

*Central Awareness/Instructional Proficiency*

	Ideal	Reality	Difference	
Understands how to interpret and use data concerning student abilities	4.81	4.51	0.3	6.00%
Views themselves as positive role models	4.81	4.51	0.3	6.00%
Understands how to enhance school wide student learning	4.65	4.41	0.24	4.80%
Holds a strong understanding of their role as a leader	4.81	4.57	0.24	4.80%
Has excellent teaching skills	4.79	4.59	0.2	4.00%
Has a clearly developed personal philosophy of education	4.59	4.46	0.13	2.60%

The highest discrepancy of this section, *understands how to interpret and use data concerning student abilities*, received an all schools combined average of 11.4% rate of importance. Central Elementary rated the discrepancy as being 6%, demonstrating the differences of perceptions between Central, North, and South Elementary. Teacher leaders *viewing themselves as positive role models* held the second highest discrepancy rating, which again was 6%. These ratings suggest that Central Elementary is closely aligned in perceptions of ideal and perceived reality on these items.

Teachers reported that teacher leaders' abilities to *understand how to enhance school wide student learning* was important by rating this item as 4.81 or 93%. When compared to their reality rating, a 4.8% discrepancy was identified. This item was rated as having a difference of 11% in the combined school analysis. Similarly [a teacher leader] *has excellent teaching skills*, was rated as being closely aligned with a 4%

discrepancy between Central Elementary teachers' perception of ideal and reality as compared to the combined school rate of importance mean of 10.8%. Not only were both of these items rated as having differences lower than that of the overall mean, they both had differences greater than 50% lower than the overall mean. Again, Central Elementary was near equal on their beliefs of what should ideally be an attribute of robust formal teacher leadership and the reality they perceive in their school.

#### Central Elementary Collaboration/Diversification

This category demonstrates more diversity in ratings than did the first (Central Awareness/Instructional Proficiency). This section recognizes two items being greater than 5% discrepancy, which remains closer in alignment than the all schools average. (Table 14).

Table 14

#### *Central Collaboration/Diversification*

	Ideal	Reality	Difference	
Builds trust and rapport with peers	4.95	4.57	0.38	7.60%
Understands how to guide colleagues in improving instruction	4.63	4.32	0.31	6.20%
Works collaboratively with peers	4.79	4.6	0.19	3.80%
Promotes colleagues professional growth	4.37	4.39	-0	-0.40%

Central Elementary's largest discrepancy in this area addresses teacher leaders' abilities to *build trust and rapport with peers*. Responding teachers rated this item as being extremely important in the ideal formal teacher leader role, 4.95 out of 5, or 99% rate of importance as compared to a 4.73 or 94.6% mean for all schools combined. *Works collaboratively with peers*, and *understands how to guide colleagues in instruction* are both very similar in context. Central Elementary reported a small discrepancy rating of 3.8% concerning teacher leaders' working collaboratively with peers, and a discrepancy of 6.2% concerning teacher leaders' roles in guiding colleagues in instruction. These three items all share a relatively low discrepancy rate compared to the all school mean. Promoting colleagues' professional growth rated as being a strong positive; teachers rated this area stronger in reality than ideally.

#### Central Elementary Continuous Improvement/Self Organization

Analysis of category 4, Continuous Improvement/Self Organization data, revealed that Central Elementary's average rating differences were lower than the all schools mean. Areas such as participating in formal professional organizations, developing and leading professional development programs, and leading their school in learning communities all received ratings of perceived reality being higher than reported ideal characteristics of formal teacher leadership roles (Table 15). The reported ratings as compared to North Elementary and South Elementary's reported ratings suggest the ideal role of teacher leadership aligns much closer to the perceptions of the reality of teacher leadership at Central as reported by Central Elementary's teachers.

Table 15

*Central Continuous Improvement/Self Organization*

	Ideal	Reality	Difference	
Understands how to guide colleagues in improving instruction	4.63	4.32	0.31	6.20%
Is a strong communicator	4.75	4.45	0.3	6.00%
Models professional growth	4.68	4.43	0.25	5.00%
Is organized and flexible	4.52	4.33	0.19	3.80%
Is able to take on extra responsibilities	4.5	4.33	0.17	3.40%
Engages in peer coaching	4.11	4.05	0.06	1.20%
Is politically involved with issues concerning education at all levels	3.51	3.54	-0.03	-0.60%
Leads school wide Learning Communities	3.87	3.9	-0.03	-0.60%
Develops and leads professional development programs	3.89	4.15	-0.26	-5.20%

Central Elementary consistently rated the reality of their teacher leaders as being closely aligned to their ideal beliefs. This section is no different. The greatest discrepancy is that of *understanding how to guide colleagues in improving instruction*, closely followed by *modeling professional growth*. These areas represent a 6% and 5% discrepancy respectively, which compared to the other schools in the study, is at a low level. The areas that follow, *is a strong communicator*, *is organized and flexible*, *is able to take on extra responsibilities*, *engages in peer coaching*, *is politically involved with issues concerning education at all levels*, *leads school wide Learning Communities*, and



*develops and leads professional development programs*, all demonstrated closer alignment as the numbers grew smaller. Three items in this area, *is politically involved with issues concerning education at all levels*, *leads school wide Learning Communities*, and *develops and leads professional development programs*, were marked as having negative values. These values denoted ratings higher as perceived reality than believed ideal.

### Summary of All Schools Survey Questions One and Two

Comparative analysis of South Elementary, Central Elementary, and North Elementary Schools' ideal ratings mean, reveals that not all three schools were similar. The fact that South Elementary aligned well to the overall mean, Central Elementary exceeded the mean rating in all areas, and North Elementary showed a difference of alignment between ideal beliefs and perceived reality which was the greatest of the three schools, demonstrated inherent differences within these schools.

Such inherent difference does not imply one school is better than another in anyway. The implication this data suggested is that each school has a different level of understanding and expectation of what teacher leadership should look like in each school. There exist multiple meanings, or available meanings, that are neither right nor wrong, but perceived. Prior experiences and knowledge, past and present leadership practices, relationships, power plays, and micropolitics in general, may all contribute to the forming of beliefs and perceptions.

## Phase Two - Teacher Leader Self Assessment Survey Data

Nominated teacher leaders identified as formal teacher leaders via their affiliation to the Leadership, Professional Development, or Response to Intervention teams were invited to complete the Teacher Leader Self Assessment survey. Analysis of coded survey data revealed that formal teacher leaders' beliefs did not align closely with the overall perceived reality ratings. In all cases, formal teacher leaders rated themselves higher than the reality ratings of their peers at their schools (Table 16).

Table 16

*Teacher Leader Self Assessment Survey*

	South Teacher Leaders	South Teachers	Central Teacher Leaders	Central Teachers	North Teacher Leaders	North Teachers	All Teacher Leaders	All Teachers
Category 1 Awareness/ Instructional Proficiency	95%	81%	94%	90%	90%	77%	93%	79%
Category 3 Collaboration/ Diversification	95%	80%	95%	89%	86%	76%	92%	80%
Category 4 Continuous Improvement/ Self Organization	90%	74%	90%	83%	85%	72%	88%	78%

Analysis of the teacher leader data suggested that the teacher leaders themselves differ in contrast to each other. In all cases, teacher leaders appeared to have stronger beliefs of alignment to their responsibilities concerning their leadership roles than that of their peers at their schools. Overall, all categories identify a 10% to 14% mean difference between teacher leaders' beliefs and the teachers they work with at their schools.

Teacher leaders reported greater awareness of their role as a teacher leader than was perceived by all teachers. This difference supports the idea that the formal role of teacher leadership was not well defined and many teachers were not aware of the responsibilities of the role. The definition of teacher leadership is fluid, and multi-meaning (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001). This flux may explain why teacher leaders have a greater belief of their strengths in fulfilling their roles than do their peers.

### Phase One – Part Two

#### Electronic Survey Questions Three and Four All Schools

Questions one and two of the electronic survey were designed to gain an understanding of how teachers perceived teacher leadership in their schools in a comprehensive manner. In a broader sense, this research also sought to solicit teacher leaders' beliefs concerning their overall benefit to the school. Therefore, question three of the survey prompted teachers to offer their ideal belief of the benefits formal teacher leaders bring to a school. This question asked teachers to identify all areas that they believed represented the benefits a school may receive due to teacher leadership involvement. Question four shared the same design, with the difference being the solicitation of teachers' perceptions of the reality present in their schools. Questions three and four of the electronic survey were tabulated to yield the mean of each question as well as the difference of the two, reflecting the discrepancy of the ideal perception versus the perceived reality of the benefits teacher leaders bring to a school (Table 17). A range of 115-146 teachers chose to respond with the mean used for calculation.

Table 17

*Benefit of Teacher Leaders in School (Difference vs. Reality ratings)**Formal teacher leaders can benefit a school by ...*

	South	Central	North	Three School Mean	Response Total
Contributing to the building of a culture that supports increased student learning	11.3%	13.1%	30.6%	18.3%	133
Developing and interpreting curricular goals as set by district and state policies	27.3%	79.0%	11.1%	15.4%	104
Bolstering school improvement efforts	18.1%	27.0%	22.2%	14.3%	114
Increasing collaboration among staff	25.0%	6.6%	30.6%	20.7%	133
Representing teachers in school wide decision making	40.9%	4.0%	25.0%	23.3%	124
Supporting all teachers through coaching and Instructional skill enhancement	31.8%	13.2%	41.7%	28.9%	116
Being positive role models and demonstrating expert practices	15.9%	13.1%	13.3%	20.8%	132

Teacher leaders' *contribution to the building of a culture that supports increased student learning* rated a mean of 15.4% (between ideal and reality) with *bolstering school*

*improvement efforts* rating a 14.3%. These ratings align well when compared to the survey ratings because items pertaining to collaboration scored similar.

Teacher leaders' responsibilities as *being positive role models and demonstrating expert practices* received rating differences that were consistent between South and Central Elementary, with North Elementary being significantly higher. Yet, *supporting all teachers through coaching and instructional skill enhancement* received significantly higher ratings from South Elementary when compared to Central Elementary, aligning closer to North Elementary. This difference may be a result of modeling practices and coaching being viewed by teachers as two different levels. Teachers may prefer teacher leaders work as peers, not coaches, avoiding a possible understood difference in hierarchical status.

*Representing teachers in school wide decision making* was rated as having a difference of 23.3% between ideal and perceived reality. This rating was unforeseen based upon higher scores concerning leadership in other areas of the survey. Upon further analysis it was determined that two low scores contributed to the high difference; North Elementary 25% and South Elementary 41%. North Elementary has consistently held higher differences in rating between ideal and reality perceptions, but this score was uncharacteristic for South Elementary. This suggested that teachers at South Elementary may feel there exists a large disconnect concerning teacher leaders being part of the decision making process. Such a belief may stem from what is apparent as well as a lack of communication and or understanding of their school's teacher leader participation.

### Survey Question Five

The objective of this study was to explore teachers' and teacher leaders' perceptions of the role of teacher leader. Exploring teachers' perceptions is important because perception is not only different for each person; it is the foundation of peoples' beliefs, supports, and in part, their actions. The particular instrumentation and protocol used in this study were chosen in an attempt to gain a greater understanding of how teachers and teacher leaders perceive the formal role of teacher leadership, both ideally and in reality at their schools, and as an approach to initiate a thought process in individuals. This intention of inducing a process of thought concerning teacher leadership was anticipated to act as a transition, as a way of invoking personal reflection to be leading to the second and third phases of the study. In the closing stages of the study, teachers were asked to offer their input (Table 18), in a broad sense concerning the guiding questions, which were:

What do teachers perceive the responsibilities of formal teacher leadership should be and what constitutes the actual practice of teacher leadership by their colleagues in these roles?

What do individual teachers engaged in formal leadership roles believe their responsibilities and practice of the position should be and what do they believe to be their reality?

Therefore, teachers were asked to choose one of the following responses, which would closest relate to their beliefs pertaining to the following statement -If teachers did not participate in formal leadership roles at my school...

Table 18

*If teacher leaders did not participate*

	South	Central	North	Mean
The school would experience great improvement, student achievement would increase	0.0%	0.0%	2.8%	0.9%
The school would remain unchanged, student achievement would be unaffected	0.0%	1.6%	13.9%	5.2%
The school would experience moderate changes, student achievement would fluxuate	20.5%	14.3%	19.4%	18.1%
The school would suffer, student achievement would lower	75.0%	82.5%	61.1%	72.9%

*N=139*

The one hundred thirty-nine teachers who responded to this question responded greatest to the idea that the school would suffer, and student achievement would be reduced. A significantly smaller amount stated that the school would experience moderate changes and student achievement would fluxuate. Although the intensity of these two statements differ, both support the idea that teachers believe that teacher leadership is important. Interestingly, 13.9% of North's teachers reported that student achievement would remain unaffected as compared to 0 and 1.6% ratings of importance from South and Central. Throughout the study, many of North's scores have shown ratings of support of teacher leadership to be lower than the other two schools, and discrepancies to be greater. This rating suggested that there may be a small group of

teachers who have little or no faith in their school's identified teacher leaders' ability to influence school improvement efforts.

#### Survey Question Six

All participants of this study, teachers and teacher leaders, were asked an open-ended question regarding their interactions with teacher leaders at their school. This query was included as an extra measure in understanding teacher perceptions of formal teacher leadership. The question did not distinguish between formal and informal interactions as a means to determine if respondents' understandings of such classification aligned with the study's design.

Table 19

#### *Interactions with teacher leaders*

	South	Central	North	Mean
Collaboration	68%	46%	38%	60%
Coaching	3%	0	0	1%
Communication	5%	15%	10%	11%
Leadership	5%	15%	38%	16%
Mentor	16%	21%	10%	17%
Modeling	5%	0	0	2%
Professional Development	16%	17%	48%	23%
N=	37	52	21	110



Teachers rated collaboration among the highest process of interaction present between themselves and teacher leaders. This area represents communication, mentoring, and professional development in regards to the respondents' form of narrative. Most respondents reporting interactions of communication, mentoring, and professional development used terms relating to the sharing of the work, and collaborating with teacher leaders in these areas. Modeling and coaching were reported in a very formal sense. Teachers viewed these acts as rigid roles more than interactions between colleagues. The level of response ratings did not match those reported in questions one and two. Fewer teachers responded to this question than did the initial set. Possibly, the teachers identifying themselves as being more positive completed a greater amount of the survey, which could explain the higher ratings. A second possibility may be that teachers viewed the preconceived questions in a different manner than the responses they offered as an open-ended response.

#### Survey Question Seven

Survey question six was directed toward soliciting responses from teachers regarding their interactions with teacher leaders, survey question seven asked teachers to cite their actions in the role of teacher leadership. This study asked all participants to respond to an open-ended question regarding their beliefs of their own actions within teacher leadership roles at their school. Each participant was asked to respond to the following question: *Do you participate in formal or informal teacher leadership? If so please explain.* This query was included as both a stimulus to teachers in preparation for asking them to nominate persons they perceived as teacher leaders and as an additional gauge in gaining greater insight into teacher leaders' perceptions of teacher leadership.

The question's design allowed for both formal and informal citations as interpretation was left open by the participants.

Table 20

*Teacher leadership participation*

	South	Central	North	Mean
Collaboration	0	2%	0	1%
Coaching	3%	0	0	1%
Communication	6%	2%	0	3%
Leadership	34%	25%	30%	32%
Mentor	9%	2%	6%	6%
Modeling	13%	4%	0	7%
Professional Development	13%	13%	35%	18%
Formal Identification	3%	4%	12%	5%
Informal Identification	16%	19%	24%	21%
No participation in Formal/Informal	25%	40%	6%	32%
N=	32	48	17	87

Eighty-seven teachers responded to the query, with eighteen teachers reporting they have acted in the role of informal teacher leader. Four teachers identified themselves as participating as formal teacher leaders, and twenty-seven teachers responded no involvement in informal or formal teacher leadership roles. Interestingly, twenty-eight teachers identified themselves as participating on their school's leadership team and

sixteen as being involved with developing professional development opportunities, both of which are defined by this study as being a formal teacher leader role if associated with a specific committee charged with such action. Only four teachers identified themselves as being formal teacher leaders. The number of teachers reporting involvement in leadership roles is consistent with nominations. The low number of teachers self identifying themselves as formal teacher leaders cannot substantiate a claim due to the fact that many teachers did not respond, yet it begs the question of teachers understanding the term formal in formal teacher leadership, or perhaps choosing not to identify themselves in a manner that may seem above their peers in title. Missing from this analysis is a large portion of all teachers who participated in the survey. This study cannot speak for those who did not report, and an understanding of their experiences might alter the current outstanding themes.

Teachers who self identified their roles in their schools as being part of the teacher leader position rated leadership responsibilities among the highest responsibility of their function. Following was professional development, modeling, communication, and mentoring, all of which have formal leadership connotations. Most respondents did not report interactions of collaboration.

#### Question Nine

In an effort to allow teachers an opportunity to share responses concerning teacher leadership that is significant to their schools, an open-ended question was included which stated; *Please feel free to add any comments you would like based on this questionnaire.* A total of twenty-six responses were received, with fourteen or 54% pertaining directly to the context of this study. The comments in line with the study spoke of teacher leaders

being a supportive part of the schools; one comment states, “[School] has survived and thrived all these years because of the wonderful teacher leadership we have here.”

Another from this same school stated, “I think that we have some very effective teacher leaders here at...” Supporting this assertion one comment affirmed, “Teachers leaders are very important to our school and also in representing their fellow teachers.”

Other comments referred to formal teacher leadership roles as controlled by administrators, exclusive, and often made up of persons who did not represent the best choices. The following statements support this idea; “The teacher leaders at [school] are appointed by the administration. They attend the leadership meetings. It is my observation that they write down what is told to them by the administration, discuss it somewhat, and then tell the rest of us on their team. I do not see them as Leaders in any sense of the word. I do not see them discussing educational ideas; direction [school] is going, etc. They seem to be bogged down with the daily workings of the school.”

Comments that supported teacher leaders as both necessary for school improvement, as well as being learners themselves were shared: “We need teacher leaders at [school]. The teachers who are now in leadership positions aren't there because they know everything. They are also teacher learners. They are there because they want to see improvements for everyone at all levels and they are willing to do the work.” Following up with the idea of leading and learning, the comment, “Often, we forget that being the wisest isn't always being the best at sharing wisdom. Most of the time we do really well, but on occasion we forget that all ideas are worth contemplation and that some ideas, no matter how old or simple, will continue to promote student learning,” ties in collaboration as a component of teacher leadership and school improvement.

Teachers also responded with comments geared toward teacher leadership in general, “Teacher leaders can be effective or disastrous. I believe it is of the utmost importance to place qualified, enthusiastic individuals in these positions. If one were to place an unmotivated teacher in this position it would be detrimental. This is obvious, but needs to be stated.” “Being an effective leader in a school MUST be done for the success of the students and fellow teachers, not the recognition.” Others cited recommendations pertaining to teacher leadership roles; “I believe that a program that would be dedicated to helping teachers, who help other teachers, would greatly improve school performance!” and “I feel that teacher leaders should have a minimum of 5 years teaching and should have a POSITIVE, sensitive personality as well as be a good communicator to the grade level” were included.

### Phase Three - Interviews

Teacher leader nominees identified as being members of the Leadership, Professional Development, or Response to Intervention teams, received the Teacher Leader Self Assessment surveys. Thirty-five of the forty-six teachers invited (80%) completed and returned the survey to the researcher. Twenty-nine of the thirty-five (83%) responding teachers responded positively to the idea of possible invitation to participate in the interview portion of the study. From those who responded positively, three teachers from each school were sent an invitation to continue participating in the study, for a total of nine teachers. Teacher selection was based on the completed Teacher Leader Self Assessment surveys and selection was determined by the highest self reported scores of these surveys. Each section of the survey was tabulated per author’s

instructions. Teachers who self reported the highest scores were invited to participate in the interview phase of the study. All nine invited teacher leaders agreed to participate.

The partially structured interview approach (Peterson, 2000; Rubin & Rubin, 1995) allowed conversation to occur where the participant was prompted to discuss his perceptions of his role as a formal teacher leader. Based on Van Manen's (2002) theory that two people engaged in an experiential conversation must reflectively orient themselves to the common ground, which brings the significance of the question into view, the interviews were built from opening questions designed to share background information of both interviewer and interviewee. The tone was set as one of broad solicitation of information, and led up to more direct solicitation.

Categories reflective of the information shared by individual teacher leaders emanated through data reduction inductive analysis and data display (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Interview transcripts were reviewed and coded independently by the researcher and five colleagues who are all knowledgeable in the areas of leadership and teacher leadership. Through extensive inductive analysis and collaborative dialogue, the final product yielded four categories containing items viewed as being both positive and negative.

Analysis of the transcripts determined that of all the themes that emanated from the interviews, some were that of individuals only, and others shared. The responses of the teacher leaders reflect their perceptions concerning what they personally believed should be ideal in their role, and what they perceived as being the reality of their function. The following categories as taken from Gabriel's (2005) book, *How To Thrive*

As A Teacher Leader, contain the coded themes determined through the data reduction process.

1. Interpersonal Communications
2. Instructional Leadership
3. Motivational Leadership
4. Adaptive Leadership

Within these categories, twenty-seven themes were identified and assigned. Each occurrence of the interviewee speaking of a theme was recorded as pertaining to their perception of the theme being an ideal part of their role as a teacher leader and or the reality they experienced. Table 21 demonstrates the instances each theme was referred to by the nine teacher leaders who participated in the interview process.

Table 21

*Teacher Leader Beliefs*

Category	Identified Theme	Ideally	Reality
Interpersonal Communications	Formal Communications	3	2
	Mediator	1	1
	Organizing Events	2	2
Instructional Leadership	Collaboration	4	3
	Committee Membership	3	6
	Mentor	2	3
	Peer Coaching	4	3
	Professional Development	6	6
	Progressive Thinkers	3	2
	Researcher	1	2
	Student Achievement	7	8

Motivational Leadership	Acknowledgement	3	1
	Community	2	1
	Culture/Climate	6	6
	Expected Volunteer	0	2
	Greater Amount of Responsibility	0	4
	Participate in School Wide Decision Making	3	2
	Relationship Builders	4	4
Adaptive Leadership	Above and Beyond Work Ethic	4	4
	Accept Greater Responsibility	2	2
	Competent	3	2
	Decision Makers	5	3
	Dedicated	2	2
	Intrinsically Motivated	5	5
	Rigor/Relevance	1	1
	Role Model	4	4
Trail Blazers	3	2	

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Interpersonal Communications contains several areas of communication that were referred to as both an expectation and a reality for teacher leaders. Teacher leaders spoke of their roles as being associated with the dissemination of information, acting as liaisons between the administration and the greater population of teachers in both formal and informal roles as being both an ideal expectation as well as reality of their position. Communication was referred to by one teacher leader as being "...the pipeline." This term was explained as "You have certain people you go to so that you're not overwhelming the principal." A teacher leader who was fulfilling the role of grade level chair expressed the idea of the liaison being herself based on her role, "We have one lead person to go to...helps everything flow better." The idea of communication was further supported through statements such as "[Teacher leaders] go to meetings and bring back



information” and “[Teacher leaders] relate information to others.” Communication is not limited by sharing information, teacher leaders referred to other areas as well.

Communicating with colleagues as a responsibility of teacher leaders was seen by one teacher as including the role of mediator as both an ideal function and reality of her role. This teacher leader spoke first of being a communication liaison, “... take back any information our principal gives us to our team”. Secondly, and more in depth, she spoke of her role in handling “any conflicts [my team] has with each other”. She stated, “They come to me and I take it to the other teacher ... or we sit down together and handle it.” Unlike other teacher leaders interviewed, this teacher leader spoke extensively of working with teachers in helping them through their differences as being a strong component of her role.

Organization of events was seen as reality of a teacher leaders’ role by two teacher leaders. Primarily, the events referred to were school functions that involved the community. One teacher leader spoke of his roles in various events as both an expectation and a responsibility. He stated “at least half our [leadership] team will be there [event].” He continued by framing his involvement as an inclusive effort, “the leadership team will look forward to it [event]” demonstrating support and collaboration within his team which was cited by several teacher leaders.

The idea of communication being a strong part of the role of teacher leadership has been identified throughout the study in both the literature review (Danielson, 2006; Donahoe, 1993; Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001; Pearman, 1998; Senge, 1990; Strodl, 1992; York-Barr & Duke, 2004), and the survey results. As table 21 identified a low number of respondents referring to communication in the interviews, the participants who

responded as interacting with teacher leaders and acting in the role of teacher leader was also low. Responding participants reported an 11% rate of interacting with teacher leaders (table 19), and a 3% rate as participating in the role of a teacher leader (table 20). These numbers align with the low number of teachers including reference to this area as identified in table 21. This discrepancy may support differences in most others areas, for without clear lines of communication, each person is left to their own interpretation which may inherently vary greatly.

The area containing much of the professional development themes was identified by the data reduction team as Instructional Leadership. Foremost in this category is student achievement with seven teacher leaders referring to their role in helping others enhance student achievement as being ideal, with eight of nine teacher leaders citing it as a reality within their roles. Professional development, with six of nine teacher leaders referring to it as both an ideal element of the role, and a reality of their function, ties directly to student achievement. The subsequent themes all pertain to the professional development opportunities cited as being present in the schools.

Professional development was recognized by six teacher leaders, all of whom believe they were appropriately fulfilling their duties in this area. Teacher leaders identified a strong part of their role as facilitating adult learning activities; at one school the teacher leader referred to an innovative model for their school that is emerging. He talked about facilitating the learning more so than delivering it, “We have teachers teaching teachers ... carousel learning sessions during professional learning days.” Professional development was cited as exploring teaching strategies, leading book studies, and managing professional development teams. One teacher leader spoke of her

challenge in this role as being the reality of “getting to know the adult learner”. As a teacher leader she felt leading others in professional development was both ideal and reality. Empowering other teachers to take stronger roles and create new committees and learning opportunities was cited as the overall focus of her work in this area.

The statement made by a teacher leader, “teachers [leaders] are leaders of different committees, and ... professional learning teams”, summarizes the ideal area of professional development. Many teacher leaders referring to professional development stated that their reality included being part of a professional development team based on their role as teacher leader, or eluded to the idea that they were seen as a teacher leader based on their participation. In the same context, another teacher leader stated in an interview, “...those [teachers leading/on committees] are usually seen as the teacher leaders”. This reality did not stand as strong for other teacher leaders; one in particular stated, “We got hit really hard this year, because we had the furlough days. So we really haven't been able to do what that committee should fully be doing” when referring to her involvement in professional development. Thus her reality did not meet her perception of an ideal situation.

A contribution to committees, which was a part of the selection criteria of each participant at this stage, was referred to as playing a more inherent part than that of an ideal situation. Only three teachers referred to their work on committees as being an ideal part of the formal teacher leader role, yet six spoke of the committees as being a strong part of their reality. Student achievement, the foremost purpose of teacher leadership, was identified by eight of the nine teachers interviewed as being a result of their work as a formal teacher leader.

The idea of teacher leaders being progressive thinkers, collaborating to formulate strategies aimed toward enhanced student learning as well as teacher leaders being researchers, searching for information to support others and student learning, was prominent in the interviews. Risk taking, in an effort to benefit student learning was exemplified in this area, “Education is always changing all the time, so there are new strategies, new technology... if you're a risk taker and a teacher leader, the benefits go directly to the students.” This teacher leader continued to talk about collaborating with peers in an effort to consistently update instructional strategies to make learning relevant to the current world. Despite the fact that these areas did not receive direct references as being ideal, they were inherent in much of the information conveyed.

Areas such as collaboration and coaching were identified by less than half the respondents as being ideal or a reality in their schools. It was however a positive topic for some, a teacher leader stated, “I think that you need to have people collaborating in order to make it work, and I think teacher leaders play a big role in the picture of collaboration and making it happen.” Another teacher leader stated, “I think collaboration is huge, especially on our grade level. I see it make such a big difference in the way everybody on our team teaches because we do collaborate so well, and that comes from teachers who are willing to say let's collaborate, let's make it work.” This teacher leader specified collaboration within her grade level; she did not include collaborative work within her school. Such isolation to a particular grade level or team may explain in part why collaboration and coaching were not cited often by the teacher leaders interviewed.

This area also experienced fewer references in the survey section concerning involvement as an informal/formal teacher leader. As this area was recognized by

teachers as being an ideal part of the teacher leader role, collaborative 95% and peer coaching 83%, it only received 44% recognition by teacher leaders for both areas. A plausible reasoning may be that teacher leaders focus more on the task to be accomplished than the actual act of collaboration with their peers, “I know you always have to talk about dirty work, but I wish we had more of those conversations about how can we better student learning, how to make the school a collaborative school, happily build relationships with each other” This is not to say collaboration is not considered a major part of their role; an analysis of data suggested that it is seen as an inherent part, not an individual act. Collaboration is a key component in all areas reported by teacher leaders as being the reality of the role.

Mentoring and peer coaching were cited by teacher leaders as being a part of both their reality and perception of an ideal design. The term “coach” was not as prominent in the dialogue as were the actions associated with coaching. While one teacher leader stated the term directly, “a teacher leader is somebody who feels comfortable having people come into their classroom and observe, somebody who feels comfortable going into other people's classrooms and observing, may be coaching, or co-teaching or helping out”. Other teacher leaders referred to peer coaching as “having a conversation with somebody”, stating that the term “coaching is kind of a buzzword right now”. This indirect approach is supported through the statement “I help others find their way instructionally”, which avoids any hierarchical connotations. Mentoring was described in all cases as being associated with new teachers. Teacher leaders felt they had a specific role in guiding new teachers in a pronounced mentor role, without reference to any teachers who were not new to teaching or new to their schools.

These areas of teacher leadership have been supported in the literature as being instrumental to the role of formal teacher leadership (Ackerman & Mackenzie, 2006; Fullan, 2001; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005; Mujis & Harris, 2007; Ryan, 1999; Silva, Yendol, & Nolan, 2000; Swanson, 2000). The teacher leader self-reported actions in this area suggest teacher reported ratings aligned with the literature. Teacher leaders' beliefs of their responsibilities in the area of instructional leadership appear to match the greater body of knowledge, hence being on track with school improvement efforts.

Motivational Leadership encompasses themes coded as being and offering acknowledgement, helping build a strong culture, and increasing positive aspects of the school climate.

Themes taken from transcripts suggest teacher leaders' reality consist of increased responsibilities, building relationships, and participating in school wide decision making, which underlies this category.

School climate/culture was strongly referred to by a majority of teacher leaders (67%) as being both a reality associated with their roles, and an ideal part of their roles. This area has been supported in the literature as being a strong part of teacher leadership (Barth, 2001; Donaldson, 2006; Fiore, 2004; Ross & Gray, 2006). North elementary, who on average reported the greatest deficits throughout the study, reported a 30.6% agreement rating concerning the idea that teacher leaders can benefit a school's climate in promoting student achievement (table 17), which aligns well with similar themes in instructional leadership which received high scores (table 23). When asked what would happen if teacher leadership was not a part of their school, one teacher leader responded: "You'd see a huge loss in what South Elementary is. South Elementary is a family

orientated building. ...the culture is more family oriented than a school institution. So if you took out teacher leadership ... without those particular teacher leaders, you wouldn't have a South Elementary. ... go from having a warm cozy building to a cold institution.” This idea is followed up by another teacher leader statement, “...if there is a cold culture in the building, forget it. There is no learning,” which exemplified this teacher leader’s perception of the power of culture. Teacher leaders who conveyed the importance of their role in culture building, referred to the idea that culture was extremely important in maintaining a positive environment.

As part of the culture, acknowledgement of the role of teacher leader and relationship building were seen as ideally important parts of teacher leadership. Recognition of teacher leadership and teacher leaders’ personal skills were also reported as being important. One teacher leader stated that awareness of teacher leaders’ skills and specialties increased the amount of help the respective teacher leaders could offer to their peers, as he stated, “We have a taste of people being recognized, and people going to those teachers”, others referred to the idea that formal certification and recognition at school, district, and state level, should be a reality of their role. Such recognition would create a stronger identity for teacher leaders, increasing the teachers’ awareness of who they may depend on for certain needs while supporting the perceived ideal and experienced reality of teacher leaders’ responsibilities within their schools.

Being acknowledged as competent was to two teacher leaders a reality that placed them in their roles. “Administrators will see that strength in you, then they'll place you in a role. Then, if you do a decent job and step up to the plate, you do okay ...you will have

the opportunity to be granted additional responsibilities.” When conversing about how they became a teacher leader, another stated, “They based it on your background and what training you had.”

Teacher leaders referred to particular personal traits of teacher leaders as being a necessary part of their role, as well as identifying their own traits, which they felt, supported them in their function. Having a work ethic of going above and beyond, a willingness and ability to accept an increased work load, dedication, intrinsic motivation, and competence in teaching students and adults, as well as decision making, were all cited.

Competence is an area that was stronger in the teacher survey than the teacher leader sections. Competence was also viewed as an ideally important trait by teacher leaders, as one teacher leader stated, “teacher leaders in a way help guide situations.” Another stated, “There are a lot of people who know delivery systems, but they don't know what to put in. To think that when you have teachers who recognize how to do both of those things, along with the classroom management piece you have effective lessons that target the standards.” While one third of the teacher leaders referred to the need to be competent, a greater number confirmed the reality of peer coaching and professional development of which instructional competence is a foundation. This area also presumes competence as a prerequisite of being a teacher leader.

As reported throughout the interviews, some teacher leaders believed they are in their positions as teacher leaders based on their proven competence. Many teacher leaders referred to their work as being central to assuming a lead responsibility in their school. The reality of such work was cited as holding stronger merit in recent times than in the



past. “[In the past] a lot of the teacher leadership seemed to be the staff that was there the longest”. This teacher leader continued to describe current teacher leaders as those who are “willing to bite off a next chunk and try something new, strong teachers who aren't afraid to try something. They're risk takers and can help the people that fall behind.” These sentiments reflect the collaboration, professional development, and innovation cited throughout many interviews. The idea of accepting greater responsibility was also pronounced as a shared concept, “We are all responsible for taking part in stepping back and looking at it in ways that we could have done different and done things better.”

Leading as an ability to guide others was voiced as a necessary trait, “I think that to make collaboration happen you need to be able to share, to step up to the plate and share your ideas and be willing to listen to other people's opinions and be okay with them being different than yours, and finding middle ground.” Another teacher leader acknowledged this idea by saying, “At our school right now an aspect ... is being developed where the teachers are open to receiving the strategies, where it's not just a teacher leader saying hey, you gotta do this, but saying hey, this is something you can try, you can think about, and the teachers are open to that.”

These teacher leaders embodied the idea of collaboration as one where a leader could accept diversity and differences of opinions.

Decision making was an area that was revealed as being ideal by five of nine, or 56% of the teacher leaders interviewed, yet paled in reality (3/9 or 33%). One teacher leader who did acknowledge this as a reality in their school stated, “We are always involved”, another reflected, “benefits of teacher leaders also bring just better instruction to students, better decisions being made.” Responsibilities of a teacher leader was said to

include decision making on behalf of one's team, "definitely helping lead your team, helping the principal and decision-making where she feels that it's appropriate to get views from all the grade levels and representing your teachers".

All reported themes have been identified in the teacher leadership literature as being important to both teacher leadership and school improvement, the underlying focus of such leadership. Yet many of these areas did not receive the full attention of the teachers interviewed. Through analyzing all facets of the teacher leadership self reported beliefs and behaviors, it is suggested that many of the teacher leaders did not fail to report such interactions and responsibilities as identified in table 21, but that these formal teacher leaders were focusing their energies in certain areas at the time of data collection for many different reasons individual to each leader. Areas such as committee membership, professional development, culture/climate building, and student achievement were all reported as common themes for most formal teacher leaders. These specific areas of their roles shared a commonality of being fueled by intrinsic motivation for most.

Areas that are referred to in the literature as being significant, yet received little acknowledgement, included sense of community, areas of communication, curricular input involving rigor and relevance – bolstering student achievement, innovation, competence, and school wide decision making. The lack of responses addressing these areas suggested that the formal teacher leader participants in this study may not be envisioning the big picture, they appear to be focused on a limited amount of areas, which address student achievement. Should they open their understandings to encompass

the afore mentioned areas, greater school improvement may become a reality for schools respectively.

### Summary

School stability as reported by the Georgia Department of Education guided the selection of schools for this study. This selection process was designed to identify three schools that were similar in their perceived stability. Despite this alignment, analysis of this study's data demonstrated that distinct differences between teachers' perceptions of what the responsibilities of formal teacher leadership should be and what constitutes the actual practice of teacher leadership by their colleagues in these roles exists not only amongst schools, but also between teachers and teacher leaders. This study's findings suggest that teachers engaging in formal leadership roles may hold beliefs of their responsibilities and practice that differ from the perceived reality of the greater teacher population. The reasons for this difference are multi-faceted, and based on perception, which is the underlying theme of this research. No study can fully explain perceptions because it is always changing and different for each individual, but the data suggested some generalizations.

Overall, analysis of the data supports the idea that the term teacher leader is fluid and contextual. Traits reported throughout this study support this idea. Likewise, many authors have also described the term using different words and ideas, but all are synonymous with the idea that the term teacher leader refers to a leadership role, influence of leaders over followers (Anderson, 2004). This singular proposal of simply defining teacher leadership holds inherent issues of its own. Through the lens of micropolitics, the use of power, cooperation, support, and ultimately the perceptions of

individuals (Blase, 1991), which is at the heart of leadership, distinct differences in beliefs of leadership characteristics are pronounced.

Analyses of all data, surveys and interviews, demonstrated that a stronger presence of collaboration is desired by teachers, and an understanding of a more formal position, which may support a chain of command design, is better understood by teacher leaders. Teachers consistently referred to communication and collaboration, working as peers, as key in all areas. When interviewed, teacher leaders spoke more of formal responsibilities, roles of supporting administrative areas as well as peers, acting as conduit or liaisons.

A formal teacher leader, who is fulfilling an intentional role, often in addition to his role as a teacher, does stand out as being different judged against the general population.

Barth (2001) states that relationships among teachers and principals have an impact on student learning that is equivalent to no other factor. When teachers and leaders work together toward the common goal of increased student achievement, student learning is improved. When teachers meet in teams, or work collaboratively with others in less formal settings, the uniqueness of the inherent differences in the understandings of all individuals creates an exclusive panel. Together, working on committees to enhance school improvement efforts, these teachers form an echelon. Yet, analysis of the data of this study suggested true collaboration is not equally as strong in the three participating schools. Schools demonstrating a greater perception of collaboration as measured through survey data, report a closer alignment to a unified effort to improve student learning in a multitude of ways. The open-end comment section solicited teachers to offer responses concerning teacher leadership that they may have felt were not sufficiently voiced

through rating survey questions. Some spoke of teacher leaders being a supportive part of the school, others referred to formal teacher leadership roles as controlled by administrators, exclusive, and often made up of persons who did not represent the best choices. Still others stated that teacher leaders were so bogged down in alleviating pressures from administrators, that they were not working with their colleagues, rather completing administrative tasks that did not directly influence school improvement efforts via teachers or students. Again, micropolitics, influencing colleagues and peers, along with a difference in perceptions may contribute to this thought pattern.

Despite inherent differences in perceptions of teacher leaders' responsibilities and their actual practice, teachers agreed that teacher leadership is a strong part of school improvement efforts as measured through the survey ratings. The electronic survey data as a whole yielded an 87% ideal mean for all items, and a 78% mean for reality. These ratings suggest that teachers believe that the components of teacher leadership listed within the survey, align well with their ideal beliefs. The reality ratings also speak to the idea that the reality of such teacher leadership has not reached its perceived potential within the schools surveyed.

Themes that have emanated from this research include the idea that many teachers participate in teacher leadership roles, whether informal or formal. An attempt to disaggregate formal positions and solicit perceptions and beliefs of the teacher leaders fulfilling these roles may invite strong personal biases. This study's results suggest many teachers may prefer to work at a level where they feel equal to their peers, not one where their colleagues may have a professional relationship that place them closer to administrators or allows them access to more information.

Many teachers who fulfill the roles of formal teacher leader tend to focus their responses toward their formal roles/responsibilities. When asked to explain, they include the underlying foundations of collaboration and communication as an inherent part, with less distinction than the sample as a whole. And finally, the definition which supports this research as given by Katzenmeyer and Moller (2001), “Teachers who are leaders lead within and beyond the classroom, identify with and contribute to a community of teacher learners and leaders, and influence others toward improved educational practice” (5), is open to personal interpretation as are supporting allusions cited by Durant and Frost (2003), Leithwood and Riehl (2003), Pugalee, Frykholm, and Shaka (2001), and York-Barr and Duke (2004), all who state that teacher leaders influence school improvement efforts designed to increase student achievement. Silva, Gimbert, and Nolan (2000) sum up these thoughts by describing teacher leadership as “sliding the doors open” (2) and influencing other teachers’ practices of instruction concerning increasing student achievement through collaboration and discussion.

The study of teacher leadership is a study of relationships and interactions as they are lived and conceptualized. Such a study is the aspiration of understanding another’s consciousness, which is the only access people have to their world (Van Manen, 1990). In essence, the analysis of this research data resounds that of a clearly understood and acceptable description of the participants experiences concerning teacher leadership and school improvement efforts in their schools, which will vary among each individual (Van Manen, 1990).

## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to explore teachers' and teacher leaders' perceptions of the role of formal teacher leadership. The research cited in this study supports the idea that such an understanding may offer a more plausible insight into the world of teacher leadership. This study was motivated by the researcher's interest in teacher leadership as an integral part of school improvement efforts.

The art and science of education has become increasingly complicated and has resulted in changes in organizational structure, thus recognizing an increased amount of teacher leadership roles (Donaldson, 2006; Fullan, 2006). As demonstrated through the results of data analysis in this study, identification of perceptions concerning teacher leadership is as complicated as the multifaceted influences, which make up the frameworks of schools themselves.

What teachers believe to be reality dictates many of their actions and efforts, directly relating to their interactions with teacher leaders, thus effecting school improvement efforts (Herzberg, 2006). The design of the research instrumentation and protocol used in this study reflected an attempt to gain a greater understanding of how teachers and teacher leaders perceive the formal role of teacher leadership both ideally and in reality at their schools. The questions that guided this study were:

1. What do teachers perceive the responsibilities of formal teacher leadership should be and what constitutes the actual practice of teacher leadership by their colleagues in these roles?
2. What do individual teachers engaged in formal leadership roles believe their responsibilities and practice of the position should be and what do they believe to be their reality?

Heavily influencing the research paradigm, which guided this study, was the theory of micropolitics: the use of power, cooperation, support, and ultimately the perceptions of individuals working together (Blase, 1991). Schools are complex organizations, made up of factors and relationships that connect individuals through formal and informal networks, as well as individual and team interactions. Schools are open systems, influenced by both internal and external demands. Schools are collections of interacting parts, grade levels, departments, and hierarchical levels. Inherent to each of these interacting parts is a need for leaders to create teamwork and trust (Kouzes & Posner, 2002). Within these systems, the actions of each part, team, or individual, affect many others. These micro political relations influence how teacher leaders are identified, developed, supported, and sustained. Thus, acknowledged must be the inherent complexity of micropolitics to meet the need for school change leading to increased student learning.

Qualitative methodology with phenomenological elements, which produces rich, thick, personal data (Willis, 2007) was chosen as the best method for this research. The qualitative design allowed for exploration of teachers' and teacher leaders' perceptions of



teacher leadership in their schools. The added aspect of phenomenological elements created a lens through which the researcher was able to achieve a stronger understanding of teacher leaders' beliefs and interpretations of their roles.

To assist in understanding individual experiences, a constructivist approach was included within the qualitative framework. Constructivism allows the researcher to better understand the creation of a meaningful reality (Crotty, 2006). The theory of constructivism suggests meaning is not inherent in objects; the individual knower constructs meaning based on experiences and present knowledge, such as teacher leadership perceptions.

The study's participants were teachers from a North Georgia school district. Three schools, which were identified as being operational for five or more years, as well as yielding the highest scores for their respective geographical location per the Georgia Department of Education equity reports, were invited to participate in this study. One hundred fifty five teachers participated in the initial survey, with the numbers of participants decreasing as the study narrowed in phases two and three based on the criteria of needing to be identified as a formal teacher leader in order to continue participation in the study.

The data collection techniques employed in this study included an electronic survey administered to all teachers who chose to participate, a self-rated survey which was completed by peer nominated teacher leaders who met the criteria of specific committee membership identifying them as being formal teacher leaders, and interviews with formal teacher leaders. Triangulation of this data supported the selection of interview nominees as well as emerging themes discussed in chapter four, and continued

throughout this chapter. In an effort to support the validity of the data, interviewees were asked to review the transcripts of their interviews for accuracy. A panel of the researcher's colleagues who have expertise and knowledge in the areas of leadership and teacher leadership worked with the researcher to identify and categorize key themes associated with this research's purpose. The data, as well as the researcher's interpretations of the data, underwent data reduction and validation measures (Miles & Huberman, 1994) in an effort to reduce researcher bias as much as possible prior to reporting the information.

Analysis of this study's data demonstrated that distinct differences exist between teachers' and teacher leaders' perceptions of what the responsibilities of formal teacher leadership should be and what they perceive the actual practice to be in their schools. This study's findings suggest that teachers who are engaged in formal leadership roles may hold beliefs of their responsibilities and practice that differ from the beliefs of the greater teacher population.

Analysis of the data suggests many teachers desire a stronger presence of collaboration. The analysis also suggests that teacher leaders may better understand an understanding of a formally recognized position, supported by a chain of command design, than is understood by their teacher colleagues. Throughout the study, teachers consistently referred to communication and collaboration, as well as working with teacher leaders as peers, as being of key importance in all areas. Contrary to this, when interviewed, teacher leaders often spoke of formal responsibilities such as supporting administrative efforts and guiding peers, as well as acting as a conduit or liaison between teachers and administrators, as being a heavy focus of their role.

The study of teacher leadership is important to school improvement efforts. Barth (2001) states that relationships among teachers have an impact on student learning that is equivalent to no other factor. When teachers and teacher leaders work together toward the common goal of increased student achievement, student learning is improved. When teachers meet in teams, or work collaboratively with others in less formal settings, the uniqueness of the inherent differences in the understandings of all individuals creates an exclusive panel. Together, working on committees to enhance school improvement efforts, these teachers form an echelon (DuFour & Eaker, 1998). Yet, varied from participating schools are the relationships that should bring teachers together.

Despite inherent differences in perceptions of teacher leaders' responsibilities and their actual practice, teachers agreed that teacher leadership is a strong part of school improvement efforts as measured through the survey ratings. The ideal survey ratings suggest that teachers believe the components of teacher leadership listed within the survey align well with their ideal beliefs. The reality ratings also speak to the idea that the reality of such teacher leadership has not reached its perceived desirable potential within the schools surveyed.

Themes that have emanated from this research include the idea that many teachers participate in teacher leadership roles, whether informal or formal. This study's results suggest many teachers may prefer to work at a level where they feel equal to their peers, not one where their colleagues may have a professional relationship that placed them closer to administrators or allows them access to more information.

## Interpretations

The survey results indicated support for teacher leadership in the participating schools was present with varied levels of understandings. Collaboration, inferred power relations, and existent/non-existent shared understandings of the roles of formal teacher leaders were major underlying themes within the research results. Power is a strong factor in human relationships. The data suggests that formal teacher leaders are granted a certain level of authority, power, in the course of their assigned role. Teacher leaders do not necessarily receive influential power, which is bestowed to leaders through follower to leader relationships as a form of support and respect. The literature supports the idea teacher leaders earn this power within their roles, through their work with both their students and their colleagues (Danielson, 2006). In this sense, teacher leadership may be seen as a behavior more so than a position (Mujis & Harris, 2007; Strodl, 1992). The survey data, comments, and interviews suggest many teachers may also view teacher leadership as both a behavior and a position.

Teachers from the study's participant schools nominated a pool of teacher leaders equal to sixty-two percent of all teacher participants. Filtering of committee involvement reduced this number to nearly forty-one percent. Perhaps such a high nomination rate, fifty percent greater than actual participant pool used as based on the study's identification criteria, shows a high level of respect for teachers who are seen as demonstrating teacher leadership skills by their colleagues.

The term formal teacher leader was used in the inquiry. By segregating formal teacher leaders from informal teacher leaders, individual participants formulated perceptions of whom and what constituted this position based on personal understanding.

As a direct result of participant perceptions, 62% of all teachers at the three school sites received nomination as a formal teacher leader. The perceptions held by each individual varied inherently, based on their understandings of the term as well as personal experiences (Krathwohl, 2004; Van Manen, 1990).

Teachers and teacher leaders held differing perceptions of the ideal enactment and the reality of the formal teacher leader role. The literature and data support the concept that formal teacher leaders are charged with more responsibilities than that of their colleagues who are not involved in formal teacher leadership. A large part of this responsibility is concerned with influencing colleagues' instruction in an effort to bolster school improvement efforts. The ability to influence one's environment or another person can be intrinsically motivating for an individual (Deci, La Guardia, Moller, Scheiner, & Ryan, 2006). Yet, it can also be a source of discontent for those who are at the receiving end of this influence. Exercising such agency is dependent on the social context, the culture of the school, the school wide understanding of the roles of teacher leaders and why these individuals were selected. Ryan and Deci (2000a) argue that human beings can be proactive and engaged or alternatively passive and alienated, largely as a function of the social conditions in which they develop and function. In schools, each factor contributes to teacher leadership roles in some form of influence.

## Conclusions

In this section, shared are assertions based on the researcher's interpretation of the data. School culture can make a difference in increasing teacher autonomy and job satisfaction (Beatty, 1999). Schools, that harbor an environment of teacher leadership, often share an understanding of the schools' mission and vision, fostering autonomy and promoting closer consensus of understanding regarding teacher leaders and their contributions. Schools, that support shared understanding, appear to harbor greater support for collaboration and community (DuFour & Eaker, 1998). Therefore, the complimenting theory suggests schools that reported greater disconnects of beliefs concerning teacher leadership are believed to have greater disconnects in their cultures as supported in the analyses of this study's data. Collaboration, as well as cultural disconnects, may be directly attributed to differing perceptions of the role of formal teacher leadership. Schools, which practice greater collaboration, may also share greater communication and understanding of teacher leadership roles. Schools, which demonstrate greater disconnects, may harbor greater differences in understandings.

In this study, it appears that North Elementary teachers gave the impression that they may lack a collaborative environment. North Elementary teachers reported greater differences between the ideal situation and reality of a collaborative environment than were reported at Central Elementary or South Elementary. Such differences may be attributed to a shift in school culture, reality of new administration, or lack of shared vision and understanding as demonstrated through the disconnects identified in the data analysis. Interestingly, both North and Central underwent changes in administration the same year as this study's implementation, yet Central Elementary remained the most-

connective and supportive of teacher leadership, as interpreted through their ratings, which represented the lowest discrepancy rates. Fiore (2004) asserts that it takes three to five years to change a school's culture. Thus, the cultures attributed to Central's greater alignment as compared to North's greater disconnect may be a result of cultures existent from past administrations, and not representative of present shifts and changes.

When looking at changes in administration and school culture, Fiore (2004) suggests changing a school's culture can take three to five years. Central Elementary data suggests the culture of the school can extend itself beyond administrators; teacher leaders and teachers can maintain culture through their collaborative work. This conclusion goes against the format of the Race to the Top as well as the No Child Left Behind legislation philosophies. Race to the Top's design suggests school culture, which directly affects school improvement efforts, can undergo a quick change when introducing a financial incentive. No Child Left Behind's design suggests changing school culture, which drives school improvement, transpires through punitive measures by introducing new leadership and faculty to struggling schools. Based on the first assertion of this study, school culture and school improvement are directly tied to teacher collaboration and existing school culture, including teacher and teacher leader relationships. Therefore, positive and or negative incentives are not a quick fix answer to enhancing school improvement efforts; what has to develop is a continued long-term focus on formal teacher leadership improvement.

The second assertion of this study is that a sense of collaboration amongst a school's staff is a key element in all school improvement efforts. The structures of schools' physical plants and curricular designs, speak to the isolation many teachers

experience through most of their work (Rogers, 2006; Silva, Gimbert, & Nolan, 2000). Without mentoring and collaboration, many teachers would leave the field long before they were ready to take on teacher leadership roles (Smylie, Conley, & Marks, 2002). Johnson and Birkeland's (2003) study of new teacher's perceptions remind us that support and collaboration are necessary for beginning teachers, many simply trying to survive, as well as for experienced teachers. Many teacher leaders interviewed saw mentoring as a strong component of their role as a teacher leader.

Teachers and teacher leaders rated the area of collaboration as being highly important. The mean rating of the complete set of questions referring to collaboration as being an ideal part of formal teacher leadership was 91.8%. With the exception of one teacher leader, every teacher leader interviewed spoke of collaboration. These teacher leaders referred to ideas and examples of collaborating with colleagues in planning, professional development, mentoring, participation within professional learning committees, and instructional design. Teacher leaders from Central Elementary, whose ratings showed their perceptions aligned closest to their reality when comparing the three schools, spoke of collaboration being the strongest explanation of student success. The stronger the understanding of the role and benefits of teacher leadership an educator has, the closer the two can work together toward increased student learning. Central Elementary also cited teachers practicing collaboration in efforts to assist students and their families with basic survival needs. All references to the act of collaboration supported both school culture and student achievement.

Teacher leaders at North and South Elementary Schools made the strongest references to mentoring as being essential to both teachers' and students' successes. As



teachers work with mentors and collaborate with each other, collaborative relationships develop, resulting in enhancement of student success. Murphy, Manning, and Walberg (2002) suggest that stronger connections form when educational leaders design collaborative experiences to include the learning of specific knowledge concerning while learning together. Formal teacher leaders are instrumental in designing and leading their colleagues' professional development, this collaborative work bolsters school improvement efforts.

The recognized low presence of training and professional development designed to support teacher leaders is the third assertion of this study. One of nine teacher leaders responded that they had formal training concerning teacher leadership skill sets. One teacher stated teachers, which included some formal teacher leaders who serve as mentors, have recently received district training in mentoring, but most "...kind of like just jump in the water and learn how to swim." Another teacher leader stated that training was not offered and that administrators based selection for the role in part on "...what training you may have had." The importance of training is not completely overlooked however; one teacher leader reported, "they are looking at doing that [teacher leader training] next year."

Organizations such as the Georgia Leadership Institute for School Improvement and the Teacher Leadership Exploratory Consortium have established frameworks for teacher leadership roles. In Georgia, both public and private universities offer courses leading to an endorsement in the field of teacher leadership, yet only one teacher in this study responded to receiving formal training. Vesta school district itself does not recognize a formal teacher leadership framework nor do they imply a single model,

which must be observed in its elementary schools. Vesta's current reality is that teacher leadership development and implementation occurs differently in each school respective to the school's needs.

Assertion four suggests that when teacher leaders charged with the role of formal teacher leadership do not understand the expectations of the role, fellow teachers' perceptions of the role of teacher leadership as a whole, may suffer. As stated by a participating teacher, "Teacher leaders can be effective or disastrous." The data describing North Elementary's perception of the reality of their school's teacher leadership base highlights this contention. The discrepancy ratings at North were as high as 20% in the areas concerned with teacher leaders understanding their roles.

Respondents reported such understandings as being important in both the ratings and responses. Responses such as "I believe it is of the utmost importance to place qualified, enthusiastic individuals in these positions" and "Being an effective leader in a school MUST be done for the success of the students and fellow teachers..." support the contention of teacher leaders' need to comprehend their role. Krisko (2004) asserts that teacher leaders are professionals who hold a clear understanding of their purpose, professionally and personally, and have a true love for education. Yet, many teachers' perceptions as reported in the data suggest this is not always the case. When failure of teacher leaders to enact in a professional manner due to any combination of reasons occurs, the perceptions of those who do not share an understanding of the school's model for teacher leadership may also suffer.

Many comments written by responding teachers included notions of support for teacher leaders. Yet responses on the surveys also reported beliefs referring to teacher

leaders not fulfilling roles as expected by these individuals. Comments included the idea that teacher leaders may not demonstrate qualities deemed worthy, do not always collaborate, and may act in a manner as if they were better than others who are not in the teacher leader role. Participants reported teacher leaders as possibly bogged down with administrative duties, which remove them from school improvement efforts and reported as possibly identify with cliques. Analysis and interpretation of the data suggests these perceptions may represent a lack of understanding of formal teacher leader duties as well as a lack of experience by the citing individuals.

The final assertion is that personal identities may be threatened when one's peers appear to hold greater responsibilities. Comparison of data representing perceptions of peer coaching versus understanding how to guide colleagues in improving instruction and developing professional learning opportunities, suggest semantics may play a part in cultural disconnect. The term coaching may be understood as the teacher leader holding more responsibility and power in the relationship, versus the words guiding and developing which may lend more to the idea of collaborating as peers, with an absence or less pronounced sense of hierarchy. Personal identity results from teachers' daily interactions with students and colleagues. Personal perceptions and cultural experiences also contribute to the development of personal identity. Teachers' professional identities are often based on their main responsibility of educating students; they are not administrators. Barth (1991) suggests teachers thrive on the opportunity to expand their role within their school by collaborating with and influencing their colleagues outside their classrooms, but such expansion may create a perceived uneven balance by some.

The very term “leadership” denotes a power base and hierarchical structure. Ultimately one leads and one follows; the degree of separation of the two being the determining factor.

### Limitations

Motivation is simply whatever prompts people to act as they do (Leithwood & Beatty, 2008). As implied throughout this study, human motivation, prompted by perception, is hard to formalize. Therefore, the respondents’ choices reflect their personal perceptions at the time they completed the study, which may have differed from their internalized beliefs.

Completion of this study occurred at a time of uncertainty and negativity within the education field. Economical restraints across the nation have prompted educational budget cuts, which have manifested themselves in a multitude of ways in schools. Many teachers have received reduced salaries as well as larger numbers of students in their classrooms. Along with these changes, diminishing positions with increasing responsibilities have become a reality for many. Recently, some monetary incentives designed to reward advancement of teachers’ education have been withdrawn via state legislation. Due to budgetary restraints, the Georgia State legislators chose to eliminate monetary compensation made to teachers with proven teaching and leadership abilities via National Board Certification. As a result, teachers’ trust has also been compromised. These issues and more contributed to the further demoralizing of the climate of education during the time of data collection for this research. Such trying political and economical times may have influenced teachers’ responses in an undeterminable amount of ways.

Limiting this study to three schools, and the recognized teacher leaders selected for this study by affiliation to three committees, excluded a possible population of teacher leaders who may operate in different areas. Within the three schools studied, several teachers identified themselves as informal teacher leaders and numerous nominations recognized teacher leaders who were not members of the identifying committees. These limitations allowed for a small percentage of the districts' schools to be involved. Thus, the study is limited to a partial representation of teacher leaders' perceptions within the district. A larger sample size, which included interviews with teachers as well as teacher leaders, may have allowed for more themes and greater understanding.

The minimal narrative form of response solicited from teachers may have limited the understandings of respondents, as well as the depth of responses. The design of the research followed selection of pre-determined traits, because a narrative form was thought to yield less information overall. Although perception is best represented by the respective individual, people tend to write less than they will say (Krathwohl, 2004). The survey design was selected in an effort to reach a greater number of individuals. In accepting this design, it was understood that the depth and clarity inherent in individual interviews would not be available for the teacher subgroup as a whole. The design of soliciting responses electronically also negated the researcher's ability to gain a deeper understanding of each individual teacher's perception. This was due to the inability to probe and measure based on participants' emotional responses as well as possible nuances that may have presented themselves in a personal setting (Peterson, 2000).

Accepting the premise that each person's perceptions will differ from others it was not possible to obtain a response derived from a uniform understanding. Each

participant decided if the questions were sensitive enough to warrant a guarded response (Pryor, 2004). In an effort to reduce any existing apprehension, each participant received a guarantee of anonymity and confidentiality upfront via verbal and or written communication.

The same school district, which employed the researcher, also employed the participants of this study. This commonality of affiliation held a potential limitation based on the idea that participants may not have been as open with responses. All participants were informed their identity would be kept anonymous in the study. Participants were also informed they would have the opportunity to review their transcripts as a form of member check. These measures were in place in part to alleviate hesitance to be completely honest in interviews, but the fact that teachers were talking with an insider from their district could not be completely controlled.

The researcher himself is employed by Vesta School District and has participated numerous times in the role of informal/formal teacher leader. These acts have occurred at various places and times. Such involvement creates a bias of personal understanding. The researcher had an inherent perception of what he believed the role of the teacher leader is, what they do, and what the role should be. This bias may have affected the interview process and reporting of the derived understanding. The researcher entered the research with the understanding that potential for bias existed throughout the process and took steps to avoid possible bias. The researcher entered each interview with an open mind and kept good journal notes, employed data triangulation, worked with a team of colleagues to analyze data, and identified data through a coding process that did not reveal specific names of participants.

Many factors shape and encourage perceptions of teacher leadership. There is an excess of possibilities when considering organizational as well as personal dynamics. Each person's understandings are a result of past and present beliefs, directly resulting from personal experiences. Therefore, this study is limited to the representation of the researcher and his colleagues who assisted in the interpretation of the data as well as the personal understandings of the reader.

The first is the realization that the focus of this study, discovering the perceptions of teachers and teacher leaders' concerning the ideal formal role of teacher leadership compared to the reality they believe to be in their schools, should take into account a larger pool of participants than is possible for this study. Restricting the interviews to three teachers at each of three schools, limits the database used to create the rich narrative and limits the ability to see the whole picture of this phenomenon because it intertwines with so many other issues in the complexity of the school setting. It is also difficult to identify teacher leaders, as the definition is fluid and allows for a great deal of subjectivity. Therefore, true to the qualitative design of this study, the results can only speak to the perceived understandings of the participants (Krathwohl, 2004). The results are not generalizable to the population of teacher leaders as a whole, but can inform future work with teacher leaders.

### Recommendations

Teacher leadership is a vital part of many schools and has a focus of working with teachers in an effort to advance school improvement. Teacher leadership is supported in the literature as being a cornerstone in school improvement efforts (Frost & Durant,

2003; Hickey & Harris, 2005; Leithwood and Riehl, 2003; Lord & Miller, 2000; Mayo, 2002; Surrana & Moss, 2002; Silva, Gimbert, and Nolan, 2000; Smylie, 1995; York-Barr & Duke 2004). As supported in the teacher leadership research, teacher leadership enhances student achievement (DuFour & Eaker, 1998; Lieberman & Walker, 2007; Muchmore, Cooley, Marx, & Crowell, 2004), which translates to increased student achievement, and school improvement. School improvement is not only bolstered by teacher leadership, it is also seen as being dependent on teacher leadership (Barth, 2001; Crowther, Kaagan, Ferguson, & Hann, 2002; Kochran & Reed, 2005; Smylie, Conley, & Marks, 2002).

Recommendations from this study are made with regard to teachers, teacher leaders, school administrators, and policy makers at the school systems level. They are also intended to inform designers and instructors of university teacher and administrator preparation programs and educational support agencies, as well as policy makers at the state legislative level. The teacher participants in this study offered their perceptions, which are reality for them, and disconnects between what is believed to be ideal and reality are a result of both personal experiences and understandings which could be best fostered by the above mentioned entities.

The first recommendation is for teacher leaders, their fellow teachers, their administrators, and school districts. Based on the established argument that teacher leadership can drive school improvement efforts, it would be in the best interest of schools to develop a shared vision of what formal teacher leadership is and should look like in the school. The data suggested there are differences of opinions concerning what formal teacher leadership should look like ideally, and the reality present in schools.



Teacher survey respondents' comments reflected ideas which alluded to the idea "teacher leadership is not visible", "teacher leaders are too bogged down with administrative duties", "teacher leaders can be effective or disastrous, they must be qualified", and "... it is of the utmost importance to place qualified, enthusiastic individuals in these positions." These comments continued a theme of implied disconnection of some teachers in the schools by stating, "... they write down what is told to them by the administration, discuss it somewhat, and then tell the rest of us on their team", "I do not see them as leaders in any sense of the word. I do not see them discussing educational ideas; direction [school] is going, etc."

Despite the perceived disconnect of some teachers, others offered comments which included pleas for a stronger presence of teacher leadership in schools, "We need teacher leaders at (school)", "... a program that would be dedicated to helping teachers, who help other teachers, would greatly improve school performance!" The majority of the teachers participating in the study reported support for teacher leadership. Nevertheless, reported were discrepancies between ideal and realistic teacher leadership practices in most areas. If schools are to capitalize on their resources of teacher leadership, a greater understanding of what teacher leadership looks like, as well as a greater understanding of the discrepancies between ideal and reality perceptions present in each school, is needed. Further, a greater understanding of the perceptions of the role of formal teacher leadership could support stronger interactions between teacher leaders and teachers, leading to greater collaboration and enhanced school improvement.

School districts as well as policy makers could benefit by engaging in greater collaboration with educational support organizations in adapting and implementing

established guidelines concerning formal teacher leadership. These guidelines should address the roles and responsibilities of formal teacher leaders as they pertain to areas including committee service and collaboration with colleagues. Organizations such as the Georgia Professional Standards Commission's Teacher Leader Task Force, the Georgia Leadership Institution for School Improvement, and The Teacher Leader Exploratory Consortium, have worked toward developing a standards framework for teacher leadership. Collaborating with these entities in an effort to adopt a formal teacher leadership framework could lay a path of increased understanding within the schools themselves.

Second, school districts and schools themselves should concentrate their efforts toward improving teacher leaders' skills and knowledge concerning their roles. Interviews with participating formal teacher leaders and comments submitted by participating teachers suggested the choosing of teacher leaders is often a reactive response, not a proactive one. Formal teacher leader participants stated in interviews that, "Administrators will see that strength in you, then they'll place you in a role. Then if you do a decent job and step up to the plate, you do okay ... you will have the opportunity to be granted additional responsibilities." When conversing about how he became a teacher leader, another stated, "They based it on your background and what training you had." These assertions suggest administrators may take advantage of teacher leaders' existing skills, more so than working with teacher leaders toward developing them.

Professional development elevates teachers' effectiveness in teacher leadership roles via education, training, and personal skill development (Hersey, Blanchard, & Johnson, 2001). Districts should implement professional development intended to

enhance teacher leaders' professional development design and implementation skills as an integral part of the teacher leadership role. One of the nine teachers interviewed responded that he received training in the area of working with adults while completing a post-graduate course with an emphasis on teacher leadership through a private school. Another teacher leader suggested, "At the county level, do a program like the Aspiring Administrative program. Do a program for Aspiring Teacher Leaders." Another participant's comment "... a program dedicated to helping teachers, who help other teachers, would greatly improve school performance!" supports this recommendation. Additional courses such as managing professional knowledge resources were suggested, as one teacher leader participant stated, "there are some people who have all the knowledge, but don't know how to deliver it. Likewise, there are a lot of people who know delivery systems, but they don't know what to put in." "To think that when you have teachers who recognize how to do both of those things, along with the classroom management piece, you have effective lessons that target the standards." The idea of developing teacher leaders' skills in professional development and management of resources should also include courses on communication. A teacher leader referred to the idea of teacher leaders being trained to effectively communicate with their colleagues, "Loosely like coaching, but I don't mean coaching...knowing how to talk with somebody. Talking to an adult is extremely different from talking with children."

The third recommendation is for the State of Georgia. The Georgia Professional Standards Commission stated that, as of August 2009, a Teacher Leader task force was established, whose charge is to develop new standards and recommendations concerning teacher leadership. Speaking to this committee, this research suggests the task force

should develop a set of rules similar to the new administrative certification rules, such as PSC Rule 505-2-300, which addresses changes in administrative certification. These changes identify a performance requirement as well as specific roles and duties within the school building. These updated requirements for administrators could be adapted for formal teacher leadership, possibly issuing certifications versus endorsements.

Further, under the new Georgia policy, PSC Rule 505-2-300 for Educational Leadership, administrators must continue their education after entering the role of administrator, and renewal of certification is based on performance measures. Similar measures can be adapted and applied to teacher leadership endorsements. Several teacher leaders expressed ideas concerning formal certification. As an example, one stated that, “If there’s some type of certificate or something ... some type of classes they could take and then also show they are acting in the role.” Another stated, “It doesn’t have to be money, to have some kind of attachment to this certificate or some kind of recognition by the state, that would really help motivate people.” One teacher leader referred to the idea that an endorsement would help teachers to “be able to say, hey, I’m a valuable person.”

Currently, in the state of Georgia, teachers can earn an endorsement in teacher leadership via a stand-alone program or as part of a degree program through completion of a Georgia Professional Standards Commission approved program in the Teacher Leader Endorsement field. Once this endorsement is earned, there is no requirement of evidence of performance for renewal. There are no provisions which state performance measures must be met to renew the Teacher Leadership Endorsement. Some teacher leaders who participated in the study offered opinions contrary to automaticity of renewal. One stated, “It’s more than just a degree... it [formal teacher leadership] needs

to be looked at as multiple criteria.” Another stated, “I definitely think there should be aspects of it that show you should grow and earn it [teacher leadership endorsement], not just a piece of paper.” One teacher leader stated her belief that administrators should play a part in determining teacher leaders’ endorsement renewal; “Administrators could have a little more say when someone is being used [as a teacher leader]. There is nothing more frustrating than knowing that peers and colleagues who have received degree after degree are making more money and are not willing to serve in the school.” This is an area of interest for policy makers to examine and possibly draft legislation accordingly.

Any newly developed policy should include a component of support. Should policy define teacher leadership in a greater formal sense, not only would a professional support system be necessary, but also a rewards system would need to be in place. Currently there is very little incentive to become an endorsed and practicing teacher leader other than self-satisfaction and desire to move a school forward. Policy does not require teachers to obtain an endorsement of any kind to act as a teacher leader in a school. Georgia Teacher Support Specialist endorsements, signifying specialization in mentoring new teachers, are not always recognized in schools either. Reality of many districts is that the many roles of formal teacher leader are open to negotiation between teachers and administrators exercising personal discretion. This could limit the amount of people who pursue such advanced knowledge.

Often teachers have to bare the financial responsibility of earning such endorsements and degrees, as well as expend personal time to complete programs and performance components. Currently Georgia’s teacher remuneration schedule does not provide for a difference in salary for individuals endorsed as teacher leaders, nor does it

provide stipends or differentiated salary scales for those participating in formal teacher leadership roles in their schools. Currently teachers receive higher salary placement when earning advanced degrees in specific areas. Many districts supplement the salaries of teachers who hold administrative certification, even though less than twenty-five percent of these teachers fulfill leadership roles. In other areas, teachers with specific curricular skill sets may receive stipends. Currently, however, not recognized in such a manner is formal teacher leadership. Additional compensation may be complimentary to and part of formally recognizing teacher leader positions in schools.

If in addition to consortia and researchers' recommendations, policy stated what formal teacher leadership should look like, and if a strong component of recognition and support were in place, followed by time and opportunity to facilitate experiences in the role, it is possible that more teachers might become involved in formal trainings, thus promoting school improvement.

The fourth recommendation is that of clearly recognizing formal teacher leadership as a position. Teacher leaders in formal and informal roles have contributed to schools for decades without formal training. In an effort to increase the caliber of formal teacher leadership, recognition should have more than a monetary component. Such a role should include the ability to hold certain positions, perform particular duties, and perhaps carry specific titles. Formal teacher leadership needs to be both recognized and clearly understood.

The Georgia Professional Standards Commission's PSC Rule 505-2-.351, describes endorsed teacher leaders as having strengthened and enhanced competency in many building level leadership activities. The literature as cited throughout this study has

supported teacher leadership as a beneficial force in schools. Yet there are no policy requirements for schools or districts to acknowledge or honor this training in schools via formal positions. One teacher leader stated that awareness of teacher leaders' areas of expertise increased the amount of help solicited and accepted by peers, as he stated, "We have a taste of people being recognized, and people going to those teachers [for their specific knowledge]". Others referred to the idea that formal certification and recognition at school, district, and state level, should be a reality of their role. Schools would benefit greatly through state and legislative policy makers' creation of a framework that distinguishes endorsed, trained teacher leaders, as fulfilling a formal position within the field of education. Policy makers should consider the drafting of rules which might influence administrators to first look to their teacher leaders when considering delegation of their school's needs.

### Reciprocity

This study of teachers' and teacher leaders' perceptions of the formal role of teacher leadership required access to both school faculties and individual persons' insights. In a sense, administrators opened their homes and individuals opened their hearts to the researcher. Such accommodation was more than professional; it was also personal. It is hoped that the act of participation in this study, as well as usefulness of the data derived, held a reciprocal affect of benefit for all who contributed.

The teachers who participated in the phase 1 survey were prompted to consider their own beliefs concerning the formal role of teacher leadership. The survey instrumentation offered a suggested list of traits and beliefs that may not have been reflected in the survey's formal teacher leader traits section were solicited as open

responses. It is hoped that this exercise in reflection prompted teachers to examine their beliefs as well as their own roles in their school.

Nominated teacher leaders who completed the Teacher Leader Self Assessment survey received an opportunity to use a validated tool, which suggested their personal levels of teacher leadership in different areas, at the time of completing the survey. These teacher leaders received a numeric value rating that corresponded to levels per the survey key. Such information coupled with the experience of the phase 1 survey allowed them multiple guided opportunities to reflect of their personal engagement in teacher leadership.

Teacher leaders selected for interviews engaged in conversation concerning their perceptions and roles as teacher leaders. During these conversations teacher leaders were asked to make suggestions to policy makers at all levels concerning the formal role of teacher leadership. Not only did these individuals have an opportunity for self-reflection through the survey and self-assessment survey, they were also granted an audience to share their perceptions. Transcripts were returned to individual participants and they were asked to review and validate or decline use in data interpretation.

It is hoped that individual participation in this study helped increase all participants' personal understandings of themselves and the roles many of their colleagues play in teacher leadership school improvement efforts.

Administrators were crucial to the research in that they not only allowed the researcher to come into their schools and solicit meaningful information from their staff, which may or may not have been complimenting or positive, they also trusted the researcher in his solicitation of data. The information gained from the electronic survey is



a strong source of data that can be interpreted as describing a large portion of the culture of the participating schools, which is an underlying force in school improvement efforts to schools. Therefore, a report was prepared for each administrator that included anonymous information of their school's survey results. Administrators had the option of declining or endorsing their school's data. The researcher also offered to work with administrators in interpreting data for their individual schools. The researcher extended an offer to meet with the principals both at the time the reports were delivered, as well as the conclusion of the dissertation so that the researcher could share his insights and suggestions with them.

#### Future Research

Additional research is needed in the area of understanding teachers' beliefs of ideal versus reality of formal teacher leaders fulfilling their roles in their schools. Studies that include an increased amount of interviews, including a representation of the complete participant base, teachers, as well as formal teacher leaders, would benefit the literature and the greater body of knowledge. Through increasing the diversity of the interviews, researchers could better identify the teachers' and teacher leaders' understandings which support their perceptions of formal teacher leadership in a greater context.

Collaboration is a strong component of teacher leadership. Collaboration has been linked to student achievement in both the literature (Ackerman & Mackenzie, 2006; Beatty, 1999; Conley & Muncey, 1999; Mayo, 2002; Riordin & da Costa, 1998; Rogers, 2006), and perceptions of participants in this study. Collaboration requires time,

planning, relationships, understanding of roles, and increased responsibilities. Study participants identified these areas as being less than adequate. Research designed to understand the key components of strong collaboration in teacher leadership roles, as well as understanding what teachers perceive as being fundamental elements of collaboration, would greatly enhance teacher leadership development programs.

The field of teacher leadership would benefit from research conducted on what would be required in order for teacher leaders to do an effective job of mentoring novice teachers as well as guiding seasoned teachers in professional development in their building. In order to better understand the idea of collaboration among teacher leaders and their roles, research should be conducted concerning the teacher leaders' role in development of professional learning opportunities and learning communities. More precisely, research that looks closely at professional development and peer coaching, the terminology used and the designs of such programs would be required. Teachers' responses to teacher leaders' collaborative roles, both as facilitators and learners, could offer greater insight into formal teacher leadership. Based on interpretation of this study's data, the terminology used in facilitative roles and perhaps the design of professional development opportunities can elicit favorable or not as favorable responses from teachers.

Understanding why teachers become involved in the role of formal teacher leadership, assuming responsibilities beyond their required duties, could also be beneficial to the teacher leadership literature base. Ryan and Deci's (2000) Self Determination Theory has guided research for a number of years through studies that have repeatedly shown reciprocal autonomy support between people enhances the

autonomous motivation, quality of performance, and psychological health of those involved (Deci, & Ryan, 2004; Deci, Ryan, & Williams, 1996). Thus applying this theory to a research model designed to better understand why teachers choose to become formal teacher leaders might offer greater understandings of the benefits of teacher leaders' work.

The literature and data suggest that teacher leaders are a key component in the school improvement process. The field would benefit from research attending to a greater understanding of teacher leaders' specific roles in ensuring school improvement measures take place. A question that would lead to beneficial research would be: Do formal teacher leaders take part in ensuring that changes affecting classrooms and schools are either implemented or challenged dependent on how the initiative affects the students? (Ackerman & Mackenzie, 2006).

The literature reviewed cites efforts by organizations to create clear frameworks concerning teacher leadership. The Georgia Professional Standards Commission's Teacher Leader Task Force, the Georgia Leadership Institute for School Improvement, and the Teacher Leader Exploratory Consortium, are all involved in making recommendations related to teacher leadership. Also required is research concerning how to shift school cultures to embrace these leaders as agents of change. Research pertaining to the building of cultures that recognize and celebrate those teachers working in formal teacher leadership positions would benefit teacher leaders, schools, and the greater body of knowledge.

Replicating this research in a district that has incorporated a set of standards concerning formal teacher leadership would be beneficial. An understood paradigm

within the district would create a closer alignment of selected schools. Such a study could control, in part, the variable of understanding the definition of teacher leadership in one's school and district. In addition, including a focus on school improvement efforts and their results as related to teachers' perceptions of the value and involvement of formal teacher leaders could add a narrower focal point to the study.

Teacher leadership holds strong roots in professional development. Research designed to identify professional development programs intended to target teacher leaders and track their learning would be beneficial. A longitudinal study that tracks changes in teacher leaders' beliefs and actions in their leadership role, as attributed to the professional development they receive, could offer valuable information for entities involved in designing such training.

Identification of school districts, that have received some form of recognition for teacher leadership accomplishments in their schools, would be an ideal setting for future research. Studying such schools and the governances, which guide their teacher leadership models and responsibilities, as well as teacher perceptions concerning such teacher leadership, could suggest ideas and themes, which may possibly enhance teacher leadership models elsewhere.

## Summary

In summary, this research attempted to develop a better understanding of the perceptions of teachers and teacher leaders concerning their beliefs of what teacher leadership should look like ideally, and what they believed to be the reality in their schools. Teacher leadership was reported in the literature and by the participant data as having positive effects on school culture and student improvement. Teacher leadership was seen as a positive force by most, but not all teachers. Discrepancies between teachers' and teacher leaders' ideal beliefs versus their perceived reality were identified, and cultural disconnects within schools were interpreted. In an effort to strengthen teacher leadership in schools as well as collaboration between teachers and teacher leaders, and ultimately improve student achievement, teachers' and teacher leaders' perceptions must be acknowledged, appropriately addressed, and researched further.

Lasting and meaningful school improvement comes from teachers; it is a result of how they feel about their work and how their school perceives them. Greater insight into the phenomenon of formal teacher leadership and teachers' and teacher leaders' perceptions of the formal role of teacher leadership could help guide future policy and instructional designs pertaining to the development of future teacher leaders and the roles they fill. Such forward thinking could equate to positive progress toward school improvement efforts.

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APPENDIXES  
APPENDIX A

Teacher Leadership Perceptions Electronic Survey

For purposes of this study, the term Formal Teacher Leadership is defined as “Teachers who are leaders lead within and beyond the classroom, identify with and contribute to a community of teacher learners and leaders, and influence others toward improved educational practice” (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001, p.5), and are members and or chairs of formally recognized committees. Please consider this definition while focusing your thoughts on individuals who fulfill formal teacher leadership roles within your school. Your participation is greatly appreciated. Please be aware that you are not required to answer any questions should you choose to do so.

1. Ideally, which of the following do you believe should be included in a definition of the role of formal teacher leader?

*Please choose all that apply*

A formal teacher leader...

- a. participates in school management and decision making
- b. builds trust and rapport with peers
- c. confronts and challenges the status quo in a school's culture
- d. facilitates parent and school relationships
- e. facilitates community and school relationships
- f. participates in formal professional organizations
- g. is politically involved with issues concerning education at all levels

- h. monitors school improvement efforts
- i. understands how to interpret and use data concerning student abilities
- j. understands how to enhance school wide student learning
- k. develops and leads professional development programs
- l. promotes colleagues professional growth
- m. engages in peer coaching
- n. models professional growth
- o. leads school wide Learning Communities
- p. works collaboratively with peers
- q. understands how to guide colleagues in improving instruction
- r. views themselves as positive role models
- s. holds a strong understanding of their role as a leader
- t. has excellent teaching skills
- u. has taught more than 3 years
- v. has a clearly developed personal philosophy of education
- w. is organized and flexible
- x. is able to take on extra responsibilities
- y. is a strong communicator
- z. I choose not to respond to this question

2. In reality, which of the following do you believe characterizes persons acting in the formal role of teacher leader?

*Please choose all that apply*



In my school formal teacher leaders...

- a. participate in school management and decision making
- b. build trust and rapport with peers
- c. confront and challenge the status quo in a school's culture
- d. facilitate parent and school relationships
- e. facilitate community and school relationships
- f. participate in formal professional organizations
- g. are politically involved with issues concerning education at all levels
- h. monitor school improvement efforts
- i. understand how to interpret and use data concerning student abilities
- j. understand how to enhance school wide student learning
- k. develop and leads professional development programs
- l. promote colleagues professional growth
- m. engage in peer coaching
- n. model professional growth
- o. lead school wide Learning Communities
- p. work collaboratively with peers
- q. understand how to guide colleagues in improving instruction
- r. view themselves as positive role models
- s. hold a strong understanding of their role as a leader
- t. have excellent teaching skills
- u. have taught more than 3 years
- v. have a clearly developed personal philosophy of education

- w. are organized and flexible
- x. are able to take on extra responsibilities
- y. are strong communicators
- z. I choose not to respond to this question

3. Ideally, what benefit can teacher leaders bring to a school?

Formal teacher leaders can benefit a school by ...

*Please choose all that apply*

- a. contributing to the building of a culture that supports increased student learning
- b. Developing and interpreting curricular goals as set by district and state policies
- c. bolstering school improvement efforts
- d. increasing collaboration among faculty
- e. representing teachers in school wide decision making
- f. supporting all teachers through coaching and instructional skill enhancement
- g. being positive role models and demonstrating expert practices
- h. I choose not to respond to this question

4. In reality, how do formal teacher leaders benefit your school?

Formal teacher leaders benefit my school by ...

*Please choose all that apply*

- a. contributing to the building of a culture that supports increased student learning.

- b. developing and interpreting curricular goals as set by district and state policies.
- c. bolstering school improvement efforts.
- d. increasing collaboration among faculty.
- e. representing teachers in school wide decision making.
- f. supporting all teachers through coaching and instructional skill enhancement.
- g. being positive role models and demonstrating expert practices.
- h. I choose not to respond to this question.

5. What do you believe would happen to your school if teachers did not participate in leadership roles?

If teachers did not participate in formal leadership roles at my school...

*Please choose one*

- a. The school would experience great improvement, student achievement would increase.
  - b. The school would remain unchanged, student achievement would be unaffected.
  - c. The school would experience moderate changes, student achievement would fluxuate.
  - d. The school would suffer, student achievement would lower.
  - e. I choose not to respond to this question.
6. Do you interact with any teacher leaders at your school? If yes, in what ways do you interact?

7. Do you participate in formal or informal teacher leadership? If so please explain.
8. Please nominate 1-3 persons in your school who are teacher leaders in no particular order.
9. Please feel free to add any comments you would like based on this survey.
10. Please answer the following questions to help the researcher analyze the collected data for trends or patterns in perceptions.
  - a. How long have you been teaching?
    - 1-5 years
    - 6-10 years
    - 11-15 years
    - 15+ years
  - b. How long have you been at \_\_\_\_\_ Elementary?
    - 1-5 years
    - 6-10 years
    - 11-15 years
    - 15+ years

Appendix B  
Teacher Leadership Self Assessment Survey

## Teacher Leadership Self-Assessment

Marilyn and Bill Katzenmeyer

Please respond in terms of how frequently each statement is descriptive of your professional behavior.

Never	Rarely	Some-times	Often	Always
-------	--------	------------	-------	--------

1. I reflect on what I do well and also how I can improve as a classroom teacher.	①	②	③	④	⑤
2. I understand how my strengths and needs for development will impact my new role as a leader in my school.	①	②	③	④	⑤
3. I am clear about what I believe about teaching and learning.	①	②	③	④	⑤
4. I act in ways that are congruent with my values and philosophy when dealing with students and colleagues.	①	②	③	④	⑤
5. I seek feedback on how I might improve in my work setting.	①	②	③	④	⑤
6. At work I behave in ways that are ethical and meet expectations for a high level of professional performance.	①	②	③	④	⑤
<i>Enter the total of items 1-6 in the space to the right</i>	<b>Total Items 1-6</b> _____				
7. I invite colleagues to work toward accomplishment of the vision and mission of the school.	①	②	③	④	⑤
8. I lead others in accomplishing tasks.	①	②	③	④	⑤
9. I involve colleagues when planning for change.	①	②	③	④	⑤
10. I understand the importance of school and district culture to improving student outcomes.	①	②	③	④	⑤
11. I work toward improving the culture of the school.	①	②	③	④	⑤
12. I am willing to spend time and effort building a team to improve my school.	①	②	③	④	⑤
<i>Enter the total of items 7 - 12 in the space to the right</i>	<b>Total Items 7 - 12</b> _____				
13. I listen carefully to others.	①	②	③	④	⑤
14. I adjust my presentations to my audience.	①	②	③	④	⑤
15. I seek perspectives of others and can reflect others' thoughts and feelings with accuracy.	①	②	③	④	⑤
16. When facilitating small groups I keep the group members on-task and on-time.	①	②	③	④	⑤
17. When leading meetings I am able to get almost everyone to participate.	①	②	③	④	⑤

**Teacher Leadership Self-Assessment, Page 2**  
Respond in terms of how frequently each statement is descriptive of your professional behavior.



18. I use electronic technology effectively to communicate with individuals and groups.	①	②	③	④	⑤
<b>Enter the total of items 13-18 in the space to the right</b>	<b>Total Items 13-18</b> _____				
19. I understand that different points of view may be based on an individual's culture, religion, race or socioeconomic status.	①	②	③	④	⑤
20. I respect values and beliefs that may be different from mine.	①	②	③	④	⑤
21. I enjoy working with diverse groups of colleagues at school.	①	②	③	④	⑤
22. I work effectively with non-educators and persons with special interests.	①	②	③	④	⑤
23. I make special efforts to understand the beliefs and values of others.	①	②	③	④	⑤
24. I am willing to share my beliefs even when they are different from the beliefs of others.	①	②	③	④	⑤
<b>Enter the total of items 19-24 in the space to the right</b>	<b>Total Items 19-24</b> _____				
25. I promote a positive environment in the classroom.	①	②	③	④	⑤
26. I use research-based instructional practices.	①	②	③	④	⑤
27. I persist to assure the success of all students.	①	②	③	④	⑤
28. I have a reputation for being competent in the classroom.	①	②	③	④	⑤
29. I am approachable and open to sharing with colleagues.	①	②	③	④	⑤
30. I act with integrity and fairness when working with students or adults.	①	②	③	④	⑤
<b>Enter the total of items 25-30 in the space to the right</b>	<b>Total Items 25-30</b> _____				
31. I seek out all pertinent information from many sources before making a decision or taking action.	①	②	③	④	⑤
32. I set goals and monitor progress towards meeting them.	①	②	③	④	⑤

**Teacher Leadership Self-Assessment, Page 3**  
Respond in terms of how frequently each statement is  
descriptive of your professional behavior.



33. I analyze and use assessment information when planning.	①	②	③	④	⑤
34. I participate in professional development and learning.	①	②	③	④	⑤
35. I am proactive in identifying problems and working to solve them.	①	②	③	④	⑤
36. I work side-by-side with colleagues, parents and/or others to make improvements in the school or district.	①	②	③	④	⑤
<b>Enter the total of items 31-36 in the space to the right</b>		<b>Total Items 31-36</b> _____			
37. I plan and schedule thoroughly so that I can accomplish tasks and goals.	①	②	③	④	⑤
38. I exhibit self-confidence when under stress or in difficult situations.	①	②	③	④	⑤
39. I work effectively as a team member.	①	②	③	④	⑤
40. I show initiative and exhibit the energy needed to follow through to get desired results.	①	②	③	④	⑤
41. I prioritize so that I can assure there is time for important tasks.	①	②	③	④	⑤
42. I create a satisfactory balance between professional and personal aspects of my life.	①	②	③	④	⑤
<b>Enter the total of items 37-42 in the space to the right</b>		<b>Total Items 37-42</b> _____			

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## *Teacher Leadership Self-Assessment*

### *Scale Descriptions and Scoring Protocol*

#### *Scales of the Teacher Leadership Self-Assessment*

**Self Awareness:** Teacher has an accurate picture of self in terms of strengths, values, philosophy and behaviors.

**Leading Change:** Teacher uses effective strategies to facilitate positive change.

**Communication:** Teacher exhibits effective listening, oral communication, presentation skills and expression in written communication.

**Diversity:** Teacher demonstrates respect for and responds to differences in perspectives.

**Instructional Proficiency and Leadership:** Teacher possesses and uses professional knowledge and skills in providing the most effective learning opportunities for students and adults.

**Continuous Improvement:** Teacher demonstrates commitment to reaching higher standards and readiness to take action to improve.

**Self Organization:** Teacher establishes course of action and implements plans to accomplish results.

#### *Self Scoring Procedure*

✓ **Self Awareness:**

*Enter Total of Items 1-6*

✓ **Leading Change:**

*Enter Total of Items 7-12*

✓ **Communication:**

*Enter Total of Items 13-18*

✓ **Diversity:**

*Enter Total of Items 19-24*

✓ **Instructional Proficiency:**

*Enter Total of Items 25-30*

✓ **Continuous Improvement:**

*Enter Total of 31-36*

✓ **Self Organization:**

*Enter Total of 37-42*



## APPENDIX C

### Phase Two Letter of Invite

/(Date)/2010

Dear (Name),

I would like to first congratulate you as being nominated by your peers as a Teacher Leader at (School) Elementary. Your hard work and dedication to educating your school's students have been recognized by many of your colleagues.

You were selected to be invited to be part of this second phase of research because you have been repeatedly recognized by your colleagues as being a teacher leader and have been identified as being a part of your school's improvement teams that were used as extended selection criteria. I know that this is a busy time of year for you, but I hope that you will take just a little time to participate in this brief Teacher Leadership Self Assessment Survey.

To complete the survey, please read and sign the consent form, complete the contact form, and complete the enclosed Teacher Leadership Self Assessment inventory. It is expected to take no more than 10-20 minutes to complete. After completion, please mail all papers back in the enclosed self-addressed envelope. USPS has been chosen over inter school mail to maintain your confidentiality. If you would prefer to use inner school mail, or prefer I meet with you in person to obtain the form, these options are certainly fine also.

Your answers will be completely confidential. Should you be selected for invitation to the third phase, an interview, you will be notified via your personal preference as listed on the contact form included. Moreover, the results of the survey will be reported in a summary format, so again no one will link you to your responses.

Thank you in advance for your participation in this important project. If you have any questions about the administration of the survey, please contact Jerry Kelley at [jkelly9@student.gsu.edu](mailto:jkelly9@student.gsu.edu), by phone 678-697-5873, or you may use any of the contact information supplied on the consent form.

Thank you in advance for your professionalism and dedication to education as demonstrated through your participation as well as nomination by peers.

Sincerely,

Jerry Kelley  
GSU PhD Candidate  
Chestatee Elementary ESOL Teacher

## APPENDIX D

### Teacher Leader Interview

The purpose of this interview is to gain an understanding of your perceptions of the formal role of teacher leadership at your school, \_\_\_\_\_ Elementary. This interview is completely anonymous and confidential. No information will be shared with anyone without your permission. I will give you a copy of the transcript before analyzing it so you may amend any information you feel is inaccurate for any reason. All information will remain with me, the researcher, in a private database not affiliated with your school or district.

This interview will probably last approximately one hour and will be confidential. You may choose not to respond to any question, and to stop the tape recorder or the interview at any time.

[Verify correct personal information and understanding of interview process. Allow opportunity to clarify any questions before starting.]

#### *Opening Question:*

1. Please tell me about your teaching assignment. How long have you been teaching in this area? How long have you been teaching in general?

#### *Transition Question:*

2. What caused you to choose to be a teacher?

#### *Key Questions:*

3. Ideally, what do you believe the role of a teacher leader is? What responsibilities should they have?
4. In reality, what does teacher leadership look like at your school? What responsibilities do you and other teacher leaders have?

5. What leadership opportunities are available in your school?
6. What benefit can teacher leaders bring to a school?
7. Do teacher leaders benefit your school? Why or why not?
8. What do you believe would happen to your school if teachers did not participate in leadership roles?
9. What do teachers do to at \_\_Elementary to be considered a teacher leader?
10. Please tell me about your role as a member of the \_\_\_\_\_ committee? How were you selected for this position?
11. What is the length of time you have been in this position?
12. What, if any, formal training was received concerning the formal teacher leadership role?
13. Do you believe teacher leaders feel appropriately utilized at your school?
14. Does your formal role have a formal job description?
15. Is there compensation, monetary or otherwise, associated with your position?
16. Is there anything you would like to add to our conversation?
17. Demographics Questions:

*The Following Questions are for Statistical Use Only*

- a. How long have you been at \_\_\_\_\_ Elementary?
- b. Have you held leadership roles at other schools? If so what was/were they?
- c. Have you held a professional career outside of education?

## APPENDIX E

Informed Consent Letters

Georgia State University

Department of Educational Policy Studies

Informed Consent

Perceptions of Teacher Leadership Teacher Survey

Principal Investigator: Jerry Kelley

### I. Purpose

You are invited to participate in a research study. The purpose of this study is to better understand perceptions of teacher leadership. You are invited to participate because your school has been identified as one that implements teacher leadership. All teachers at your school are being invited to join. The survey is expected to take approximately ten minutes, and it is a one-time only event.

Based on the survey's results, an undisclosed number of persons will be asked to participate in the second phase of this study. The actual amount of participants invited to participate in the second phase will be based on the survey results. If your profile matches that of individuals sought to continue the research, you will be invited to participate in phase two. If your profile does not match, you will not receive any further communications concerning participation in this study. Phase two research will involve a second survey to be taken on paper. Based on phase two survey results, nine participants will be invited to join phase three. Selected persons will be contacted anonymously and details will be discussed with them at that time. Participants who were not selected will be notified that their profiles did not match the profile

sought, and a copy of the survey will be given all participants to provide personal benefit concerning their roles in teacher leadership roles. Completion of phase one survey will require approximately 10 minutes. If selected, completion of phase two survey will last approximately 10 min, and phase three interview will last approximately 45 minutes.

## II. Procedures

If you decide to participate, you will be asked to complete the teacher leader perception survey published on this site, and may possibly be contacted for a follow up survey which is a Teacher Leader Self Assessment survey. This survey will take approximately ten minutes, and the resulting profile may result in inviting you to participate in an interview lasting approximately 45 min.

This survey can be completed at your convenience, at a location of your choice. The survey will be offered only one time, you will not be asked to continue participation unless you are selected to participate in the phase two survey. Following phase two, selected individuals will be invited to participate in phase three interviews. All phases are completely voluntary.

## III. Risks

In this study, you will not have any more risks than you would in a normal day of life.

## IV. Benefits

Participation in this study may or may not benefit you personally. It is hoped that participants completing the survey will benefit through reflective thought of the questions asked. It is also believed that patterns may appear which could benefit the school in their understanding of the perceptions of teacher leadership. Overall, the researcher hopes to gain information about

teacher leadership perceptions that might guide future development, enhancing education for students and teachers.

V. Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal:

Participation in research is voluntary. You do not have to be in this study. If you decide to be in the study and change your mind, you have the right to drop out at anytime. You may skip questions or stop participating at anytime. While participation is greatly appreciated, the choice to drop out will be respected.

VI. Confidentiality

All records will be kept private to the extent allowable by law. Only the researcher, Jerry Kelley, will have access to the information you provide. Information may also be shared with those who make sure the study is done correctly, Dr. Hayward Richardson (researcher's major advisor) and the GSU Institutional Review Board and the Office for Human Research Protection (OHRP). The researcher will use initials to code interviews and all surveys are anonymous by design. The information you provide by completing the survey will be collected via a private website, which has no affiliation with your school or any other organization. The researcher has purchased all related licensures and he holds sole ownership. The information obtained will be stored at a private site in both a locked facility as well as a firewall-protected computer. Your name and other facts that might point to you will not appear when this study is presented or its results published. The findings will be summarized and presented in group form. You will not be identified personally.

This survey is hosted privately, and has no connections to your school or district. This survey is completely anonymous and confidential; names of persons completing the survey are not asked for, nor required. Demographic information is requested for statistical purposes only.

This is in an effort to determine any trends or patterns in responses and in no way will be used to identify respondents. No personal information will be shared with anyone for any reason.

VII. Contact Persons:

Contact Dr. Hayward Richardson, (404 413-8261 or Hrichardson@gsu.edu ) or Jerry Kelley (770-889-2556 or Jkelley9@student.gsu.edu) if you have any questions about this study.

If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a participant in this research study, you may contact Susan Vogtner in the Office of Research Integrity at 404-413-3513 or svogtner@gsu.edu.

VIII. Consent to Participate

If you are willing to volunteer for this study, please complete the survey. By completing this survey, you are giving your expressed informed consent that the researcher may use all information.

Georgia State University  
Department of Educational Policy Studies  
Informed Consent  
Teacher Leader Self Assessment Survey

Principal Investigator: Jerry Kelley

I. Purpose

You are invited to participate in a research study. The purpose of this study is to better understand perceptions of teacher leadership. You are invited to participate because your school has been identified as one that implements teacher leadership. All teachers at your school are being invited to join. The survey is expected to take approximately ten minutes, and it is a one-time only event.

Based on the results of the electronic teacher leader survey you recently completed, your profile is a match for individuals sought to participate in this phase. You are one of approximately fifty teachers from different schools who have been invited to participate in this second phase.

If you should choose to participate in this phase of the study, you will be asked to complete a Teacher Leader self Awareness survey. It is expected that participation will take approximately 10 minutes and will be a one-time event only. If the results of your profile matches that of individuals sought to continue the research, you will be invited to participate in phase three. A total of nine participants will be invited to participate in phase three interviews. Participants who are not selected will be notified that their profiles did not match the profile sought, and a copy of the survey will be given to all participants to provide personal benefit concerning their roles in teacher leadership roles. If your profile does not match, you will be informed as such, and will not receive any further communications concerning participation in this study.



Phase three participants will be contacted anonymously, and invited to participate in this final phase of the study. At the time of contact, details concerning the interviews will be discussed should participants accept the invitation.

## II. Procedures

If you decide to participate you will be asked to complete a teacher leader self assessment survey. It is expected that this survey will take approximately 10 minutes to complete. As was the case in phase one, participation is voluntary.

## III. Risks

In this study, you will not have any more risks than you would in a normal day of life.

## IV. Benefits

Participation in this study may or may not benefit you personally. It is hoped that participants completing the survey will benefit through reflective thought of the questions asked. It is also believed that patterns may appear which could benefit the school in their understanding of the perceptions of teacher leadership. Overall, the researcher hopes to gain information about teacher leadership perceptions that might guide future development, enhancing education for students and teachers.

## V. Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal:

Participation in research is voluntary. You do not have to be in this study. If you decide to be in the study and change your mind, you have the right to drop out at anytime. You may skip

questions or stop participating at anytime. While participation is greatly appreciated, the choice to drop out will be respected.

#### VI. Confidentiality

All records will be kept private to the extent allowable by law. Only the researcher, Jerry Kelley, will have access to the information you provide. Information may also be shared with those who make sure the study is done correctly, Dr. Hayward Richardson (researcher's major advisor) and the GSU Institutional Review Board and the Office for Human Research Protection (OHRP). The researcher will use initials to code interviews and all surveys are anonymous by design. The information you provide by completing the survey will be collected via a private website, which has no affiliation with your school or any other organization. The researcher has purchased all related licensures and he holds sole ownership. The information obtained will be stored at a private site in both a locked facility as well as a firewall-protected computer. Your name and other facts that might point to you will not appear when this study is presented or its results published. The findings will be summarized and presented in group form. You will not be identified personally.

This survey is hosted privately, and has no connections to your school or district. This survey is completely anonymous and confidential; names of persons completing the survey are not asked for, nor required. Demographic information is requested for statistical purposes only. This is in an effort to determine any trends or patterns in responses and in no way will be used to identify respondents. No personal information will be shared with anyone for any reason.

#### VII. Contact Persons:

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If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a participant in this research study, you may contact Susan Vogtner in the Office of Research Integrity at 404-413-3513 or [svogtner@gsu.edu](mailto:svogtner@gsu.edu).

#### VIII. Consent to Participate

I will give you a copy of this consent form to keep.  
If you are willing to volunteer for this research, please sign below.

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Participant

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Date

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Principal Investigator – Jerry Kelley

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Date

Georgia State University  
Department of Educational Policy Studies  
Informed Consent  
Perceptions of Teacher Leadership Interview

Principal Investigator: Jerry Kelley

I. Purpose

You are invited to continue participation in this research study. The purpose of this study is to better understand perceptions of teacher leadership. You have been invited to participate in this phase because your profile, as determined by the surveys completed in phases one and two, match that sought for this study. This interview is expected to last approximately 45 minutes, and will most likely be a one-time event.

II. Procedures

If you decide to participate in this phase, you will be asked to engage in an interview lasting approximately 45 min. The interview is designed to gain a better understanding of your perceptions of teacher leadership in your school. The interview will be audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. A transcript will be given to you for you to amend if chosen, and approve before it is considered for analysis by the researcher. As was the case in phases one and two, participation is completely voluntary.

III. Risks

In this study, you will not have any more risks than you would in a normal day of life.

#### IV. Benefits

Participation in this study may or may not benefit you personally. It is hoped that participants completing the survey will benefit through reflective thought of the questions asked. It is also believed that patterns may appear which could benefit the school in their understanding of the perceptions of teacher leadership. Overall, the researcher hopes to gain information about teacher leadership perceptions that might guide future development, enhancing education for students and teachers.

#### V. Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal:

Participation in research is voluntary. You do not have to be in this study. If you decide to be in the study and change your mind, you have the right to drop out at anytime. You may skip questions or stop participating at anytime. While participation is greatly appreciated, the choice to drop out will be respected.

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purchased all related licensures and he holds sole ownership. The information obtained will be stored at a private site in both a locked facility as well as a firewall-protected computer. Your name and other facts that might point to you will not appear when this study is presented or its results published. The findings will be summarized and presented in group form. You will not be identified personally.

This survey is hosted privately, and has no connections to your school or district. This survey is completely anonymous and confidential; names of persons completing the survey are not asked for, nor required. Demographic information is requested for statistical purposes only. This is in an effort to determine any trends or patterns in responses and in no way will be used to identify respondents. No personal information will be shared with anyone for any reason.

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Consent to Participate

I will give you a copy of this consent form to keep.  
If you are willing to volunteer for this research, and be audio recorded, please sign below.

_____	_____
Participant	Date
_____	_____
Principal Investigator – Jerry Kelley	Date