

CULTIVATING CAPACITY: A PRINCIPAL'S USE OF DISTRIBUTED
LEADERSHIP THEORY TECHNIQUES

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Abstract

Background: The demands placed on educators are challenging. High stakes testing along with long hours, low pay, limited benefits, and not enough support lead to teacher frustration. Improving educators' working conditions must become a priority if our society is to ensure high-quality academic experiences for all children. In the past, educators often worked in isolation to accomplish tasks delegated to them by administrators. The principal was the sole decision-maker and power was concentrated within one or a few individuals with few opportunities for leadership capacity to develop or be distributed among teachers. The author, who was a first-year principal, was in the process of implementing distributed leadership through shared decision-making and collaboration to increase students' academic achievement. **Purpose:** This study explored how a principal's use of distributed leadership to grow capacity in others shaped beliefs and perceptions about distributed leadership. Questions: 1. How have beliefs about involving teachers in the shared decision-making process evolved since completing the study? 2. What are teachers' perceptions about distributed leadership? **Methods:** This study employed an inductive qualitative approach based on an autoethnographic framework. Data were recorded by the researcher through field notes, journal entries, observations, and semi-structured interviews to gain insight about leadership practices. Data were coded by hand as themes arose throughout the study and by using NVivo 12 software to seek lexical patterns. Alternative explanations of data were performed by gathering other people's interpretations to increase the trustworthiness of the findings.

Participants were six fourth-grade teachers who were chosen through purposive sampling techniques of critical case sampling and key informant sampling. **Findings:** The study added to the literature regarding how a reflexive leader can adapt leadership practices to the needs of the people in the organization through distributed leadership techniques to build capacity in others to increase student achievement. Three main themes emerged from the data: carrying out of instructional leader tasks, carrying out of non-instructional leader tasks, and shared decision-making through collaboration. While teachers reported finding value in collaborative activities such as common planning and professional learning communities (PLCs), they voiced concerns about time not always being used wisely during collaborative activities, not always understanding the focus of PLCs, and not all members putting forth the same amount of effort during collaborative activities. Analysis of data revealed that teachers found value in collaborative activities when PLCs were vertically aligned, included support staff, and allocated time to problem solve and learn from specialists. The researcher found that her perceptions about the value of distributed leadership to develop capacity in others evolved over the course of the study to include a belief of teachers as leaders of their students who can also become leaders of others when provided necessary supports. **Conclusion:** The findings suggested that participants' perceptions of distributed leadership were influenced over the course of the study to include thoughts and beliefs of distributed leadership enhancing and empowering teachers to become more equipped to lead students and other staff to grow in their skills and to work together collaboratively to influence student achievement.

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Chapter I

Introduction

Expectations for teachers and principals are high. In an age of high stakes testing and accountability, educators are burdened with the task of ensuring that each child masters the curriculum and passes state standardized assessments. This is a daunting task for most educators and a very difficult undertaking to accomplish in isolation. It is the principal's responsibility to make sure that teachers have the resources and support they need to fulfill these expectations such as creating a master schedule that includes protected time to allow teachers to consistently meet and collaborate to meet the needs of students. Fullan (2014) argued that principals who employ management styles focused on compliance and accountability are obsolete and their efforts do not lead to student achievement. If principals are to adapt and meet the needs of contemporary students, while also meeting district and state accountability requirements, they will need to be innovative and distribute leadership among people with varying skills and experiences, which can lead to academic gains (Camburn, 2003).

Timperley (2005) stated "distributed leadership is not the same as dividing task responsibilities among individuals who perform defined and separate organizational roles, but rather it comprises dynamic interactions between multiple leaders and followers" (p. 396). It is not people working in isolation, but involves collective effort and shared responsibility. A principal who employs a distributed perspective of leadership involves others that are in formal leadership positions and those without leadership titles (Spillane, Harris, Jones, & Mertz, 2015). Distributed leadership goes beyond one centralized figure making all the decisions and includes other staff such as

teacher leaders and other school community members in the decision-making process (Spillane et al., 2015). It can be argued that principals who adopt distributed leadership techniques will be more equipped to meet the diverse needs of today's learners because they continuously cultivate capacity by sharing leadership roles and building collaborative structures.

A modern view of the principal's role is to maximize learning, but this role can be confusing due to an over-focus on compliance and accountability, which makes the role of the principal too tedious and practically impossible (Fullan, 2014). It is not possible for a principal to reach each teacher or for the principal to be an expert on every subject (Fullan, 2014). One solution is for the principal to become the "learning leader—one who models learning, but also shapes the conditions for all to learn on a continuous basis" (Fullan, 2014, p. 9). This is a shift away from micro-management, which has proven to be ineffective and is a transition to building capacity in all teachers. A principal who utilizes distributed leadership techniques can replace ineffective drivers such as an over-focus on accountability, individualistic solutions, technology, and fragmented strategies with effective drivers such as capacity building, collaborative effort, pedagogy, and systemness (Fullan, 2014).

Fullan (2014) suggested that it is the principal's role to learn alongside teachers and that principals who lead teacher learning and development have twice the impact on learning than principals who focus their efforts in other areas. Effective principals guarantee that teachers have the resources they need, ensure safety, hire quality teachers, and establish goals and expectations, but the greatest improvements will come from a principal who is continuously learning independently and along with teachers (Fullan,

2014). Fullan (2014) advocated that these efforts along with a principal applying relevant knowledge, solving problems, and building trust results in campus improvement.

Principals who are change agents challenge the status quo because they realize that they must change to grow. They also work collaboratively with others to create plans for success and they focus on the team (Fullan, 2014).

If teachers are to develop the skills needed to implement and use evidenced-based practices effectively with students, campus leadership must be supportive and provide professional development opportunities for teachers to develop needed skills. Campus leaders will also need to allocate time for teachers to consistently collaborate with other teachers, support staff, and academic coaches to plan for instruction. Effective campus leaders should embrace and acknowledge the important role they play in developing and growing teachers' self-efficacy. Sehgal, Nambudiri, and Mishra, (2017) proposed that campus leaders such as principals have great influence and power to create an environment that affects how teachers view themselves. Sehgal et al. (2017) advised there is a "positive correlation between principal leadership and teacher self-efficacy" (p. 511). Sehgal et al. (2017) suggested that it is the principal's responsibility to create an environment that supports collaboration among peers. Goddard, Goddard, Sook Kim, and Miller (2015) reported that campus leaders "serve as a catalyst for teacher collaboration" (p. 512) and a principal's skill level will lead to campus procedures that are collaborative in nature, which supports teachers to create effective instruction.

Statement of the Problem

Teacher and principal attrition are high and this trend negatively affects students' academic achievement. Results from the *2012-2013 Teacher Follow-Up Survey* revealed

that 8% of teachers left the field (Goldring, Taie, Riddles, National Center for Education Statistics (ED), & Westat, 2014) and according to the *2016-2017: Principal Follow-Up Survey*, 10% of principals left the field of education (Goldring, Taie, National Center for Education Statistics (ED), & Westat, 2018). Of the teachers that left education for other careers outside of education, 51% reported that the workload was more manageable in their current position and 53% stated they had better working conditions than when they were teaching (Goldring et al., 2014). Of the principals who left education, 13% reported that the stress and disappointment of the position influenced their decisions to leave and 14% reported that they were too tired to continue in the profession (Goldring et al., 2018). The demands placed on educators make it very difficult to be effective while working in isolation. Increasing demands of high stakes testing along with long hours, low pay, limited benefits, and not enough support leads to frustration and ultimately an exodus from the field. This is an unacceptable trend and one that must be addressed from many angles. Improving educators' working conditions must become a priority if our society is to continue to ensure high-quality academic experiences for all children.

Conceptual Framework

In the past, behaviorist ideas about how learning occurred were believed to be simply related to rewards and consequences. Early learning theories were based on the work of behaviorists such as B.F. Skinner, who claimed that behavior is reinforced by external stimuli and that the cause of behavior is due to a consequence that follows a behavior (Swaim, 1972). The framework for this study is aligned to Albert Bandura's social learning theory, which is based on the belief that people learn from others by interacting in a social context (Bandura, 1979; Bandura, 1977). The advent of social

learning theory has expanded beliefs about learning to include more complex ideas of learning as going beyond behaviorist ideology and encompassing mimicry, beliefs about self-efficacy, and motivation and has been instrumental in integrating behavioral and cognitive theories.

The idea of transformative leadership has grown out of social learning theory and it proposes that transformative leaders question their unbridled use of power and their privilege of position to affect change (Shields, 2010). Transformative leadership suggests that a leader's inappropriate use of power leads to unequal relationships and that a leader that practices transformative leadership can support teachers to increase their students' achievement (Shields, 2010). Fleming (2018) explained that transformative learning takes place through the activation of previous experiences and connecting the experiences to new learning, which guides behavior. As new learning happens it leads to revisions of understanding that results in active attempts to improve what is questioned or goes against one's beliefs. Transformative leaders are activists who recognize the power they hold and use it to build relationships, voice concerns, share power, advocate for others, and "recognize the ethical dimensions of teaching other people's children" (Brown, 2004, p. 10). The fact that transformative leaders are activists and advocates, compels them to be morally responsible and dedicated to similarly educating children as they would educate their own children (Brown, 2004). This leads them to build relationships with community members, seek out and share power with underprivileged groups and individuals, and to act on behalf of groups and individuals to level the playing field and ensure equitable treatment and access to resources (Brown, 2004).

Sun and Leithwood (2012) conducted a study that researched how various

transformative leadership practices affected student achievement. They identified 11 different types of practices and found that two practices, "building collaborative structures" (p. 429) and "providing individualized support" (p. 429) as having small, but significant influence on increasing student achievement. Building collaborative structures is defined as teachers having a voice and being involved in the decision-making process related to programs and instruction (Sun & Leithwood, 2012). It is argued that staff should be part of the process to establish working conditions, which includes decisions about collaboration related to planning, professional development, and "distributing leadership broadly among staff" (Sun & Leithwood, 2012, p. 429). Providing individualized support as a "practice involves leaders listening and attending to individual opinions and needs, acting as mentors or coaches to staff members, treating them as individuals with unique needs and capacities, and supporting their professional development" (Sun & Leithwood, 2012, p. 429).

Distributed leadership is similar to participative leadership or democratic leadership and is aligned to social learning theory. The idea is that the members of an organization have shared power in the decision-making process. This promotes trust, teamwork, collaboration, and engagement among staff. The emphasis is on quality and building trusting and respectful relationships among teams to build capacity in people and to meet students' instructional needs. Bagwell (2019) explained that the challenges faced by school leaders cannot be solved by a few people and to close the achievement gap, leaders should engage other professionals by distributing work among many people. This requires a principal to be skilled in empowering others by removing barriers such as time

and resource constraints, encouraging communication, and building capacity in the members of the organization (Prasertratana, Sanratana, & Somprach, 2013).

Purpose

This study explored how a principal's use of distributed leadership to grow capacity in others shaped beliefs and perceptions about distributed leadership. In the past, educators often worked in isolation to accomplish tasks delegated to them by administrators. The principal was the sole decision-maker and power was concentrated within one or a few individuals with few opportunities for leadership capacity to develop or to be distributed among teachers. In the current context of education, which is heavily focused on high stakes testing and accountability this type of leadership can negatively affect morale and lead to frustration. Over time, frustration can result in educators leaving the field to pursue other careers (Goldring et al., 2014). Attrition by capable educators is a detriment to our children who need competent educators to ensure they have excellent educational experiences that boost their likelihood of success. Distributed leadership practices focus on building relationships and sharing leadership among various people in an organization, which builds trusting and collaborative relationships that are interdependent and include many leaders in the decision-making process (Gronn, 2002).

There is a strong case that the principal is second only to the teacher in ensuring a child's educational success (Wahlstrom, Louis, Leithwood, & Anderson, 2010). Without the necessary resources available to teachers, their job is confounded. It is the principal's responsibility to ensure that teachers have the required resources to meet the needs of their students. These resources are varied, but include protected time and space for planning and interaction among staff. It also includes caring and skillful principals who

put the needs of others and the organization before personal agendas and the need for personal recognition. The principal cannot accomplish this alone, but by utilizing distributed leadership theory techniques to build capacity in others, the goal of ensuring each child is successful is more likely to be attained.

Research Questions

The following research questions were explored during this study:

1. How have beliefs about involving teachers in the shared decision-making process evolved since completing the study?
2. What are teachers' perceptions about distributed leadership?

Definition of Terms

- Collaboration – Working together to reach shared goals.
- Common Planning – Time that is scheduled within the workday for teams of educators to meet and plan for the instruction of students.
- Educator – A person involved with the instruction of children. For this study, an educator is a teacher or administrator such as the principal.
- Micro-Manager – A person in a position of authority who makes decisions and delegates tasks without including input from others. It is a management style that focuses power and control on one or a few individuals within an organization and expects others to follow orders as directed without question.
- Reflective Practices – Involves thinking about experiences such as what happened in the past and what can be done in the future to affect improvement.
- Trust – A belief that forms in relationships between people that an individual or group of individuals are honest, truthful, and genuine in what they say and do.

- Job-Embedded Professional Development – Learning that occurs within the context of a person's workday. It can happen with students in real-time, away from students just before or after instruction, or away from students, but in the school just before or after instruction and focuses on real-time student concerns (Croft, Coggs, Dolan, Powers, & Killian, 2010).

Significance of the Study

The demands for educators to ensure that every child achieves academically are immense. The responsibilities and expectations placed on educators go beyond curriculum and instruction and with the emphasis on high stakes testing, the pressure continues to build. Long hours, low pay, minimal benefits, and increased responsibilities take a toll, resulting in teachers and principals leaving the profession for careers outside of education (Goldring et al., 2018; Goldring, et al., 2014). This is an unacceptable trend and one that must be addressed. Principals who embrace distributed leadership theory techniques are dynamic and recognize that the days of one centralized leader making the decisions are outmoded and do not result in academic gains for students. This study sought to add to the evidence that principals who cultivate capacity in others by fostering a culture of collaboration rather than isolation can limit attrition and build teams that work together. This ensures that children are provided educational experiences aligned to their needs and supports them to meet academic expectations.

Researcher's Positionality

My experience as a special education teacher was often an isolated practice. The general education teachers that I worked with were willing to try co-teaching, but convincing them to go beyond one teach and one assist was a challenge. This relegated

my support to entering the classroom and listening to the general education teacher teach a lesson while I provided cues to students to pay attention. During independent practice I usually perused the room checking in with students. Teaching was not what I had imagined it would be and I was rather disillusioned by the experience. The experience often left me feeling disappointed and I believed my skills as an educator were being wasted. I often thought of leaving the field to pursue a career in which I felt valued and part of a team. By reflecting, I realized that it would be a mistake to leave a career that is my calling and passion and that I would dedicate my efforts to building and refining collaborative structures and practices with my team and then across the campus that I worked. My ultimate goal was to help others to build collaborative structures at their campuses, which steered me to a district-level position providing consulting and professional development related to inclusive practices for students receiving special education services. The experience assisted me to develop skills to work with professionals with different views and personalities to find solutions to problems that hindered the educational process.

After a few years at the district level, I realized that it was difficult to establish meaningful professional relationships with the people that I worked with at the different campuses across the district because I was not at any campus for very long. My role was to help solve problems and then move onto the next problem. This was very rewarding, but I realized that I missed the collegial relationships that develop from working continuously with a team. The missing element of having meaningful collegial relationships prompted me to accept an administrative position at a Title 1 elementary campus with approximately 950 prekindergarten through fifth-grade children. It was a

challenging undertaking, but through a team effort in which administrators, academic coaches, and teacher leaders worked together to set norms, follow a common planning agenda, and commit to meeting with each other consistently each week and during professional learning communities (PLCs), the efforts paid off. Within a year, by using distributed leadership theory techniques in which many members of the staff shared leadership responsibilities we had implemented a common planning model in which administrators, general educators, special educators, and various support staff were consistently collaborating to plan for instruction.

My journey as an educator resulted in being selected as an elementary principal for a prekindergarten through fourth-grade campus with approximately 650 students. The campus had been targeted by the Texas Education Agency (TEA) as a campus needing improvement. It was my responsibility to provide leadership to the teachers of the school to assist them to meet the needs of their students and to ultimately improve student achievement. This study explored how a principal's use of distributed leadership to grow capacity in others shaped beliefs and perceptions about distributed leadership. This research is the result of taking best practices I have learned over the years as an educator and incorporating them with best practices on distributed leadership to develop teachers' skills to meet students' needs.

Chapter II

Review of Literature

Toxic leaders affect morale and their behavior influences followers to act more negatively in the workplace such as arguing and acting without regard for others (Burns, 2017). It can be debated that many people know how it feels to be treated poorly and do not want to follow in poor leaders' footsteps. This idea suggests that non-examples modeled by a toxic leader can be powerful catalysts for shaping behavior and assisting good leaders to develop their positive leadership styles to promote collaboration and teamwork among followers rather than emulating traits of poor leaders based on negative experiences. Spillane and Shirrell (2018) explained that collaboration and positive interactions between colleagues can lead to improvements and increased effectiveness. A principal who supports collaboration and models how to positively interact with colleagues encourages others to act similarly, which promotes a positive culture on the campus. Distributed leadership practices encourage people to interact with each other and designing an environment that provides proximity between different educators by placing accomplished teachers and coaches in central locations increases the likelihood that people will cross paths during the workday and interact with each other, which can encourage collaboration and lead to improvements (Spillane & Shirrell, 2018).

Servant Leaders

Servant leadership is a term created by Robert Greenleaf (1970), the founder of the *Center for Servant Leadership*, and is described in his essay, "The Servant as Leader." Other essays by Greenleaf promoting the concept of a leader serving others and ensuring the well-being of people within an organization followed and were eventually

published in book form in 1976 by Paulist Press. Greenleaf believed that the most successful organizations have leaders that act as caring coaches and are trustworthy (Center for Servant Leadership, n.d.). A central tenet of servant leaders is that they lead through moral and not through coercive means. The utilization of persuasion instead of domination creates opportunities for trust to grow and allows for choice and alternative ways of solving problems (Greenleaf, 1970). Greenleaf's philosophy promoted servant leaders as accepting and empathetic of others (Greenleaf, 1970). Servant leadership goes beyond the organization and Greenleaf believed that it had wide-ranging implications and possibilities for improving society as a whole (Greenleaf, 1970).

To become a servant leader, it is necessary to be a continuous learner and to think deeply about personal practices and beliefs that can be unnerving. It is through self-reflection and analysis that realities can be uncovered and then used as a springboard for improvement. Servant leaders are continual learners or "Mavens" (Gladwell, 2002, p. 60) that seek knowledge not simply for themselves, but to promote other's knowledge and growth. Servant leaders recognize the needs of followers and are empathetic and sensitive to the needs of individuals, groups of people, and the organization. They put their followers' needs above their own (Noland & Richards, 2015). Leaders that bully, abuse, and are toxic in their leadership style undermine followers personally and professionally. They are destructive and over time these types of leaders will fail due to their narcissism, self-promotion, authoritarian styles, and abuse of subordinates (Burns, 2017).

Costa and Kallick (2008) promoted "habits of mind" (p. xx) that emanate from the individual out to the wider community. Ideas such as listening with empathy, thinking flexibly, being reflective, and being responsible are promoted as methods for solving

problems in intelligent ways that support the individual and the community as a whole (Costa & Kallick, 2008). Sensitive leaders recognize and support the vision of the organization, but never at the expense of the people the organization serves. Servant leadership is not about waiting on others or doing menial tasks for them, but is about putting other's needs above one's self-centered aspirations. A servant leader is driven to serve first rather than being driven to lead due to a desire for power (Greenleaf, 1970). Noddings (2005) argued that responsible and caring school leaders promote content along with social, emotional, and behavioral well-being for students. It can be defended that a caring principal will do the same for teachers and will ensure that they have the resources needed to meet students' needs and that the work environment is healthy and positive. Strong leaders recognize the need for balanced leadership in which the needs of people matter along with the achievement of goals.

Distributed Leadership Theory

Distributed leadership is a framework that focuses on the dynamics of leadership in an organization and how different people in an organization can move in and out of leadership roles based on the requirements of situations (Diamond & Spillane, 2016). Distributed leadership goes beyond the traditional ideas of a sole leader and acknowledges that different individuals or groups of people can lead together depending on the needs of the people within the organization (Torres, 2019). Diamond and Spillane (2016) rationalized that distributed leadership is a social construct that embraces the nature of human interaction and how activities are done together by people in an organization. It is an integrated approach to leadership that requires members to address the *how*, *why*, and with *what* resources utilized by leaders and requires leaders to actively

interact with followers and work together to solve problems based on the specifics of the situation (Diamond & Spillane, 2016). A key tenet of distributed leadership is a focus on interactions between people and not a fixation on a sole leader (Diamond & Spillane, 2016). Torres (2019) suggested that effective distributed leadership practices require a quality leader and collaboration with members of the group. Torres (2019) claimed that these two elements can positively affect overall teacher job satisfaction. This is significant since teacher attrition negatively affects student achievement (Goldring et al., 2014). Teachers who have higher job satisfaction are less likely to leave their positions for careers outside of education (Griffith, 2004). Distributed leadership is a method for building capacity in others, which can positively affect teachers' self-efficacy. If teachers feel more competent and capable then they are more likely to remain in their positions (Sehgal et al., 2017; Van Maele & Van Houtte, 2014).

Collaboration

Drescher, Korsgaard, Welp, Picot, and Wigand (2014) have defined the early stages of group development as moving between social skills and task-related activities that allow groups to accomplish goals by sharing skills and processes to complete tasks while learning to work cooperatively with one another. They also contended that distributing the role of leadership among people affects performance, which suggests that when leadership is shared among members of a group trust increases and performance is positively affected (Drescher et al., 2014). Distributed leadership involves the principal as the lead learner who supports teachers to utilize strong pedagogy and assists with diagnosing learning needs while providing meaningful feedback to teachers to assist them to refine and develop skills (Fullan & Pinchot, 2018). For this to happen on a campus,

there must be targeted and purposeful interaction between staff consistently and it is the principal's role to empower and enable without dominating (Fullan & Pinchot, 2018). A strong leader is one that is proficient at enhancing the quality of the school's culture indirectly, but explicitly builds structures such as protected time and a master schedule that enables groups of teachers to have the ability to move the school forward to reach shared goals and improve students' performance (Fullan & Pinchot, 2018).

Spillane and Shirrell (2018) explained that structures such as shared common planning, teachers being given leadership roles, and PLCs are methods that support collaboration on campus. Designing an environment that encourages interaction between teachers supports their skill development, sharing of ideas, problem-solving, campus culture, and promotes the use of effective practices, which drives improvement (Spillane & Shirrell, 2018). Ritchie and Woods (2007) have identified several factors that are common to schools that have been identified as demonstrating distributed leadership practices. The factors are believed to be characteristic traits that support distributed leadership to flourish on a campus:

- School has explicit values, ethos, and aims
- The culture is essentially collaborative and structures exist to foster collaboration and teamwork
- Staff are challenged and motivated
- Staff regard themselves as learners
- Staff feel valued
- Staff feel trusted and well supported by the head
- Staff involved in creating, sharing, and developing a collective vision

- Staff were aware of their talents, of the impact of the school on their skill acquisition, and of their own leadership potential
- Staff seem to relish the responsibilities and opportunities that they are given
- Staff feel supported and enabled to take risks
- Staff are appreciative of the high degree of autonomy they have (Ritchie & Woods, 2007, p. 372)

The characteristics are essential, but will not fully develop if campus leadership does not model the characteristics and actively participate in collaborative activities along with teachers. Ritchie and Woods (2007) explained that campuses that exhibit distributed leadership practices downplay hierarchical control by one or a few individuals, support autonomy and risk-taking of teachers, and staff play an important role in the decision-making process. They note that leaders who distribute responsibilities encourage and support teachers to feel more confident and adept to take risks (Ritchie & Woods, 2017). Distributed leadership requires teamwork and team effort by all staff, but especially the principal who sets the tone and is a powerful force for supporting and developing a culture of collaboration to grow on the campus.

Professional Learning Communities (PLCs)

PLCs are a common practice in schools, but the quality and fidelity of how they are utilized varies greatly. Dufour and Reeves (2016) have termed most PLC practices as “lite” (p. 69). They believe that the concept of PLCs is misunderstood and that it is common practice for schools to rename traditional practices such as book studies and meetings that do not affect student achievement as PLCs. They have outlined the

understandings needed by members of PLCs for their efforts to affect student achievement. They argue that people must:

- Work together in collaborative teams rather than in isolation and take collective responsibility for student learning.
- Establish a guaranteed and viable curriculum that specifies the knowledge, skills, and dispositions students are expected to acquire, unit by unit.
- Use an assessment process that includes frequent, team-developed, common formative assessments based on the guaranteed and viable curriculum.
- Use the results of common formative assessments to: Identify students who need additional time and support for learning. Identify students who would benefit from enriched or extended learning. Identify and address areas of individual strengths or weaknesses in teaching based on the evidence of student learning. Identify and address areas where none of the team members were able to bring students to the desired level of proficiency.
- Create a system of interventions that guarantees that students who struggle receive additional time and support in ways that do not remove them from new direct instruction, regardless of the teacher to whom they have been assigned (Dufour & Reeves, 2016, pp. 69-70).

Members of PLCs can assess the quality of their practices by asking four questions that Dufour and Reeves (2016) maintained will assist with determining if PLCs are “lite” (p. 69) or “genuine” (p. 69). The questions include asking what it is that the PLC wants children to learn, asking how evidence will be collected to demonstrate that students have learned the material, asking what will be done when it is determined that students have

not learned the material, and asking what extended opportunities will be provided to students who did not learn the content (Dufour & Reeves, 2016). PLCs require a great deal of planning, deep thought and reflection, continuous hard work, and commitment by members to the process if they are to positively affect student improvement. The task is not easy, but by utilizing tenets of the PLC process similar to what Dufour and Reeves (2016) have identified and reflecting on campus procedures through questioning, improvements in student achievement can be attained. This requires going beyond the rebranding of traditional ineffective practices such as book studies and team meetings that do not result in action being labeled as PLCs and looking deeply at collective practices and following research-based guidelines for PLCs with fidelity.

Teachers as Leaders

Fullan and Knight declared that "next to the principal, coaches are the most crucial change agent in a school" (Fullan & Knight, 2011). Dole and Nelson (2012) indicated that teachers often teach their preferred way and, in many cases, do not have an understanding of how curriculum and instruction should align with materials used to teach. One way to remedy this problem is to employ academic coaches who can provide beneficial and necessary support to teachers to ensure that they develop the skills needed to teach the curriculum as intended. Similar to many educators, academic coaches are tasked with many roles and responsibilities that may not be directly related to working with teachers and results in academic coaches spending an inordinate amount of the school day on tasks unrelated to coaching (L'Allier & Elish-Piper, 2012). L'Allier and Elish-Piper (2012) reported that on average only a third of a literacy coach's day is spent on coaching activities while the other part of the day is split between many activities such

as analyzing data and administrative tasks such as ordering materials. L'Allier and Elish-Piper (2012) stated that even in schools where the goal is that literacy coaches spend 60% to 80% of their day coaching that coaches often fall far short of the goal. The fact that teachers require support to know how to align curriculum and instruction makes it imperative that academic coaches spend the majority of the school day with teachers supporting them to instruct students using aligned methods, practices, and materials. It is the principal's responsibility to safeguard academic coaches' time and to limit non-coaching related tasks.

The role of academic coaches is difficult and requires coaches to be masterful at building relationships and adapting methods and strategies based on different factors such as teachers' experience, resistance, and openness to coaching. McKenna and Walpole (2013) explained that coaching does not always result in teachers changing their practices or improvements in student achievement. Academic coaches must adapt to the needs of teachers and be willing to use more direct coaching methods to encourage teachers to adapt practices to support academic improvement if practices are not effective. Teachers may grow resentful of academic coaches if their relationship is not based on trust and connectedness (Walpole & McKenna, 2013). Academic coaches must be aware that professional development can take many different forms besides whole group training such as job-embedded professional development in the classroom in authentic environments, which can have an impact on teachers' practices. It also allows for academic coaches to model and provide meaningful feedback while working directly with teachers in the classroom (Walpole & McKenna, 2013). As a result of job-embedded professional development, teachers' knowledge increases, which may result in

improvements in student achievement, but whether or not the professional development is effective is dependent on the details (Walpole & McKenna, 2013). For coaching to be effective, a schedule must be created to support coaches to work with teachers in the classroom. The campus leadership team must be involved in the process and look for evidence such as through classroom walkthroughs that professional development and new approaches are being implemented in the classroom by teachers. Walpole and McKenna (2013) reported that student achievement increased when literacy coaches spent more time in classrooms with teachers. Coaching in the classroom supports the literacy coach and teacher to work together to plan differentiated instruction aligned to the students' levels and can be an effective practice for building collaborative relationships and improving student performance.

Kang (2017) proposed that literacy coaches collaborating with teachers can increase teachers' professional growth and build collaborative relationships. If both are willing to be vulnerable and recognize that there is not a competition, but a similar purpose and goal then the relationship can grow and become more cooperative in nature.

L'Allier and Elish-Piper (2012) explained that trust is a key foundation to a coaching relationship and that teachers develop trust of literacy teachers when they know their conversations are confidential and that the literacy leader follows up on promises and commitments. Dozier (2008) implied that methods coaches can use to build trust with teachers include working alongside them to solve problems by working together and engaging with teachers during literacy activities. A willingness to be open to new ideas and other people's ideas supports group members to find common ground. Academic coaches are leaders of teachers, teachers are leaders of other teachers, while principals are

administrators who are also leaders of teachers. The evolving role of a principal as a leader of campus learning will require coaching skills that include building trusting relationships to solve problems collaboratively.

Trust

Coyle (2018) declared that for great teams to build collaborative relationships that result in shared goals being met, a safe environment must be created and people must be open to sharing vulnerabilities. When people believe they can trust each other, they are more open to sharing their weaknesses and experiences, which can foster possibilities for growth and shared learning. This allows the group to establish purpose and work together toward a shared vision (Coyle, 2018). It is a principal's role to provide resources, remove barriers, and empower others so that collective goals can be reached (Mineo, 2014). Core values that embody concepts such as respect, fairness, honesty, sincerity, integrity, and credibility are the essence of the concept of trust and a leader who practices these concepts will grow trust within members of the group (Mineo, 2014). It is essential that a strong leader models and embraces these concepts at all times. A leader who keeps promises and works to ensure the well-being of all members of a group will increase trust, enrich communication, and build capacity in the members of an organization (Mineo, 2014).

As the body of evidence in support of distributed leadership grows, it is often found that trust is an essential component of relationships and is necessary for collaborative cultures to grow within schools and between people. Beycioglu, Ozer, and Ugurlu (2012) conducted a study in which 218 elementary school teachers in Turkey were interviewed to gather data and analyze if there is a correlation between distributed

leadership and trust. The results of their study revealed that trust by teachers was moderately affected when a principal promoted distributed leadership practices on campus. This implies that to build collaborative structures and improve student achievement that trust is a vital component of the process. Researchers from Khon Kaen University in Thailand have studied distributed leadership by gathering samples from 728 principals across Thailand and they concluded that trust had the highest influence on the success of distributed leadership followed by collaboration having the second-highest influence on the success of distributed leadership (Prasertratana, Sanratana, & Somprach, 2013). For distributed leadership to be an effective practice, it can be concluded that trust and collaboration are key elements to the successful implementation of the practice. Trust is an abstract concept, but is one that most people value and understand. Trust must be cultivated and tended to and if it is broken it is difficult to mend. It is also a concept that transcends culture, race, and ethnicity. Leis, Rim-Kaufman, Paxton, and Sandilos (2017) have analyzed the idea of relational trust and argued that it is a key component of reform efforts. They emphasize that trust between the principal and teachers and trust between teachers are critical to building capacity within individuals, groups, and for enriching communication (Leis et al., 2017). The perceptions that teachers develop related to how caring the principal is to members of the school community such as teachers, students, and parents affect the level of trust that teachers have for the principal (Tschannen-Moran, & Gareis, 2014). A principal's competence, willingness to put others first, and efforts to involve others in decision-making are presented as factors affecting the level of trust that teachers have for the principal (Tschannen-Moran, & Gareis, 2014). Trust is not something that is built and then abandoned, but is a conceptual structure that requires

ongoing effort and commitment to maintaining and cultivating by all members of a group—especially, campus leaders.

Cultivating Capacity

If teachers are to develop the skills needed to implement and use evidenced-based practices effectively with students, campus leadership must be supportive and provide job-embedded professional development opportunities for teachers to develop needed skills. Campus leaders will also need to allocate time for teachers to collaborate with other teachers, support staff, and academic coaches to plan for instruction. Effective campus leaders should embrace and acknowledge the important role they play in developing and growing teachers' self-efficacy. Sehgal et al. (2017) proposed that campus leaders such as principals have great influence and power to create an environment that affects how teachers view themselves and they assert that there is a "positive correlation between principal leadership and teacher self-efficacy" (p. 511). Sehgal et al. (2017) expressed that it is the principal's responsibility to create an environment that supports collaboration among peers. Goddard et al. (2015) reported that campus leaders "serve as a catalyst for teacher collaboration" (p. 512) and a principal's skill level will lead to campus procedures that are collaborative in nature, which supports teachers to create effective instruction.

Teachers that feel detached and have not developed an affiliation with colleagues are more likely to become emotionally exhausted and view themselves as less capable (Van Maele & Van Houtte, 2014). This leads to teacher burn-out, which is affected by continuous exposure to stress (Van Maele & Van Houtte, 2014). Over time, this leads to dissatisfaction and eventually teachers leaving the field of education. Thompson (2017)

found that teachers' perceptions of professional development opportunities, their level of self-efficacy, and whether or not they viewed the principal as skillful affected school performance. The changing role of the principal as savior and sole decision-maker to one of developing capacity in others, distributing leadership, and involving others in decision-making are necessary. Leaders that hold fast to methods such as leading in isolation, not involving others in decision-making, and not developing leadership skills in many people in the organization will experience frustration and failure. It is not possible for one person or a few people to successfully meet school improvement goals on their own. The evolving needs of students, high stakes testing, compliance, and accountability requirements have changed the culture of education and to meet the needs of students, collaboration and teamwork are necessary. This is more likely to be accomplished by a skilled principal who builds capacity in others by building trusting relationships, providing quality job-embedded professional development opportunities, protecting time for collaboration and common planning, ensuring resources are available to teachers to meet the needs of their students, and creating a collegial and respectful work environment that honors and models core values such as respect, fairness, honesty, sincerity, integrity, and credibility, which embody the essence of the concept of trust.

Social Justice

Urban schools require leaders that are sensitive to the unique background experiences and culture that students bring with them to the school environment. When researchers attempt to study urban schools, they must take into account the complexities of culture and the social and psychological aspects that affect students' learning. It is often the case, that teachers in urban schools do not share the same culture as the students

they teach. The United States Department of Education reported that in 2012, 82% of teachers were White, but only 51% of students were White. The statistics were similar for principals during 2012, with over 80% of school principals identified as White, 10% identified as Black, and only 7% of principals identified as Hispanic (Goldring et al., 2018). It is expected that by 2024, the White student population will continue to decrease and students of color will comprise 56% of the student population (Goldring et al., 2018). This implies that educators will need to be sensitive to the fact that White culture will not be the dominant culture in the near future. It is essential that all teachers, regardless of race and ethnicity, are sensitive to the unique cultures and background experiences of their students if they are to build relationships with their students and teach them in a respectful and sensitive manner. Increasing the diversity of teachers can support all students by providing more types of role models for students, reducing negative stereotypes, and modeling for students how to interact and get along in a diverse society (Goldring et al., 2018).

Principals are a necessary part of the process in schools to create culturally, racially, and economically inclusive educational environments that value all students. Principals can study their practices to gain insight about what is working well for students and what needs to be improved to ensure that students are educated according to their needs to ensure social justice and equitable educational opportunities for students. Methodological frameworks such as ethnography and autoethnography can be appropriate methodologies to qualitatively explore and make sense of one's environment (Eisenhart, 2001). Culture varies across race, ethnicity, and location. When culture is investigated in an ethnographic study it must be clearly defined to ensure clarity of

meaning. In order for researchers who also happen to be principals of campuses to study culture, they must have a deep understanding of the students' culture who attend the school. Eisenhart (2001) explained that qualitative studies are increasing in popularity among researchers, but that when culture is part of the study it is critical to lessen elements that lead to confusion. In the past, culture was more bounded than it is today. Even with more blending of cultures it is proposed that it is still valid to put forth the effort to understand people's thoughts, beliefs, and actions in an attempt to make sense of one's environment and to gain insight into the complexity of social groups and how people can work together to affect change (Eisenhart, 2001). The pressures and requirements placed on educators related to state accountability require sensitive leaders that work with others and this starts with school principals being aware of biases and then working with others to build capacity in teachers to grow their ability to provide culturally sensitive instruction.

Autoethnography is concerned with self-study and originated as a form of research used in anthropology. It is autobiographical in nature and involves self-reflection, which includes studying one's practice and how it affects others (Shank & Brown, 2007). Hughes, Pennington, and Makris (2012) presented autoethnography as a legitimate form of empirical research that focuses on reflexive study and interpretation of personal experiences; whereas, ethnography focuses on rules, norms, and forms of resistance within groups. Autoethnography is a supportive framework to make sense of experiences and to figure out how to solve problems (Bochner & Ellis, 2006). Both are useful methods for exploring culture, but when principals are exploring how their leadership practices affect others, autoethnography provides a reflexive component that

may provide deeper insight into how leadership practices support or do not support teachers. Ethnography as a research method continues to evolve and its current focus is on emancipating or lifting up oppressed people and ensuring social justice for children in underperforming schools (Yon, 2003). This often applies to children of color who attend urban schools at higher rates than White students.

Feinberg (2015) argued that critical pragmatism and ethnography can be used together to solve problems when moral concerns arise or when there are unequal power relationships. They can be useful methods for solving the problems of people and are especially helpful when there is a person or group of people that have a dominant interest or agenda that affects others with less power (Feinberg, 2015). This is applicable for members of school communities who are overseen by principals and for the students who are placed in the care of teachers with more power than them. Critical pragmatism is a method that brings to light issues or problems that people may not be aware of that need to be addressed and ethnography is a method that seeks truth and answers similar to the Socratic method (Feinberg, 2015). It is critical for a researcher to recognize the relevance of ethnography as an applicable method for educational inquiry, but it is constrained by the complexity of language (Frankham & Smears, 2012). It is very difficult to depict truth when writing due to the complexities of language that affect meaning and it is tricky to accurately portray findings, conclusions, and thoughts because meaning is interpreted differently among people (Frankham & Smears, 2012). Principals conducting research must be cognizant of the many cultures on their campuses and consider them when designing studies and analyzing findings. This is essential because language and how meaning is constructed from language is limited by its use and varies among different

cultures. Researchers utilizing ethnography to frame their research must be cautious when interpreting and reporting findings since language can contaminate the truth of the message (Frankham & Smears, 2012). There are two predominant views of how ethnography should be conducted. One view is that it should be as systematic and scientific as possible and the other view is that it should be more holistic and use interpretive tools to support the creation and sustainability of knowledge (Coles & Thomson, 2016). The act of extensive writing can be a meaningful practice to support sense making, organization, and analysis through continuous effort, which can be difficult to sort through, code, find themes, and write up in a sensical manner (Coles & Thomson, 2016).

Bagwell (2019) has explored leadership methods of principals by analyzing their practices through a distributed leadership framework and it is recommended that leaders work with others rather than in isolation. A distributed leadership framework explores how leadership can go beyond one central leader and spread to others not necessarily employed in traditional leadership roles. This can generalize to students as well since it is believed that people learn from others by interacting in a social context through mimicry, beliefs about self-efficacy, and motivation to learn (Bandura, 1979; Bandura, 1977).

Bagwell (2019) argued that distributed leadership includes collective efforts of individuals networking to solve problems and working together to overcome obstacles to improve student achievement. Dinham, Aubusson, and Brady (2008) have explored action learning, which is a method where teachers come together to learn from each other and share experiences. The idea is that groups can solve problems more efficiently by working together rather than in isolation. Dinham, Aubusson, and Brady (2008)

explained that action learning builds capacity within individuals and across an organization. It empowers people, creates collegial relationships, and respects the skills that people bring to the group (Dinham, Aubusson, & Brady, 2008). Children can develop efficacy through their own agency, which is affected by adult interaction and support (Rainio, & Hilppö, 2017). It is difficult to study student agency since it is not necessarily visible and studying it is further limited by the predicament of not knowing if it is something that lasts and is constant or is it something that is tied to the situation and not constant (Rainio & Hilppö, 2017). It is believed that agency is developmental and is affected by social and psychological experiences within the individual and by experiences with others (Rainio & Hilppö, 2017). Diverse and inclusive environments support people from different cultures, races, and economic statuses to understand each other, which can lessen negative stereotypes and increase understanding of cultures different from one's own (Goldring et al., 2018).

Technology has influenced life to move at a faster pace than in the past, which makes it difficult for researchers to perform longitudinal studies and long-term field studies (Henderson & Woods, 2016). Time and money constraints add to the dilemma for researchers, but Henderson and Woods (2006) advocated for returning to previous research environments at different points in time to enhance understanding and gain a different perspective from what was revealed during the original research. This is relevant for principals because it supports a serial approach to collecting data that provides a more robust perspective of the data than only collecting data during the original research (Henderson & Woods, 2006). This is a reflexive practice aligned to the methodological frameworks of ethnography and autoethnography and can be used as a

form of self-assessment to determine if principals' thoughts, beliefs, feelings, knowledge, and skills are evolving and growing. It is also a supportive practice for principals to identify and analyze practices that are effective and practices that are not effective in an ongoing effort to promote continuous improvement based on the needs of students.

Principals are responsible for the learning of all students on their campuses and they cannot reach every student or every teacher on their own. Modern leaders should acknowledge and embrace distributed leadership as a method for growing leaders in an organization. Methodological frameworks such as ethnography and autoethnography can be helpful for exploring if shared decision-making with members of the school community influences change. This idea goes beyond the principal as the primary leader and supports others to move in and out of leadership roles based on the needs of the students and the organization. This includes developing leadership capacity in students to ensure that they grow into self-directed and continuous learners that set goals for themselves and are capable of reaching them. Students who develop leadership skills can generalize these types of skills to their lives outside of school, which supports social justice because they will develop the ability to advocate for themselves as they grow into adults. The idea is that over time they will have more of a say and control about who and which for profit organizations move into their communities and make decisions for them such as how they or their children will be educated.

Huchting, Cunningham, Aldana, and Ruiz (2017) have explored how communities of practice (COPs) affect collaboration, shared goals, and professional relationships among teachers in a consortium of Catholic schools. The researchers were interested in analyzing if COPs positively affected students' academic achievement who

were from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. The study employed a case study method that looked at three elementary schools in Southern California with high immigrant populations. Administrators of the schools used a distributed leadership framework to support capacity building and collaboration. The stakeholders of the school such as the superintendent, principal, teachers, students, parents, and community members were involved in the process. The findings of the study were interpreted as COPs resulting in sustained student enrollment and increased Catholic identity. This implies that when educators work together for a shared purpose and have a common vision, they can reach goals through collaborative efforts rather than working in isolation. As people work with each other and develop trusting relationships, they learn to understand and take into account each other's point of view. This may lead to more meaningful relationships that can cross cultural, racial, and economic boundaries leading to meaningful relationships among different groups of people.

Social justice, in terms of the school environment, is focused on ensuring that all children have equitable opportunities to receive a quality education that supports them to reach their goals and have future opportunities that lead to improvements in the quality of students' lives. It is critical that teachers recognize that students require care and understanding if they are to learn content. Noddings (2001) explained that coercion is often masked as care. It is often the case that students are prescribed a standard curriculum and deviation from the standard is not encouraged because the belief is that any deviation results in a child missing out on potential opportunities. High stakes and over testing have contributed to educators teaching to tests, principals pressuring teachers, and community members such as parents, teachers, and administrators

pressuring students to score high. The demographics of America continuously change as different groups of people move to America from various parts of the world. The public-school system was founded by Europeans and it is the case that people that do not fit that background are asked to *fit* into that culture. This essentially means that other cultures are expected to learn and be assessed on material that may be presented to them in ways that they struggle to make sense of and connect with. If teachers are to build relationships with students and design instruction that is accessible to students, teachers must be sensitive to various cultures and also skilled in adapting instruction. This is required to ensure that all groups have similar opportunities to learn content and not just students who are part of the dominant culture. Noddings (2001) explained that teachers in urban settings must be attuned to the diverse needs of the melting pot of students that often live in urban areas.

The authors of *Twenty-First Century Jim Crow Schools: The Impact of Charters on Public Education* researched the charter school movements in New Orleans, Chicago, and New York City. They pointed out that after Hurricane Katrina, the charter school movement in New Orleans resulted in a return to segregation in schools similar to how schools were separated by race and economic status before *Brown vs. Board of Education* (Sanders, Stovall, & White, 2018). The media and donors who supported charter schools in New Orleans touted the charter movement as a successful reform, but upon deeper analysis it became apparent that the children of New Orleans were the victims, while self-interested politicians and entrepreneurs controlling the money and decisions were the winners. Sanders et al. (2018) explained that the people of New Orleans were taken advantage of to push forward an agenda of fixing what was believed to be a failing

education system. The reality is that the reforms created an education system in which students were worse off academically than before the reform took place (Sanders et al., 2018). This is not social justice. Instead, it is an example of how the dominant culture forced their beliefs on others. Unconsciously or consciously they believed their way of living, personal beliefs, and methods for educating people of cultures, races, and economic statuses different from their own were inferior and needed to be changed. If culture, race, and economic status were considered before making changes, people in power would be sensitive and respectful of the community and work with the stakeholders rather than forcing their own beliefs on them without their input or involvement. This would be a more supportive promotion of social justice for the members of communities and schools rather than implementing reforms without their full consent and understanding.

Within a school community, a principal can promote social justice by implementing response to intervention (RtI) and multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS) practices that value diversity and take into account how cultural and economic differences affect learning and how prepared some children are for learning grade level content. Social justice is concerned with guaranteeing that all people, regardless of race, sex, and background have equitable opportunities (Winfrey-Avant, 2016). Hammond (2017) explained that multicultural teaching, social justice teaching, and culturally relevant teaching (CRT) support children to overcome barriers that other children do not experience, and all three components work together. The National Equity Project advocated that CRT enhances equality and reduces the predictability of who is successful and who fails (National Equity Project, n.d.). Campus RtI/MTSS practices, including first

instruction, should focus on improving the learning capacity of children by building their cognitive and social emotional skills so that they become self-directed leaders of their own learning (Hammond, 2017). It has been established that principals and teachers are predominantly White. Winfrey-Avant (2016) explained that people overseeing RtI/MTSS programs typically implement programming for students based on their own cultural views and experiences, which may be based on misinterpretations of behavior displayed by cultures different from their own. Winfrey-Avant (2016) advocated for the use of quality Tier 1 instruction that is designed around culturally responsive and research-based practices. It is recommended that Tier 2 practices be intensive, supplemental, and supportive of cultural and individual needs, while Tier 3 supports should be based on a problem-solving approach focused on altering and adapting for children based on their unique needs and performance data (Winfrey-Avant, 2016).

Principals have an important role to play to ensure social justice for their students and this requires reflection and thought about one's biases, practices, and beliefs that may be misinformed. In order to assure equity for all students, principals must be aware and recognize when social injustice is occurring and then put a plan in place to address and ameliorate any injustices. Principals can begin this work by being visible and out in the school interacting and building relationships with students and teachers. This builds trust within the school community. Building relationships and being involved in the daily happenings of the school supports principals to go beyond the surface level and become witnesses of any social injustice prevalent on the campus. When principals are also researchers, they can design qualitative studies utilizing methodological frameworks such as ethnography and autoethnography to explore social injustice. Both frameworks support

principals to deeply explore and understand if certain groups are receiving more privilege than others. Autoethnography, goes further in assisting the principal with reflecting on his or her practices. This is very important since the principal is the learning leader of the campus and has great influence to shape culture on a campus. Armed with this type of understanding, principals can begin the difficult work of supporting the members of the organization to process and come to terms with inequality and unjust social practices that may negatively affect some students' achievement. Once this occurs, the principal can work with teachers to begin understanding why inequality exists and they can work together to establish a "new social order" (Winfrey-Avant, 2016, p. 511) in a positive attempt to address inequality on the campus. These types of activities are difficult for many people to discuss and come to terms with, but in order to address inequities it is necessary to have difficult conversations and collaboratively work through the concerns and problem solve if the concerns are to be addressed. Over time, the playing field would be leveled and all students would have equitable opportunities to excel and reach goals not due to advantages of race, culture, or economic status, but because they were provided equitable opportunities supported by an educational system that understands and values diversity to guarantee social justice for all.

Summary

High stakes testing, accountability, and compliance requirements placed on 21st Century educators have resulted in traditional forms of leadership becoming outmoded. The era of decisions being made for the group by one or a few people in positions of authority is antiquated and does not positively affect student achievement. 21st Century leadership is complex and requires a leader that can develop capacity in others by

building and supporting collaborative relationships among the members of a group. This means that modern leaders must be comfortable allowing others to move in and out of leadership roles based on the needs of the organization. They do not seek power for the sake of having it, but are compelled to serve others first. A servant leader recognizes and is sensitive to the needs of the members of the school community and involves others in the decision-making process. Leaders who utilize frameworks such as social learning theory and distributed leadership theory in their practice have the potential to affect student achievement because they operate through social means by collectively collaborating with others to solve problems and reach organizational goals. They also appreciate that collaboration and cultivating capacity in others cannot be achieved unless the members of the group trust each other and believe that each member has the other members' best interests in mind. Administrators, academic coaches, and other teacher leaders can affect student achievement by working together rather than in isolation to meet shared goals. These efforts build capacity across the organization, which can lead to increased teacher efficacy, reduced educator attrition, and increased student achievement (Goldring et al., 2014; Griffith, 2004; Sehgal et al., 2017; Van Maele & Van Houtte, 2014).

Chapter III

Methodology

Introduction of Research Design

A qualitative research design was chosen because the study focused on how behavior and attitudes were influenced when a principal distributed leadership to others. Creswell (2014) explained that qualitative research can be used to explore how one's role, experiences, background, and culture influences how meaning is created. Social learning theory proposed that people learn from each other by interacting socially (Bandura, 1979; Bandura, 1977). Research by Fleming argued that new learning happens when connections are made between what has been previously learned and what is newly learned (2018). As new learning is developed, it will then shape future behavior (Fleming, 2018). Transformative leaders question their use of power to influence others and they avoid using their position to coerce others (Shields, 2010). A qualitative research design facilitated the exploration of my leadership practice and how the act of distributing leadership roles to teachers influenced teachers' perceptions and beliefs about distributed leadership.

The present study used an inductive approach by which I gathered data and then analyzed the data to identify themes. Credibility and truthfulness are complicated in qualitative research because interpretations are influenced by the researcher's unique background experiences and beliefs (Schwandt, Lincoln, & Guba, 2007). Qualitative studies address complex problems that include factors related to how people interact with each other that cannot be addressed through numerical data alone (Creswell, 2014). Shank and Brown (2007) explained that when it is necessary to understand the why of a

phenomenon, it may require “looking at the roles that personal and interpersonal meanings play in shaping lived experience” (p. 60). A qualitative design supports the identification of complex factors and catalyzes understanding as the researcher searches for meaning in the various forms of data collected.

This study explored how I used distributed leadership with others in an attempt to grow capacity and positively influence beliefs and perceptions about distributed leadership. Two questions were explored during the study:

1. How have beliefs about involving teachers in the shared decision-making process evolved since completing the study?
2. What are teachers’ perceptions about distributed leadership?

The objective of this study was to study how beliefs and perceptions evolved when I distributed leadership tasks to others within the organization that may or may not have been in formal campus leadership positions. The study was an autoethnographic investigation concerning my efforts as a first-year principal to build capacity through meaningful discourse, reflexive practices, collaboration, PLCs, and by guaranteeing teachers necessary resources such as time, space, and support. This chapter is divided into several sections that address the methodological framework, participants and context, sampling design, data collection methods, instrumentation, data analysis, and ethical considerations.

Methodological Framework

Autoethnography is a form of self-study involving reflection in which the researcher actively studies personal experiences scientifically and systematically to better understand cultural groups (Hughes, Pennington, & Makris, 2012). It originated as a form

of research used in anthropology, but has been incorporated into educational research because it is a method that can be used to explore the complexity of how groups of people interact with each other (Hughes et al., 2012). School settings are environments that have social and cultural aspects that influence how people interact with and treat each other. Within schools, the principal is a key player in influencing the culture of the organization. Furthermore, autoethnography is a supportive framework for reflecting on practices that influence others, thus it is a fitting method to use for the given topic. Data collected through autoethnography methods such as field notes, journal entries, observations, and semi-structured interviews are forms of data that can provide insight into themes and trends that influence the culture of a campus (Creswell, 2014). The idea is that by identifying themes and trends, a reflexive leader can adapt his or her leadership practice to the needs of the people in the organization and build leadership capacity in others that positively influences student achievement. Bagwell (2019) explained that the challenging task of closing achievement gaps for children is daunting and requires involving others in the process rather than school leaders working alone. An autoethnographic approach was utilized because it is a method to aide in making sense of one's environment and it is a useful method to understand the complexity of social groups and how they work together (Eisenhart, 2001). Elementary schools are structured as hierarchies with principals as the leaders and sole decision makers in many cases. Depending on a principal's leadership style, he or she may follow traditional forms of leadership in which he or she makes most or all of the decisions that affect the members of the school community or the principal may employ more of a distributed leadership style in which decisions are made more democratically. Hughes et al. (2012) argued for

the credibility of autoethnography as a legitimate form of empirical research. Schwandt et al. (2007) explained that a qualitative research design that includes the researcher carefully choosing appropriate autoethnographic methods to gather data can strengthen qualitative validity and qualitative reliability, which increases the credibility of the research.

Autoethnography has an autobiographical focus while ethnography is more focused on social interactions and cultural settings (Shank & Brown, 2007). Feinberg (2015) argued that ethnography can be used to solve problems when moral concerns arise or when there are unequal power relationships. Ethnography is a useful method for solving the problems of people and for exploring issues of social justice for oppressed students attending under performing schools (Yon, 2003). It can be especially helpful when there is a person or group of people that have a dominant interest or agenda that affects others with less power (Feinberg, 2015). The setting of this study was an elementary school that had been targeted by the TEA as in need of improvement. The school was assigned an overall state accountability rating of “B” for Student Achievement by the TEA for 2019. The campus was assigned a state accountability rating of “D” for School Progress and a “D” for Closing the Gaps by the TEA for 2019. Due to failing grades on the state’s accountability system, the campus was required to create a targeted improvement plan to address failing domains. As a result, there was a need to improve teachers’ ability to ensure that all children demonstrated growth over the school year. It could be argued that ethnography could be used to explore why some groups of students on the campus are outperforming other students. Due to the influence I have as the principal to affect teacher practice on the campus, autoethnography was

chosen for this study because it goes further and supports exploring the complexities of a principal distributing leadership to others to influence change. If the study was simply focused on students' lack of achievement, ethnography may have been a more suitable framework for the study because the focus would have been about studying why some groups of students were meeting academic targets while others were not.

Autoethnography was chosen for this study instead of ethnography due to the reflexive component of the study in which I continuously reflected on my leadership practices and how they influenced teachers' perceptions and beliefs about distributed leadership. Ethnography and autoethnography are qualitative methodologies, but they differ from each other in that autoethnography focuses on reflexive study and interpretation of personal experiences and ethnography focuses on rules, norms, and forms of resistance within groups (Hughes et al., 2012). This study acknowledged that forms of resistance within groups would be encountered, but they were addressed through supportive collaborative practices that were intended to build capacity in teachers to support them to use a common planning model and collaborative practices to design instruction tailored to their students' needs. This study involved reflection and self-study concerning a principal's use of distributed leadership techniques to build capacity in others. Autoethnography was chosen as the methodological framework because the nature of the study was to explore how my leadership practice affected others and influenced their perceptions about the value of distributed leadership

Participants and Context

The participants included six fourth-grade teachers from a kindergarten through fourth-grade elementary campus. I was also a participant and was a first-year principal at

the time of the study. I chose fourth-grade teachers due to the pressures they face on the campus for students to pass state standardized assessments. The campus leadership team included an academic coach, assistant principal, special education team leader, counselor, math interventionist, reading interventionist, enrichment specialist, librarian, English language learning specialist, and a principal who regularly planned with teachers and participated in professional development and PLCs alongside teachers. The campus had approximately 21% of students identified as economically disadvantaged and the number of students with limited English proficiency historically increased each school year. At the time of the study, approximately 13% of the student population identified as Asian, 5% of the student population identified as Black, 11% of the student population identified as Hispanic, 3% of the student population identified as Multi-Ethnic, and approximately 67% of the student population identified as White. The 2017-2018 *Texas Academic Performance Report* (TAPR) stated that approximately 2% of the staff were beginning teachers, approximately 12% of the teachers had one to five years of teaching experience, approximately 12% of the staff had six to 12 years of teaching experience, approximately 20% of the staff had 11 to 20 years of teaching experience, and 5% of the staff had over 20 years of teaching experience (TEA, 2018). All teachers on the campus met state credentialing requirements and 77% had Bachelor's degrees (TEA, 2018). 23% of the teachers had Master's degrees (TEA, 2018). The teachers on the campus had an average of 13 years of teaching experience and an average of a little over seven years of experience within the district (TEA, 2018). Of the six fourth-grade teachers that participated in the study, two were first year teachers, one was in her second year of

teaching, two had eight years of experience, and one had 16 years of classroom teaching experience.

To address growth measures, the campus leadership team focused on growing teachers' ability to differentiate for students by utilizing a common planning model that included members of the leadership team supporting teachers to adapt instructional content, products, and processes to increase the likelihood that students would meet grade level expectations. A lesson plan template was created to guide teachers and members of the leadership team to plan differentiated lessons. An example of a lesson plan template is included as Appendix A. Campus common planning activities were influenced by the TEA guide *Co-Teaching A How-To Guide: Guidelines for Co-Teaching in Texas* (TEA, 2018). The guide includes an agenda that shows teachers how to collaborate together to plan instruction by addressing components such as curriculum, data, instructional challenges, co-teaching arrangements, and communication needs (TEA, 2018). The intended outcome of common planning was that each child would grow academically and that state indicators for performance would increase. Teachers were provided professional development opportunities aligned to their students' needs that happened at the campus and off the campus. Teachers and members of the leadership team attended workshops offered through educational support centers, they visited campuses outside of the school district, and attended district provided professional development. PLCs were rolled out in October of the school year and members of the leadership team supported PLCs to be meaningful and productive by learning alongside teachers and coaching teachers through the PLC process. All teachers on the campus participated in PLCs and common planning, but not all teachers attended off campus professional development.

When teachers and leadership team members attended professional development, they returned to campus and worked collaboratively to design professional development that was shared with teachers during PLCs, in-service days, faculty meetings, and during after school workshops all led by the teachers with leadership team support. All of the participants in the study participated in PLCs, common planning, and campus professional development.

Consent for the study was received from the district's institutional review board (IRB) and is included as Appendix B. Consent was also obtained from the University of Houston's IRB and is included as Appendix C. A script was provided to the fourth-grade team leader to read during the recruitment meeting and is included as Appendix D. I obtained signed consent from each of the participants to participate in the study and for their semi-structured interview responses and other data collected during the course of the study to be used in the study. A copy of the consent is included as Appendix E and a copy of the interview questions with additional probes is included as Appendix F. All participants' identities were kept confidential to ensure privacy. Participants were assigned a unique code to identify them, which was kept in a separate locked file cabinet from participants' names.

Sampling Design

A purposive sampling design is a non-random sampling technique in which participants who meet specific criteria are asked to participate in a study (Johnson & Christensen, 2012). Purposive sampling is used in qualitative and quantitative research and involves choosing participants due to their unique traits (Shank & Brown, 2007). The limitation of purposive sampling is that the ability to generalize the results of a study are

severely limited (Johnson & Christensen, 2012). For this study, six fourth-grade elementary school teachers were recruited to participate to gain insight about how my use of distributed leadership techniques influenced teachers' perceptions about distributed leadership. Recruitment of participants took place after school by the fourth-grade team leader who approached her grade level team of teachers to participate in the study. The intent was to lessen the chance that participants would feel obligated or forced to participate in the study, which may have happened had I directly recruited participants. The goal was to assure that the teachers would participate in the study by their own free will. Due to the nature of the study being related to me reflecting on my practice and how it affected others, I believed that purposive sampling was the most appropriate sampling design to answer the questions of the study. Purposive sampling can be broken down into subtypes. Two types of purposive sampling techniques known as critical case sampling and key informant sampling were used in this study. Critical case sampling is a method that can be used in qualitative research to gather information that a researcher is trying to find (Marshall, 1996). Critical case sampling was used as a method in this study due to only one grade level and one elementary school being studied and the exploratory nature of the qualitative study, limited resources available to me, and the small number of participants in the study. It was also used due to the teachers having specific experiences related to the research questions (Marshall, 1996). A second type of purposive sampling known as key informant sampling was also utilized. Key informants are experts in a topic and can also act as proxies for other members of the organization (Marshall, 1996). Related to this study, the fourth-grade teachers were experts on fourth-grade curriculum and were recruited for the study. The sampling design for this study was chosen due to

the humanistic nature of the questions, which are related to *how* and *what* (Marshall, 1996).

Data Collection Methods

This study sought to answer two questions:

1. How have beliefs about involving teachers in the shared decision-making process evolved since completing the study?
2. What are teachers' perceptions about distributed leadership?

A qualitative, autoethnographic approach was used to answer the research questions. The following methods were used to collect data: field notes, journals, observations, and semi-structured interviews. The data were chosen to give a comprehensive and in-depth understanding about how my use of distributed leadership techniques influenced teachers' perceptions about distributed leadership and how my beliefs about involving teachers in shared-decision making evolved over the course of the study. A more detailed description of each data source and method for collection follows.

Field notes. Field notes were collected during and after observations while my memory was still fresh about events. I took on the role of researcher-observer-participant during the study and attempted to become an insider who participated in teacher activities such as common planning, PLCs, and professional development. All participants were aware that I was also the researcher. Limitations of the researcher-observer-participant method include teachers not acting naturally due to the researcher also being the supervisor, but as trust is established and participants get used to a researcher's presence, participants often act more naturally (Johnson & Christensen, 2012).

Journals. Field notes were recorded during observations and common planning. Journaling was a method used as a reflective activity to record my thoughts, beliefs, feelings, knowledge, and motivation that evolved during the course of the study related to the research activities. The journal was formatted with the two research questions and my ideas were recorded and analyzed in relation to the research questions to explore and attempt to answer them. Coding and identification of themes were activities that I included in journaling activities to gain insight about the research questions of the study. A sample of the journal is included as Appendix G.

Observations. Classroom observations and observations of teacher planning were completed for exploratory purposes and were naturalistic in nature. As a researcher-observer-participant, I acted as the data collection instrument during observations (Johnson & Christensen, 2012). The idea was to observe and collect detailed field notes concerning all relevant phenomena related to the research questions. Data were collected during observations that focused on who was in the group, what was happening, where was the group located, when did the group meet, how were elements of the research questions connected to what was happening during the observations, and why did the group act as it did (Johnson & Christensen, 2012).

Semi-structured interviews. Interviews were conducted with participants to gain information about their thoughts, beliefs, feelings, knowledge, and motivation about the topics of the research study. The intention was to gain valuable insight from the teachers, but interviews were also conducted as a method to grow trust and rapport with the teachers due to the fact that I was a new principal on the campus when the study was completed. Even though the interview questions were semi-structured with all

participants being asked the same questions, I designed the questions to be open-ended to gain a depth of understanding about teachers' thoughts, beliefs, feelings, knowledge, and motivation. Probes and additional questions were used when the need arose during the semi-structured interviews that were natural to the conversation and focused on gathering additional information that may not have been recorded during initial interview questions.

Instrumentation

The instrumentation and measures for the study have been listed and described in the data collection methods section above. This section provides elaboration and detailed information concerning the instruments and data collection methods used to collect data during the study.

Field notes. OneNote is an electronic notebook and it was used to collect field notes. A field notes tab was created and formatted to include columns for the date, time, and notes that I took during the study. Field notes were sometimes recorded by hand and then transcribed into OneNote at a later time. I regularly read through and reflected on field notes during journaling activities, which took place after observations, common planning, PLCs, professional development, discussions, and interviews with members of the leadership team, and teachers who participated in the study. All journaling activities were guided by the research questions in order to keep me on task and focused on the questions of the study. The journal was set up with columns and each column was titled with a research question.

Observations. I collected data during the study by conducting observations that related to the research questions as I observed teachers while they taught, attended campus professional development, and planned with each other. I directly observed or

observed by proxy each of the six fourth-grade teachers for at least fifteen minutes every other week during the study. I directly participated or participated by proxy in a minimum of one hour of planning per week with the six fourth-grade teachers and members of the leadership team. Proxy activities were carried out by the assistant principal and members of the leadership team using protocols such as a common planning agenda and lesson plan template when I was unable to directly observe or participate in common planning due to administrative tasks unrelated to instructional leadership. Observational data that I collected was shared with members of the leadership team to support them to plan with teachers for differentiated instruction during common planning and to identify areas of need related to professional development.

Semi-structured interviews. At the beginning and ending of the study, I conducted semi-structured interviews. I recorded responses to interview questions by writing them down as I interviewed participants and I also recorded many of them by using an electronic recording device. Interviews were conducted to gain information about teachers' thoughts, beliefs, feelings, knowledge, and motivation related to how their teaching was influenced when they were involved in the decision-making process. Shank and Brown (2007) suggested that semi-structured interviews provide consistency and support a researcher to make comparisons. The teachers were asked the same interview questions at the beginning and ending of the study and their responses were compared to their beginning and ending semi-structured interview responses and to each other's responses to analyze changes in their thoughts, beliefs, feelings, knowledge, and motivation related to the research questions over the course of the study.

Data Analysis

NVivo 12 was the application software used to support identifying lexical patterns in the data collected. I sought to identify themes among coded data to assist with answering the research questions. In addition to using NVivo 12, I also coded data collected in field notes, journal entries, observations, and semi-structured interviews by hand. This was done to triangulate data to assist with justification of identified themes (Creswell, 2014). The idea was to increase qualitative validity by using NVivo 12 along with human coding and identification of themes to increase saturation, which supported the idea that enough data had been collected and that continuing to collect data would not yield new insights or understandings related to the research questions (Creswell, 2014). I also pursued alternative explanations of research data in an attempt to increase the qualitative validity of the study by gaining other people's interpretations of the data. Creswell (2014) has termed this "member checking" (p. 201) and suggested that it bolsters the accuracy of qualitative findings. My intent was to increase the credibility of the study by not interpreting data too liberally. Reasonableness and believability of the data findings were strengthened by presenting findings in as transparent a manner as possible such as including NVivo 12 findings in the research study, which reduced human error and bias and was used to provide alternative interpretations of data outside of my perspective.

An early iteration of the study was to compare teachers' interview responses to 2019-2020 fourth-grade reading STAAR performance levels to explore alignment of teachers' thinking and actual state assessment performance levels. I had also planned to compare 2018-2019 third-grade reading performance and 2019-2020 STAAR fourth-

grade reading performance levels in an attempt to provide insight as to whether or not distributed leadership practices influenced students' performance levels on STAAR fourth-grade reading. STAAR scores are calculated by converting a student's raw score to a scale score and then students are ranked by percentiles. Performance levels are then assigned based on not meeting the set standard, approaching the standard, meeting the standard, or mastering the standard. Percentages are normally calculated for all students who take STAAR and meet performance levels at the approaches, meets, and masters levels. Table 1: *Grade 4 STAAR Scoring Metrics*, displays performance levels and it shows how various scoring metrics used to assess students' performance levels within a current year and mastery level of fourth-grade reading curriculum would have been assessed on the fourth-grade reading STAAR. Overall achievement for the grade level would have been based on the percentage of students that met the state's passing expectations. I did not plan to review individual student scores, but had planned to compare overall grade level achievement for fourth-grade reading to the previous year's overall grade level achievement for third-grade reading. STAAR is a standardized assessment and is considered a valid and reliable indicator that measures students' level of mastery of grade level curriculum. The Human Resources Research Organization (HumRRO) is an organization independent of the TEA and was contracted to assess the validity and reliability of 2016 STAAR assessments in grades 3-8. They reported that STAAR is a valid and reliable assessment aligned to the content standards and that the standard error of measurement of the assessment is in line with industry standards (TEA, 2016). I had planned to compare 2019-2020 STAAR scores to the previous year's percentage to determine if student achievement increased. Unfortunately, due to the

Covid-19 pandemic 2019-2020 STAAR assessments were canceled and it was not possible to compare 2019-2020 STAAR fourth-grade reading achievement to 2018-2019 STAAR third-grade reading achievement. The semi-structured interview questions explored teachers' thoughts about campus practices they found most beneficial for positively influencing students' achievement and teachers' responses were analyzed and reported as findings in Chapter 4 and discussed in Chapter 5 in lieu of comparing STAAR fourth-grade reading achievement to STAAR third-grade reading achievement.

Table 1

Grade 4 STAAR Scoring Metrics

Raw Score	Scale Score	Mastery Level	Percentile
0-18	839-1412	Did not meet	0-26
19-26	1434-1536	Approaches	31-57
27-30	1550-1619	Meets	60-79
31-36	1633-1992	Masters	82-100

Note. Adapted from “STAAR: Raw Score Conversion Table,” by the TEA, 2019. Copyright 2019 by the TEA.

Ethical Considerations

I was the principal of the campus and acted as a researcher-observer-participant for the study. Anytime a person in a position of authority conducts qualitative research as a researcher-observer-participant there is a chance that the findings of the study are not as trustworthy due to the influence a person with authority has over the participants. I attempted to address any coercion or undue influence of my authority by having the fourth-grade team leader meet with other fourth-grade teachers to explain the study and gain consent from the teachers to participate in the study. Teachers were assured by the team leader that if they declined to participate in the research study that their decision

would not result in any negative consequences. As a principal who acted as the researcher-observer-participant, there was a risk of findings being interpreted too positively. To limit bias or misinterpretation of data, I presented data findings to members of the leadership team and the teacher participants to gain insight about their interpretations of data collected during the study (Creswell, 2014). I collected other's interpretations and then reflected on them to provide insight and guidance for understanding and interpreting data.

Summary

The study utilized a qualitative research design to explore how teachers' perceptions about distributed leadership were affected when I distributed leadership to others in order to build teachers' capacity to meet students' needs. I explored how my beliefs about involving teachers in shared decision-making evolved during the study. The methodological framework for the study was autoethnography due to the autobiographical and reflexive nature of the study in which I explored my experiences and thought processes related to using a distributed leadership style to build capacity in others. Participants for the study were purposefully chosen due to their expertise with fourth-grade curriculum and data collection methods for the study included field notes, journal entries, observations, and semi-structured interviews. Data were analyzed using NVivo 12 software to identify lexical patterns and by hand coding to identify themes and patterns across and within the data sources. I took into account ethical considerations and attempted to address them by gaining alternative interpretations of data and acknowledged that findings should be interpreted with caution due to my position of authority over the study participants.

Chapter IV

Findings

Introduction

Throughout the course of the study, I acted as the data collection instrument. Johnson and Christensen (2012) explained that due to the exploratory nature of qualitative research and the fact that it is carried out in naturalistic environments, it is the researcher who decides what is relevant to observe and what questions should be asked to best answer the research questions. As a result, I collected data through observations and also by participating in campus activities such as PLCs and common planning. Multiple sources of data were collected, which included primary texts of field notes, observation notes, interview notes, PLC notes, and common planning notes. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) reported that field texts are interpretive and selective to the interest of the researcher and are influenced by the relationships between the participants and the researcher. This was evident throughout the study as I focused on building relationships with participants. The chosen data collection methods and my interpretation and selection of what evidence to collect was relevant to the research questions and was designed to capture how beliefs and perceptions grew and evolved over time when I implemented distributed leadership. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) explained that “field texts allow for growth and change rather than fixing relations between fact and idea” (p. 95). I attempted to put this idea into practice during data collection, journaling, and during analysis of data after the study concluded. Journals were created as I reviewed primary texts and reflected on campus activities outside of the school day. My Journal and teacher participants’ semi-structured interview transcripts evolved into interim texts that guided

me throughout and after the study to analyze data to answer the research questions. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) recounted that journals act as work spaces for a researcher to hash out struggles, express feelings, and can act as an audience for the researcher. I used my journal in ways described by Clandinin and Connelly and also used it as a space to connect research to my thoughts, beliefs, feelings, frustrations, and evolving perceptions during and after the study. I believed the act of revisiting my journal and the semi-structured interview transcripts regularly, supported the process of them becoming interim texts that were integral to reporting the findings and discussion sections of my study.

Data were stored in OneNote, which is an electronic notebook. I chose an electronic notebook because it assisted me with organization and it facilitated uploading data into NVivo 12 software during the coding phase of data analysis. Data source triangulation was utilized to look for patterns and themes within and across the various primary texts, semi-structured interview responses, and journal entries to gain insight and understanding of fourth-grade teachers' and my perceptions related to the value of distributed leadership to develop teachers' and my capacity to use distributed leadership techniques to influence students' achievement. Journal entries consisted of my reflections on primary texts and my evolving thoughts, feelings, beliefs, and perceptions related to the two research questions of the study:

1. How have beliefs about involving teachers in the shared decision-making process evolved since completing the study?
2. What are teachers' perceptions about distributed leadership?

This chapter reported findings related to participants, instrumentation, data collection methods, three predominant themes that participants and I agreed were relevant for answering the research questions, and a summary. The three themes that emerged from the data included carrying out of instructional leader tasks, carrying out of non-instructional leader tasks, and shared decision-making through collaboration. Findings related to the themes are reported in detail in the theme sections of this chapter.

Participants

The participants in the study included six fourth-grade teachers and I was also a participant in the study. My teaching background included various teaching positions at the elementary level, an instructional specialist position at the district level, and five years of administrative experience as an instructional supervisor and principal. During the course of the study, I was a first-year principal who was also the researcher-observer-participant of the study. Teacher demographics and career goals are summarized in Table 2: *Teacher Demographics* and in Table 3: *Teacher Career Goals*. The fourth-grade teacher participants had a range of teaching experience, which included two first-year novice teachers, one second-year teacher, two teachers with eight years of experience, and a veteran teacher who had been teaching for 16 years. Six out of seven of the participants identified as White and I was the only participant who was a first-generation college graduate and I also identified as White. Six out of seven of the participants completed traditional university teaching programs and one teacher completed an alternative teaching certification program. All of the participants had a minimum of a Bachelor's degree and two of the participants had Master's degrees or higher. Four out of five teachers reported their highest degree as Bachelor's degrees and stated they had

intentions to obtain Master's degrees in the future. All of the fourth-grade teachers who participated in the study explained that they intended to return to the campus the following school year to teach fourth-grade.

Table 2

Teacher Demographics

Participants	Subjects Taught	Traditional University Program or Alternatively Certified	Years of Teaching Experience	Ethnicity and or Race	Highest Degree Earned	First Generation College Graduate (yes or no)
ELA1	4th ELAR, 4th self-contained, 7th ELAR	Traditional	8	White	Bachelor's	No
ELA2	4th ELAR & SS	Traditional	On year 1	White	Bachelor's	No
ELA3	4th ELAR & SS	Traditional	On year 1	White	Bachelor's	No
MT1	4th Math, Science, SS	Alternative Certification	8	Black	Bachelor's	No
MT2	All subjects K -6	Traditional	16	White	Master's	No
MT3	4th Math, Science, SS	Traditional	On year 2	White	Master's	No

Note. Demographics of fourth-grade teachers collected from teachers' typed responses in a shared Google Doc. Acronyms: English Language Arts teacher (ELA#). Math teacher (MT#). Social Studies (SS). English Language Arts and Reading (ELAR).

Table 3

Teacher Career Goals

Participants	Do you plan to continue as a teacher in the future?	What are your career goals for the next five years? Where do you see yourself in five years?
ELA1	Yes	I hope to go back to school to get my Master's degree in Curriculum & Instruction. My ultimate goal is to become either a reading interventionist/specialist or instructional coach within the next 5-8 years.
ELA2	Yes	I plan on joining a Master's program to earn my degree in educational administration. I plan to teach for at least the next five years and see where my degree and goals take me beyond that. Currently, I am considering the possibilities of becoming an assistant principal.
ELA3	Yes	Continue teaching (possibly trying lower grades) for more experience and less pressure on state testing.
MT1	Yes	I hope to go back to school to get my Master's in counseling with emphasis on children. While still in the classroom I would like to continue teaching possibly going back down to first grade eventually.
MT2	Yes	I want to work on becoming a math interventionist/specialist. I hope to get a Master's degree in C&I to help with my goals. I would love to also be an instructional coach at some point as well.
MT3	Yes	Continue teaching (possibly trying lower or higher grades to gain more experience). I would love to become a math interventionist/specialist further down the line (maybe in 10 years?)

Note. Career goals are verbatim statements collected from teachers' typed responses in a shared Google Doc. Acronyms: English Language Arts teacher (ELA#). Math teacher (MT#). Curriculum and Instruction (C&I).

Teacher attrition is high and in 2012-2013, Goldring et al. (2014) reported that 8% of teachers left the field. Reasons given included poor working conditions and unreasonable workloads (Goldring et al., 2014). Semi-structured interview responses of

teacher participants suggested that collaboration and shared decision-making that took place through campus practices of common planning and PLCs positively influenced teachers to remain in their positions. Support for this finding is evidenced by four of the six teacher participants reporting their intentions to return to university to study for Master's degrees in either curriculum and instruction, counseling, or administration. When asked about thoughts related to common planning, MT2 stated, "I find value in common planning because it allows me the opportunity to reach out to specialists on campus to support my classroom instruction" (MT2, personal communication, February 19, 2020). MT3 was a second-year teacher who had already earned her Master's degree and intended to remain a classroom teacher with the possibility of becoming an interventionist later in her career. Three of the six teacher participants desired to become interventionists in the future, one teacher participant planned to become a counselor later in her career, and one teacher participant considered going into administration after earning her Master's degree. ELA3 was a first-year teacher who did not report a plan to obtain a Master's degree. She shared that she planned to continue teaching, but due to the pressures of state testing intended to go to lower elementary to avoid the pressures of state testing.

Instrumentation

Primary texts. An electronic notebook was created using OneNote with separate tabs for primary texts that were labeled field notes, teacher observation notes, PLC notes, interview notes, and common planning notes. Each page in the notebook was formatted with a table that included columns for the date, notes, and to do information. An additional tab was included for journal entries. Throughout the course of the study I

added information to the primary texts and continuously referenced the primary texts to create journal entries, which evolved into interim texts over the course of the study.

Semi-structured interviews. A tab was included in OneNote labeled interview notes. It was formatted the same as the primary texts. The fourth-grade teachers were interviewed in February and again at the end of the study in April to gain information about how their beliefs about involving teachers in the shared decision-making process evolved over the course of the study and to gain a deeper understanding related to their perceptions about distributed leadership.

Journals. A tab was included in OneNote labeled journal entries. It was a space to record my thoughts, feelings, beliefs, perceptions, and concerns related to campus leadership activities and the research questions. The journal entries evolved over the course of the study to interim texts that were continuously referenced, reflected upon, and added to throughout the study to gather data and provide insight related to the research questions. The journal was formatted using a table with five columns labeled with the date, research question 1, research question 2, notes about thoughts and reflections, and a final column was used for coding and identification of themes.

Data Analysis Strategy and Coding

Throughout the study, I regularly reflected on primary texts and referenced them to create interim texts (journal entries and semi-structured interview transcripts). The act of reviewing and reflecting on data collected throughout the study was an essential and integral process, which guided the process of identifying codes as data were continuously analyzed (Creswell, 2014). As data were examined and assigned codes, it was ultimately sorted into categories as themes and patterns emerged from the data (Creswell, 2014). As

themes emerged from the multiple sources of data, I was able to gain insight, which supported answering the research questions. Figure 1 illustrates an early stage of the axial coding process completed using NVivo 12 software to identify lexical patterns in which three overall themes and various codes emerged that I connected and sorted into the theme categories based on my journal entries, semi-structured interview transcripts, and primary data sources. An initial open coding phase was completed by going through each line of my journal entries, field notes, observation notes, interview notes, PLCs, and common planning notes. I created Figure 1 to represent themes and patterns that emerged from the data sources as I continuously reviewed and reflected on the data sources and conducted member checks with participants and members of my leadership team. Creswell and Poth (2018) defined open coding as an initial step to analyze data to begin categorizing data. After open coding, I used axial coding to relate the categories of data to themes that emerged from the data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The themes included carrying out of instructional leader tasks, carrying out of non-instructional leader tasks, and shared decision-making through collaboration. Continuous data triangulation, review, reflection, coding, and categorizing supported me to develop a deeper and clearer understanding of how beliefs about shared decision-making and perceptions of distributed leadership evolved when I involved others in decision-making processes related to student improvement efforts.

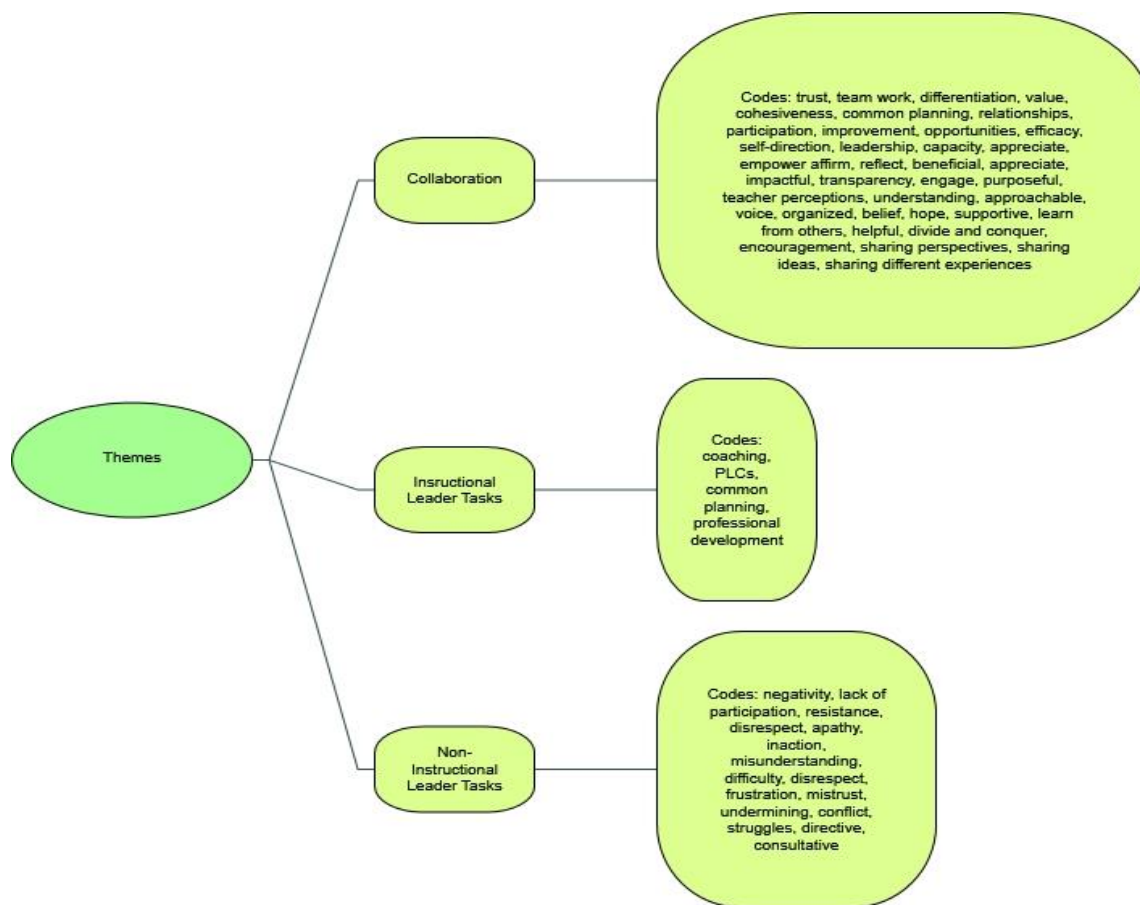


Figure 1. Themes: Collaboration, Instructional Leader Tasks, and Non-Instructional Leader Tasks. Mind map was created using NVivo 12 software mind map tools to represent themes, concepts, ideas, opinions, sentiments, and experiences of participants.

Negative sentiments are prevalent in the non-instructional leader tasks theme in *Figure 1.* with negativity, lack of participation, and struggles being coded in my journal entries and in the teacher participants' semi-structured interview responses. It is the theme of collaboration that contains many codes that include predominantly positive sentiments with multiple codes referencing ideas of sharing, empowerment, and teamwork. The findings were of a subjective nature, but were relevant due to my research questions being designed to study how beliefs and perceptions evolved over time when distributed leadership was utilized.

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the school was shut down and quickly transitioned to remote learning in March 2020. IRB modifications were obtained to permit activities such as PLCs and the final semi-structured interviews to take place remotely through platforms of Zoom and Google Meet. The original design of the research study called for comparing overall third-grade reading performance on 2018-2019 STAAR to overall fourth-grade reading performance on 2019-2020 STAAR, but due to the pandemic schools were shut down and state testing was canceled for the 2019-2020 school year. As a result, I was not able to collect data on 2019-2020 fourth-grade STAAR reading performance to make comparisons to the previous year's third-grade STAAR reading performance. Teachers' interview responses related to their perceptions and beliefs about which campus activities they believed would positively influence students' achievement were analyzed in lieu of comparing fourth-grade STAAR reading performance to third grade STAAR reading performance.

Data Findings

Three main themes emerged from the data: carrying out of instructional leader tasks, carrying out of non-instructional leader tasks, and shared decision-making through collaboration. While teachers reported finding value in collaborative activities such as common planning and professional learning communities (PLCs), they voiced concerns about time not always being used wisely during collaborative activities, not always understanding the focus of PLCs, and not all members putting forth the same amount of effort during collaborative activities. Analysis of data revealed that teachers found value in collaborative activities when PLCs were vertically aligned, included support staff, and allocated time to problem solve and learn from specialists. I found that my perceptions

about the value of distributed leadership to develop capacity in others evolved over the course of the study to include a belief of teachers as leaders of their students who can also become leaders of others when provided necessary supports.

Theme 1: Carrying out of Instructional Leader Tasks

Instructional leader tasks were identified as coaching, PLCs, professional development, and common planning. Theme 1: *Carrying out of Instructional Leader Tasks* overlapped with Theme 3: *Collaboration Through Shared Decision Making* and ended up being the area that I spent the least amount of time engaged with during workdays. Theme 3: *Carrying out of Instructional Leader Tasks*' findings detailed more of the sentiments among study participants and Theme 1: *Carrying out of Instructional Leader Tasks*' findings focused more on the activities related to instructional leader tasks identified in my journal entries. Analysis of data sources revealed that coaching, PLCs, common planning, and professional development were activities that the teacher participants and I found to be the most valuable for influencing student achievement and for building trusting and collaborative relationships among staff. The following semi-structured interview responses provide insight into the teachers' perceptions of collaborative practices that involved shared decision-making among staff.

With common planning, I really enjoy getting that feedback about kids. The gifted and talented specialist can give feedback and ideas about content. Ms. Johnson can give strategies about reading. (ELA1, personal communication, April 21, 2020)

I find value in PLCs because it gives me an opportunity to continue to grow as an educator and hear other teachers' ideas on my campus. I love learning, so I

welcome all professional development with open arms. I want to continue to better myself for my students. I've most enjoyed the professional development that is organized specifically for me and my goals from the beginning of the year. These included the Guided Math study and the Blended Learning site visit. I felt like my needs were heard and action steps were taken to help me. I'm excited to continue to learn more about Blended Learning next year! (MT3, personal communication, April 22, 2020)

The teachers' sentiments in their responses were similar to my sentiments when I was able to engage in instructional leader tasks with teachers. The following journal entry captures my feelings related to teachers working together.

It is a relief, for me as the principal, that the 4th grade teachers have been able to become a cohesive and collaborative team so quickly. They appear to value each other and work well together. As a leader I trust them and try to put structures in place to support them to meet the students' needs such as ensuring that in-service days are scheduled for planning and incorporating professional development into PLCs based on data I collect through my observations, assessment data, and anecdotal information shared with me from members of the leadership team or other campus staff. (LCT, journal entry, February 11, 2020)

The journal entries and semi-structured interview responses revealed that all participants found value in working alongside others to share ideas, learn from others, and to problem solve collaboratively. Timperley (2005) advocated that distributed leadership is a dynamic process that is ongoing and involves many different people in different roles taking on leadership activities. Spillane et al. (2015) argued that distributed leadership is

not about working in isolation, but is about people working together and sharing responsibility for outcomes. Collay (2011) had the insight to recognize that teachers are leaders by the fact that they lead their students in the classroom. I conducted a member check with the teacher participants and MT3 shared insights about teachers as leaders that aligns to Collay's (2011) insights of teachers as leaders.

All teachers have leadership qualities; they run a classroom of students. Based on their experiences and values, they can become skilled in specific areas of their practice. Allowing these teachers to share, empowers the campus and increases collaboration. (MT3, personal communication, May 11, 2020).

A principal who recognizes this and puts structures in place to support teachers to develop leadership skills demonstrates servant leadership and can lead others to grow in order to solve problems collaboratively (Greenleaf, 1970). Sehgal et al. (2017) argued that it is the principal's responsibility to create a supportive environment to support teachers to collaborate. Van Maele and Van Houtte (2014) promoted ideas that when teachers do not feel connected to colleagues they get burned out and their self-efficacy is negatively affected.

Theme 2: Carrying out of Non-Instructional Leader Tasks

An Outlook calendar was used to schedule and keep track of my daily work activities. I used OneNote to record activities pertaining to common planning, PLCs, classroom observations, field notes, and interviews. Data analysis of the above resources revealed that a majority of my workdays were spent on non-instructional leader tasks related to administrative tasks of completing paperwork for compliance and accountability required by local, state, and federal authorities, teacher evaluation,

discipline, and parent or teacher concerns. Many of the tasks were time consuming and occurred consistently such as reviewing employees' time for accuracy and approving it for payroll. Tasks related to budget expenditures to ensure resources were available for staff to carry out their responsibilities and general managerial oversight of a campus with approximately 90 staff members and 650 students were ongoing. Meetings took up a large portion of my workdays and included district level meetings with other administrators, admission, review, and dismissal (ARD) meetings, 504 meetings, and other programming meetings such as response to intervention (RtI). This meant that instructional leader tasks such as common planning, PLCs, and professional development activities were often postponed or the scope and intent of what was planned was reduced because other scheduled and unscheduled events took precedence and were outside of my authority to control. An example of non-instructional leader tasks included workweeks in which approximately 40% of the workweek was spent in ARD meetings with parents, staffings with ARD committee members to prepare for ARD meetings with parents, and review of evaluations to prepare for ARDs. This was a disproportionate amount of the workweek allocated to special education requirements when approximately 11% of the school population was served by special education. When RtI and 504 meetings were included in the calculations for non-instructional leader tasks it was noted that up to 70% of my workweek was spent in compliance and accountability related tasks. Compliance related tasks for teacher evaluation, which included conferencing with teachers to set goals and prepare for formal observations along with conducting formal observations, observations of classroom instruction, and writing up of evaluations resulted in the assistant principal and me not being able to participate in instructional leadership tasks

for several days at a time because we were rushing around to be in compliance with local, state, and federal compliance and accountability procedures.

Theme 3: Shared-Decision Making Through Collaboration

Sentiments related to this theme were predominantly positive by all participants. Several of the codes I assigned to my journal entries included words such as trust, collaboration, value, and beneficial, which were positive sentiments shared when participants had opportunities to collaborate through PLCs, common planning, and professional development. The following journal entry explains the collaborative activities I participated in as we focused on adapting instruction and activities to be more student-centered.

I was able to attend third, second, and fourth-grade planning today. Fourth-grade split into separate reading and math groups to plan instruction. I planned with ELA along with three ELA teachers, one reading interventionist, one ESL specialist, and one special education team leader. Flexible groups were reviewed followed by a quick data dive into students' MAP achievement. Research resources were reviewed to determine which ones would support research while using technology. A choice board was reviewed that included technology resources to support students to research independently. The teachers were planning and locating resources to support students to take charge of their own learning while researching. (LCT, journal entry, February 26, 2020)

Drescher et al. (2014) have studied the early stages of group development and they reported that it involves moving between social skills and task-related activities that supports groups to reach goals because they share skills while they learn to work

collaboratively. The blending of social skills and task-related activities was apparent during the study because it was my first year as the principal on the campus and five out of six of the fourth-grade teachers were new to the campus as well. MT1 was the only teacher who returned from the previous school year. Her experience on the campus was also limited due to being hired mid-year of the 2018-2019 school year. Common planning encouraged interaction among the teachers, administrators, and other support staff. The idea was to support teachers' skill development, sharing of ideas, problem solving, collegiality, and the promotion of using effective practices to drive student improvement, which Spillane and Shirrell (2018) advocated for as methods to effectively support student improvement.

Question 1 of the research study focused on how beliefs about involving teachers in the shared decision-making process evolved since completing the study and the findings suggested that as I worked closely with teachers I developed deeper trust in them to carry out leadership tasks on their own without me micromanaging or delegating to them. As teachers became more comfortable with me, they appeared to be more comfortable taking risks with new instructional activities and started to shift more of the responsibility of learning to students, which is expressed in the following journal entry.

I completed observations in the six fourth-grade classrooms. There is a wide range of teaching styles, but it is apparent that the teachers work closely together and are purposefully trying to develop self-directed and student-centered learning for the students. MT3 is willing to take risks and started blending learning with her students today. She created data recording sheets and the students were “shading” their success (mastery) of grade level TEKS by reviewing their

achievement and proficiency on Education Galaxy diagnostics. She regularly checked in with students as they analyzed and recorded their progress. MT3 shared with me that she was nervous about this type of learning, but that based on the outcome of the activities she believed that blended learning was showing promise as a method to engage students in taking charge of their own learning. (LCT, journal entry, February 28, 2020)

Schools that demonstrate distributed leadership have many characteristic factors such as a culture of collaboration and teamwork, people feel trusted and supported by the leader, and staff feel supported to take risks (Ritchie & Woods, 2007). MT3 demonstrated these characteristics as she implemented blended learning with students, which was a practice she had recently learned about through PLCs, out of district site visits for blended learning, and campus professional development focused on common planning, lesson planning, and blended learning. Kang (2017) reasoned that coaches collaborating with teachers can support building collaborative relationships. The campus coach worked very closely with the fourth-grade team throughout the school year and it was likely that collaborative relationships grew between the teachers and academic coach as they collaborated. L’Allier and Elish-Piper (2012) argued that trust is a foundation that is required for coaching relationships to become established. As the academic coach worked alongside the fourth-grade teachers to solve problems collaboratively it was likely that trust was established (Dozier, 2008).

Question 2 of the research study explored teachers’ perceptions about distributed leadership and the findings suggested that all participants found value in distributed

leadership as substantiated by their semi-structured interview responses. The following teacher participants' quotes articulate their perceptions about distributed leadership.

It is to divide and conquer. You know each other's strengths and how to build each other up. (ELA1, personal communication, February 1, 2020)

I think distributed leadership is an environment that allows all teachers to have opportunities to lead, grow, and work together to better students' achievement. (MT3, personal communication, April 20, 2020)

It is an empowerment movement for all to be involved in the decisions for students. (ELA2, personal communication, April 21, 2020)

Diamond and Spillane (2016) detailed that distributed leadership is a framework that supports different people moving in and out of leadership positions based on the needs of the organization. They advocated for the social aspects of distributed leadership and how people interacting together can positively influence how activities are completed in order to reach goals (Diamond & Spillane, 2016). A quality leader and collaboration are two components that Torres (2019) suggested are needed in order for distributed leadership to be effective. Torres (2019) claimed that a quality leader and collaboration can have positive effects on how teachers view their jobs. Goldring et al. (2014) emphasized that this is a significant idea because when teachers leave teaching it has a negative effect on student achievement. Sehgal et al. (2017) and Van Maele and Van Houtte (2014) contended that distributed leadership is a technique to build capacity in other people and that by building capacity, teachers feel more confident, which results in them being more likely to remain in the profession.

Summary

Hamilton and Pinnegar (2009) explained that self-study is not about simply studying one's self, but is about figuring out who one is and what one wants to become. It is through the building of relationships, collaborating with other professionals, and interacting with other professionals in a social context that interdependence and trust grows that results in the construction of knowledge and improvements (Hamilton & Pinnegar, 2009). The idea of trust growing through social interaction is supported by Bandura's social learning theory, which advocated that the construction of knowledge occurs through social interaction and mimicry (Bandura, 1979; Bandura, 1977).

The fourth semi-structured interview question asked participants to explain their current level of understanding regarding distributed leadership. Teachers' responses to question four on the first and second rounds of semi-structured interviews are included in Table H1: *Teacher Responses to Question Four of Semi-Structured Interviews* in Appendix H. On the first round of semi-structured interviews, two teachers were able to share their understanding of distributed leadership. Their responses are transcribed from their first semi-structured interview responses for question four.

It is knowing who you can go to for the expertise you need. (MT2, personal communication, February 19, 2020)

So, what I think distributed leadership is, is not a sage on the stage. It is shared responsibility. I love that different aspects, different experiences can share in areas rather than take over. It is to divide and conquer. You know each other's strengths and how to build each other up. (ELA1, personal communication, February 21, 2020)

Teacher responses on the first round of semi-structured interviews for question four revealed that four out of six teacher participants were not able to answer question four or provided a guess based on their understanding related to the words *distributed leadership*. After the second round of semi-structured interviews conducted in April 2020, all teacher participants were able to give a definition regarding distributed leadership.

Self-study is a means to portray experiences that others can relate to and then transfer to their own practice (Hamilton & Pinnegar, 2009). A leader that practices shared decision-making and shares leadership tasks with others fosters trust among the group (Coyle, 2018). When trust is developed, the members of the organization can believe in each other to successfully carry out leadership activities when given a chance (Mineo, 2014). A key component of building trusting relationships is for likeminded individuals that are ready, willing, and who share similar goals to not let naysayers and negativity preclude moving in the direction of reaching improvement goals. Drescher et al. (2014) reasoned that shared leadership is correlated with higher performance and as shared leadership increases, trust among members of the group also increases. There were many instances early in the study that I recorded journal entries that demonstrated sentiments of frustration and challenges with my beliefs that I would have success building collaborative relationships in which people worked together positively toward shared goals because they believed in them and not simply because they were following directives. The following journal entries capture my apathy and frustration early on in the study with utilizing distributed leadership to build teachers' leadership capacity.

My beliefs continue to evolve related to involving others in the decision-making

process. It is much easier to just make decisions myself, but I know this type of leadership is top down and doesn't grow leadership capacity within the organization. When I think about the second research question of my study, I am very interested to find out more about how teachers view themselves as leaders. In fact, I wonder if they do? (LCT, journal entry, January 31, 2020)

I have been thinking a lot about teachers as leaders and my own beliefs related to teachers as leaders. In general, I don't believe that teachers have the perception of themselves as leaders and I wonder if teachers view principals as out of touch and not as instructional leaders of other teachers. I am trying to cultivate perceptions of administrators as learning leaders of the campus, but is it possible to grow a culture of collegiality with the principal as the leader of learning? My goal has been to create "genuine" PLCs (Dufour & Reeves, 2016) on the campus, but my perception of what is happening and what teachers are getting from PLCs is not aligned to their perceptions of what is happening in PLCs. I can't get frustrated over this, but I have to figure out a way for the teachers to have the same perception as I do about the work we are doing. How can a principal get beyond buy-in and compliance and perpetuate ownership and motivation of teachers to carry on in a self-directed and engaged way with the content and ideas shared in PLCs? How can I engage in this work and also complete the management aspects of my daily responsibilities, which make it practically impossible to engage in instructional activities with teachers at the depth and complexity that I believe could make a difference in supporting teachers and assisting them to grow in their ability to differentiate for children? (LCT, journal entry, February 1, 2020)

By building relationships, rereading, and reflecting on primary and interim texts, I continued to shift my thinking about the meaning of leadership over the course of the study. My perceptions continued to evolve regarding what leadership was and what it looked like for me and for the teachers. The following journal entry captures my evolving perceptions about distributed leadership and sharing decision-making with others.

The Covid-19 pandemic crisis has resulted in schools being shut down and stay at home orders being put in place in many Texas counties. I realize that this challenging and unprecedented experience has pushed me beyond my comfort zone to rely more on others to carry out leadership tasks that I would normally do on my own. I have always known and understood that anyone is replaceable, but the Covid-19 crisis bolsters this belief in a positive way. It would be easy to view this experience as negative, but there are positives that come to light through new experiences. As a leader, one of those positives is that when people are given opportunities to lead, many will rise to the occasion. An example of rising to the occasion is captured in a shared decision-making experience that I took part in this week to work with my assistant principal, secretary, and a teacher to prepare and distribute curriculum to the families of the school who do not have access to technology. Last week, I prepared and distributed the curriculum myself without assistance. This week, I worked with the assistant principal, secretary, and teacher to share decision-making with them to devise a plan to organize the curriculum, ready it, and distribute it with their input and ideas. The result was that responsibilities were shared and decisions were made as a team. I have to continue to trust that others are just as capable as I am and will take the same care

to ensure our students have what they need to continue learning during this difficult time. (LCT, journal entry, March 29, 2020)

I originally believed that it was not common to view teachers as leaders and I decided this was a myopic view of teachers because they were continuously acting as leaders of their students (Collay, 2011). During the course of the study, I developed the perception of teachers as leaders of their students and this idea expanded my views, beliefs, and ideas about leadership and the many different forms it can take. Hamilton and Pinnegar (2013) promoted the value of a support network as we seek to understand. It became apparent to me that improvement goals could not be achieved by one person. The multiple, varied, and comprehensive requirements placed on educators could only be achieved by many dedicated people working together to reach shared goals. This required commitment, trust, collaboration, and a willingness to put personal agendas to the side and to work together so that students could achieve academic performance indicators and also have personal success. I developed the perception over the course of the study that distributed leadership was a way to develop capacity across many different people in an organization and I believed it supported leaders to have a wider reach and impact across an organization than what could be accomplished by a leader working alone and delegating rather than working collaboratively with others.

Chapter V

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to explore how beliefs about involving teachers in the shared decision-making process evolved when I utilized distributed leadership. A second research question explored teachers' perceptions about distributed leadership. Primary texts were created over the course of the study and included field notes, observation notes, interview notes, PLC notes, and common planning notes. Interim texts advanced during the study and included journal entries, semi-structured interview responses, and member checks. Primary texts were not a space to explore thoughts, feelings, beliefs, ideas, and perceptions, but captured data related to dates, activities, actions, and events. Interim texts included my journal entries, teacher participants' semi-structured interview responses, and member checks. Member checks were valuable interim texts that supported me to better answer the research questions as I went through the process of revisiting data, writing up the findings and discussion sections of the study, and continuously revisited my writing to ensure clarity of meaning. Interim texts were the spaces that included participants' thoughts, feelings, beliefs, ideas, and perceptions. They were the data sources that were most supportive for attempting to answer the research questions and I continuously reviewed them during the study and after the study to analyze how teachers' and my thoughts, beliefs, feelings, knowledge, and skills evolved during the study and after data collection was completed. Member checks were completed during the analysis phase of the study and they provided deeper insight into teachers' and my beliefs related to distributed leadership. ELA2 provided a member check concerning teachers finding value in collaborative activities such as common

planning and PLCs. She also voiced concerns of time not always being used wisely during collaborative activities and not always understanding the focus of PLCs.

With plans in place for structured, weekly PLCs, our ability to focus, work together, and accomplish group-determined goals will grow. By setting aside sacred time to plan collaboratively, we are better able to ensure our time is spent meaningfully. Next year's PLCs will need an agenda or checklist for each meeting. Teachers will need to come with lesson plans, technology, and an open mind. (ELA2, personal communication, May 13, 2020)

Frankham and Smears (2012) explained that the complexities of language make it very difficult to depict truth when writing. Accurately depicting truth and portraying findings, conclusions, and thoughts is challenging and meaning is interpreted differently among different races, ethnicities, and cultures (Frankham & Smears, 2012). I tried to be cognizant of these ideas in my writing and I used caution when interpreting and reporting findings since language can contaminate the truth of the message (Frankham & Smears, 2012).

Open coding was completed by hand going line by line through primary and interim texts to assign words or phrases to chunks of data to assist with making sense of it (Creswell, 2014). Data was uploaded into NVivo 12 and analyzed for lexical patterns and sentiments. I compared lexical patterns identified in NVivo 12 to codes I identified by open coding to gain insight about the data. Axial coding was a second level of coding that was completed as an inductive activity, which assisted with naming categories to support making sense of data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Three categories emerged and were identified as: carrying out of instructional leader tasks, carrying out of non-instructional

tasks, and shared decision-making through collaboration. I continuously reviewed data over the course of the study and after the study as a form of selective coding, which supported me to connect the themes to make meaning of collected data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Coding was time consuming and a very involved process, but the ideas uncovered throughout the study supported the idea that even though distributed leadership is time consuming for leaders to implement it appeared to support building teachers' capacity to meet students' needs. This perception was supported by teachers' responses on semi-structured interviews and member checks.

Analysis of data revealed that teachers found value in collaborative activities such as common planning and PLCs. Teachers reported that they found PLCs most effective when they were vertically aligned to include teams of teachers across grade levels, included support staff, and allocated time to problem solve and learn from specialists. MT3 provided a member check that supported this finding.

As a new teacher to the campus, I definitely would have loved more vertical alignment. I know this can be challenging to facilitate effectively, but I think that specialists are key. They usually know each grade level and how and what they teach. (MT3, personal communication, May 12, 2020)

Spillane and Shirrell (2018) found that environments that promote interaction between teachers supports skills to develop, sharing of ideas, problem-solving, positive culture, and the use of effective practices, which encourages improvement. Teachers voiced frustration about collaborative activities when they perceived that others did not put forth the same amount of effort as they felt they were putting forth. They also voiced frustration when they perceived time spent in common planning and PLCs was not used

wisely and when they did not understand the focus of PLCs. ELA2 provided the following member check that supported this finding.

I think that PLCs would be more beneficial for everyone if there was a said agenda throughout. I feel that our previous PLCs (specifically when split into smaller groups) became meaningless because conversations would get off topic and we would lose focus overall on the PLC itself. (ELA3, personal communication, May 13, 2020).

Dufour and Reeves (2016) argued that most PLCs are not implemented at a level of quality that results in improvements. A well thought out and crafted agenda with clear objectives conveying the objective of PLCs could promote what Dufour and Reeves (2016) classified as “genuine” (p. 69) PLCs.

Discussion About Findings

The *2012-2013 Teacher Follow-Up Survey* revealed that 8% of teachers left the field that year (Goldring et al., 2014). The *2016-2017 Principal Follow-Up Survey* revealed that 10% of principals left the field that year (Goldring et al., 2018). Sun and Leithwood (2012) advocated that leaders who support collaboration and personalized support for teachers can positively influence student achievement. Bagwell (2019) found that there are many challenges faced by school leaders that cannot be solved by a few people. Principals who are skilled in empowering others, who provide necessary resources, and who encourage communication can build capacity in others (Prasertratana et al., 2013). Previous research demonstrated that educator attrition can be interpreted as quite high and is affected when teachers report feeling detached or not affiliated with colleagues (Van Maele & Van Houtte, 2014). Over time this leads to burn-out and

exhaustion, which leads to teacher attrition (Van Maele & Van Houtte, 2014). These statistics influenced how the research questions were formulated and the focus was on cultivating teachers' capacity by utilizing distributed leadership to support collaboration and shared decision-making. The idea was that by utilizing distributed leadership with teachers that they would be less likely to leave their positions and they would be better equipped to meet students' academic needs.

Journal entries evolved from primary texts, and they were coded with many sentiments ranging from apathy to efficacy. The activity of journaling was a space for me to reflect on my experiences and process my thoughts, beliefs, feelings and evolving perceptions during the study. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) suggested that journals can act as work spaces for a researcher to process, work through struggles, and express feelings. It was not uncommon for several days to go by in which I did not write in my journal. I attributed this to non-instructional leader tasks, which comprised a majority of my workdays. Fullan (2014) revealed that principals who utilize management styles focused on compliance and accountability will not effectively increase student achievement. Camburn (2003) argued that contemporary principals must be innovative and distribute leadership to other people with varying skills and experiences to meet the needs of students. The findings revealed that even though my intentions were to devote a majority of my time to instructional leader tasks, the administrative and managerial requirements of my position limited my time to participate in common planning, PLCs, and professional development. This resulted in me relying on others to carryout instructional leader tasks that I delegated to them. I would have been more involved in instructional leader tasks had I not been required to attend meetings, attend to discipline,

and work through other parent or staff concerns. It can be argued that I often delegated tasks to others and they employed distributed leadership by collaborating with colleagues since I was not regularly available. Principals that learn alongside teachers and who lead teacher learning and development have twice the impact on learning than principals who employ leadership styles focused on compliance (Fullan, 2014). Although, I was not regularly available to attend common planning, PLCs, and professional development, I effectively provided resources, ensured safety, hired quality teachers, and established goals and expectations, which Fullan (2014) argued leads to improvements.

Implications for Practice

I chose to study how beliefs related to shared-decision making evolved when I utilized distributed leadership and also studied teachers' perceptions about distributed leadership based on my experiences as a teacher and as an administrator. My experiences over the years have included various teaching and administrative positions ranging from a teacher, to a special education team leader, to an instructional specialist, then to an administrative position as an instructional supervisor, and finally, during the course of my doctoral studies I became a principal. My experiences as a special education teacher were often very isolated and resulted in me not feeling connected to the people I worked with or the campus I was employed. This was a frustrating experience after spending a great deal of time, money, and energy to become certified as a general education and special education teacher. Rather than leave the field of education, I was determined to build relationships to work collaboratively with others. Even though my career had taken me in different directions over the years, I never lost interest in cultivating capacity and building collaborative relationships to enhance student achievement. It is my belief that

teaching is a calling and it is disheartening when teachers decide to leave the profession due to factors that I believe can be remedied by supportive administrators providing resources and structures such as protected time and a master schedule that supports collaboration among staff through meaningful activities of PLCs, common planning, and professional development that is personalized and job-embedded.

The implications for practice related to this study include ideas of principals empowering others, providing needed resources, and encouraging communication through distributed leadership to build capacity in others (Prasertratana et al., 2013). When teachers reported feeling detached, burned-out, exhausted, or not affiliated with colleagues, attrition increased (Van Maele & Van Houtte, 2014). Teacher attrition negatively influences students' learning, but collaborative relationships based on trust can lead to increased student achievement (Prasertratana et al., 2013). Principals who put forth efforts to build collaborative and trusting relationships on campuses are more likely to build capacity across organizations, which can lead to increased teacher efficacy, reduced teacher attrition, and increased student achievement (Goldring et al., 2014; Griffith, 2004; Sehgal et al., 2017; Van Maele & Van Houtte, 2014).

The demographics of children in the United States continues to change, but the majority of teachers and principals in the United States identify as White (Goldring et al., 2016). Noddings (2001) detailed that races, ethnicities, and cultures outside of the predominant culture are expected to *fit* into an educational system that was not designed with their backgrounds in mind. Teachers must be sensitive to the different cultures of their students and skilled at accommodating their students to support them to be able to make sense of the content and to also support their social, emotional, and behavioral

needs. If all students are to have equitable opportunities to learn, then teachers must be sensitive to the diverse needs of all their students (Noddings, 2001).

It is estimated that by 2024, students of color will comprise 56% of the student population (Goldring et al., 2014). One size fits all instruction is not student-centered and principals can use distributed leadership to build capacity in others by supporting collaborative relationships to grow. Bagwell (2019) argued that leaders should work with others rather than in isolation to build capacity. I was often pulled away from instructional leader tasks, but by supporting collective efforts across the campus, teachers were provided protected time and a leadership team comprised of experts that worked with teachers to solve problems to improve student achievement. The teacher participants reported value in coming together to share ideas and to problem solve. Dinham et al. (2008) found that action learning, or teachers joining together to learn from each other and share experiences, resulted in problems being solved more efficiently than working in isolation. Dinham et al. (2008) argued that action learning empowers people, supports collegial relationships, and respects the unique skills and experiences that people bring to the group, which were sentiments shared by the participants of this study. This is impactful because social learning theorists advocated that we learn through social interactions (Bandura, 1979; Bandura, 1977). If this is true, it can be argued that children can develop efficacy through their own agency, which is affected by adult interaction and support (Rainio, & Hilppö, 2017). If agency is influenced by social and psychological experiences from within the individual and through experiences with others (Rainio & Hilppö, 2017), then it is essential for educators to support all students regardless of their cultures, races, and economic statuses to ensure equity.

Suggestions for Future Research

Future research is recommended that could include studying a cohort of second graders over three school years as they progress through elementary school to gain more insight concerning teachers' perceptions of distributed leadership and how it influences student achievement over the long term. Collecting data for a longer period of time, could support inductively constructing themes (Creswell, 2014). Henderson and Woods (2006) suggested revisiting previous research at different points in time because it may lead to new understandings or revisions in perspectives about the original research. This could be a supportive technique to tease out themes about distributed leadership that may not be trustworthy over longer periods of time. Longitudinal study findings may increase the trustworthiness of findings, which could allow findings to be more accurate and to have more credibility for practitioners working in settings other than elementary schools. Creswell (2014) argued that validity is a strength of qualitative research and the findings of this study were accurate from my point of view and the teacher participants' point of view evidenced in their semi-structured interview responses and member check responses.

High stakes testing is a yearly requirement and educators experience pressure for students to meet performance indicators. It is difficult for teachers to meet the needs of all students by working in isolation. Principals can support teachers to meet expectations by providing resources of time and a master schedule that includes time for collaborative activities of common planning, PLCs, and professional development. Camburn (2013) suggested that principals can support students' academic gains by distributing leadership among different people with varying skills within organizations. Future study could

become more applicable to teachers beyond fourth-grade teachers if a longitudinal study was carried out following children over several grade levels to compare STAAR scores across years to provide insight into how perceptions are influenced when a leader utilizes distributed leadership to develop capacity in others. The research could employ a mixed-methods approach to measure differences in STAAR scores across multiple years and the study could explore how perceptions evolve over several years when people with varying skills and experiences are given opportunities to lead. The first phase of the study could begin with a survey and results could be generalized to a study group. A second qualitative phase incorporating open-ended interviews to gain a deeper understanding of quantitative survey data could follow (Creswell, 2014). The benefits of a mixed-methods design would include the collection of various forms of data to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the research question (Creswell, 2014).

Teachers predominantly report identifying as White, but the demographics of students are more diverse and continue to change (Goldring et al., 2014). Six out of seven of the participants in this study identified as White. Future study could include exploring how teachers use culturally responsive teaching (CRT) with students. A qualitative ethnographic approach would be supportive of gaining insight about what teaching methods work well for students and what methods do not work well for students. Professional development for teachers would need to be a key component of the research design due to the possibility of teachers misunderstanding cultures outside of their own that could lead to confusion (Eisenhart, 2001). Social groups are complex to study, but when trying to increase student achievement in a diverse student population it is critical for teachers to understand their biases and then be provided professional development

and job-embedded coaching to meet students' needs using methods sensitive to all races, ethnicities, and cultures. Yon (2003) explained that ethnography is a research method that can be used to lift up people who are oppressed.

Summary

Traditional positivist views of research require objectivity of what is true. Autoethnography as a qualitative research method is more subjective and does not follow specific rules or criteria, which brings the qualitative validity and qualitative reliability of this type of research into question. Autoethnography is reflexive, personal, and includes emotional involvement of the researcher, which is opposed to the objective and more distant role of the researcher in research that is aligned to a positivist stance. Bochner and Ellis (2006) described autoethnography as a process to figure out what to do and how to make meaning of experiences. Walford (2004) argued that autoethnography is not a valuable research tool because it is difficult to discern what is truth from what is simply an invention by the author. Autoethnography is complicated and due to the reflexive nature of it, a reader may react unpleasantly to what is presented by the researcher (Bochner & Ellis, 1996). Due to the blurring of lines between the researcher and subjects, autoethnography is often viewed as less valid, reliable, and not as easily generalizable as traditional positivist research.

The Covid-19 pandemic was unexpected and required modifications to the study to conduct the final semi-structured interviews, PLCs, and common planning with teachers through digital platforms of Zoom and Google Hangouts. The school was shut down in the middle of March 2020 and the teachers transitioned within ten days to online learning with their students. This was a challenging task, but it is my belief that the

practices that were implemented throughout the school year and up to the shutdown such as PLCs, common planning, professional development, and coaching supported teachers to flexibly transition to virtual learning with students quickly. Many of the teachers on the campus and several of the six fourth-grade teacher participants had attended out of district site visits for blended learning. The academic coach supported all teachers with professional development during PLCs to learn about blended learning and she coached 50% of the staff over the school year to implement professional development with students in their classrooms. It is my belief that these practices and systems of support made the transition from on campus to virtual teaching a less stressful experience for teachers and that it positively influenced students to continue learning at home. From March 2020 until May 2020 it was my experience that teachers, support staff, and administrators worked collaboratively to ensure that students were able to continue learning virtually during a very challenging time due to the pandemic. I expected my first year as a principal to be challenging and a pandemic made the task of building relationships based on trust a more difficult task after the school shut down due to not being able to work with teachers in person. I did not view this as an obstacle and adapted by making phone calls and using digital platforms such as Zoom and Google Hangouts to continue working with teachers. I realized that as the principal, I had a great deal of influence on the culture and mindset related to the school shutting down and transitioning to virtual learning. The assistant principal and I modeled flexible and positive attitudes during the shutdown, which I believed influenced staff to view challenges more positively and they continued to collaborate with each other during the shutdown.

This study added to the body of knowledge concerning teachers' perceptions of

distributed leadership as having value. The findings suggested that participants' perceptions of distributed leadership were influenced over the course of the study to include thoughts and beliefs of distributed leadership enhancing and empowering teachers to become more equipped to lead students and other staff to grow in their skills and to work together collaboratively to influence student achievement. My thoughts, beliefs, and feelings evolved over the course of the study to include a new understanding of teachers as the leaders of the students in their classrooms. Collay (2011) argued that teachers are leaders of their students who carry out leadership roles on a daily basis. She proposed that teachers should be supported to take on leadership roles in and beyond the classroom, which can improve their practice (Collay, 2011). This was a significant change of perception for me because I had previously viewed teachers as being chosen or applying for positions that would place them in positions to become leaders of other staff by taking on roles such as administrators, academic coaches, and coordinators, but this was too sophomoric a view of what it meant to be a leader. Coyle (2018) argued that in order for collaborative relationships to grow, people must feel safe and trust each other. Principals who utilize distributed leadership, must be dedicated to providing resources, removing barriers, and empowering others to ensure shared goals are met (Mineo, 2014). This is a time consuming and on-going process, but the efforts can pay off with improved well-being for staff, increased trust, increased collaboration, and increased capacity to meet students' needs, which may positively influence student achievement (Mineo, 2014). The body of evidence continues to grow in support of distributed leadership and thoughtful principals will recognize that trust is an essential component of relationship

building and is necessary for collaborative relationships to grow that may influence student achievement (Beycioglu et al., 2012).

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Appendix A

Lesson Plan Template

Lesson Plans: Teacher – Grade – Subject 2019-2020				Date Range	
	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Bellwork/ Fluency	Activity	Activity	Activity	Activity	Activity
Schedule:	<p>Learning (TEKS) & Language (ELPS) Objectives: Learning Objectives (TEKS):</p> <p>I can... Leveled Questioning:</p> <p>Language Objective (ELPS):</p> <p>I will... Sentence Stems:</p> <p>Mini-Lesson: Lessons use TEKS aligned activities based on scope & sequence of curriculum and classroom data.</p> <p>I Do-The teacher will...</p> <p>Active Engagement Strategies are embedded within the lesson.</p> <p>Practice: We Do & You Do-The student will...</p> <p>Formative Assessment & Plan for Reteach:</p> <p>Accommodations & Modifications: Adaptations, such as accommodations, modifications, and enrichment activities, etc.</p> <p>Stations & Small Group Instruction: Stations and Small Group Instruction use TEKS aligned activities based on classroom data.</p>	<p>Learning (TEKS) & Language (ELPS) Objectives: Learning Objectives (TEKS):</p> <p>I can... Leveled Questioning:</p> <p>Language Objective (ELPS):</p> <p>I will... Sentence Stems:</p> <p>Mini-Lesson: Lessons use TEKS aligned activities based on scope & sequence of curriculum and classroom data.</p> <p>I Do-The teacher will...</p> <p>Active Engagement Strategies are embedded within the lesson.</p> <p>Practice: We Do & You Do-The student will...</p> <p>Formative Assessment & Plan for Reteach:</p> <p>Accommodations & Modifications: Adaptations, such as accommodations, modifications, and enrichment activities, etc.</p> <p>Stations & Small Group Instruction: Stations and Small Group Instruction use TEKS aligned activities based on classroom data.</p>	<p>Learning (TEKS) & Language (ELPS) Objectives: Learning Objectives (TEKS):</p> <p>I can... Leveled Questioning:</p> <p>Language Objective (ELPS):</p> <p>I will... Sentence Stems:</p> <p>Mini-Lesson: Lessons use TEKS aligned activities based on scope & sequence of curriculum and classroom data.</p> <p>I Do-The teacher will...</p> <p>Active Engagement Strategies are embedded within the lesson.</p> <p>Practice: We Do & You Do-The student will...</p> <p>Formative Assessment & Plan for Reteach:</p> <p>Accommodations & Modifications: Adaptations, such as accommodations, modifications, and enrichment activities, etc.</p> <p>Stations & Small Group Instruction: Stations and Small Group Instruction use TEKS aligned activities based on classroom data.</p>	<p>Learning (TEKS) & Language (ELPS) Objectives: Learning Objectives (TEKS):</p> <p>I can... Leveled Questioning:</p> <p>Language Objective (ELPS):</p> <p>I will... Sentence Stems:</p> <p>Mini-Lesson: Lessons use TEKS aligned activities based on scope & sequence of curriculum and classroom data.</p> <p>I Do-The teacher will...</p> <p>Active Engagement Strategies are embedded within the lesson.</p> <p>Practice: We Do & You Do-The student will...</p> <p>Formative Assessment & Plan for Reteach:</p> <p>Accommodations & Modifications: Adaptations, such as accommodations, modifications, and enrichment activities, etc.</p> <p>Stations & Small Group Instruction: Stations and Small Group Instruction use TEKS aligned activities based on classroom data.</p>	<p>Learning (TEKS) & Language (ELPS) Objectives: Learning Objectives (TEKS):</p> <p>I can... Leveled Questioning:</p> <p>Language Objective (ELPS):</p> <p>I will... Sentence Stems:</p> <p>Mini-Lesson: Lessons use TEKS aligned activities based on scope & sequence of curriculum and classroom data.</p> <p>I Do-The teacher will...</p> <p>Active Engagement Strategies are embedded within the lesson.</p> <p>Practice: We Do & You Do-The student will...</p> <p>Formative Assessment & Plan for Reteach:</p> <p>Accommodations & Modifications: Adaptations, such as accommodations, modifications, and enrichment activities, etc.</p> <p>Stations & Small Group Instruction: Stations and Small Group Instruction use TEKS aligned activities based on classroom data.</p>

Appendix B

District Approval



College Station Independent School District

Success...each life...each day...each hour

December 2, 2019

To Whom It May Concern:

Laura Casper-Teague, a Principal at Spring Creek Elementary School and a doctoral student at the University of Houston, has informed me, Jeff Mann, of her proposed autoethnographic study concerning a principal's use of distributed leadership techniques to foster capacity in teachers. I have taken the request to the CSISD Research Request Review Committee for approval. The committee has been informed of the purpose of the research and the nature of the research methods and procedures. I have also been given an opportunity to ask questions of the researcher. The committee has granted Ms. Casper-Teague the permission to proceed with her autoethnographic research as it relates to her doctoral dissertation.

This approval includes the ability of the researcher to conduct semi-structured interviews with participants that opt-in to the research, to take field notes on her observations Ms. Casper-Teague may seek district permission, if needed, to use some of the data from this study for her graduate dissertation research. The committee understands that Ms. Casper-Teague plans to conduct observations and semi-structured interview activities in line with her normal administrative routines during the study period (approximately January 6th through June 1st). The committee is informed that she plans to audio-record some semi-structured interviews that will be done outside of school hours as a method to support improving her practice. Ms. Casper-Teague will follow the district's protocol to request permission to use data collected during the study, including audio recordings, field notes, journal entries, observations, and released STAAR data for the purpose of her dissertation.

The committee understands that participants for the research will be given the option to opt in or opt out of the research through an informed consent meeting process led by Lashan Phillips, Spring Creek's Fourth-Grade Team Leader. If you have any questions, please contact me at 979-764-5415 or jmann@csisd.org.

Sincerely,

Jeff Mann

1812 Welsh Avenue
College Station, TX 77840
(979) 764-5455 FAX (979) 764-5535

Jeff Mann
Director of Instruction &
Leadership Development

Appendix C

University Approval

UNIVERSITY of HOUSTON

DIVISION OF RESEARCH
Institutional Review Boards

APPROVAL OF SUBMISSION

January 29, 2020

Laura Casper-Teague
lcasper-teague@uh.edu

Dear Laura Casper-Teague:

On January 28, 2020, the IRB reviewed the following submission:

Type of Review:	Initial Study
Title of Study:	Cultivating Capacity: A Principal's Use of Distributed Leadership Theory Techniques
Investigator:	Laura Casper-Teague
IRB ID:	STUDY00002058
Funding/ Proposed Funding:	Name: Unfunded
Award ID:	
Award Title:	
IND, IDE, or HDE:	None
Documents Reviewed:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HRP-502A, Category: Consent Form; • Interview Questions, Category: Other; • District Consent, Category: Letters of Cooperation / Permission; • HRP-503, Category: IRB Protocol; • Participant Script, Category: Recruitment Materials; • Additional Probes and Questions, Category: Other;
Review Category:	Exempt
Committee Name:	Noncommittee review
IRB Coordinator:	Maria Martinez

The IRB approved the study on January 29, 2020; recruitment and procedures detailed within the approved protocol may now be initiated.

As this study was approved under an exempt or expedited process, recently revised regulatory requirements do not require the submission of annual continuing review documentation. However, it is critical that the following submissions are made to the IRB to ensure continued compliance:

UNIVERSITY of
HOUSTON

DIVISION OF RESEARCH
Institutional Review Boards

- Modifications to the protocol prior to initiating any changes (for example, the addition of study personnel, updated recruitment materials, change in study design, requests for additional subjects)
- Reportable New Information/Unanticipated Problems Involving Risks to Subjects or Others
- Study Closure

Unless a waiver has been granted by the IRB, use the stamped consent form approved by the IRB to document consent. The approved version may be downloaded from the documents tab.

In conducting this study, you are required to follow the requirements listed in the Investigator Manual (HRP-103), which can be found by navigating to the IRB Library within the IRB system.

Sincerely,

Research Integrity and Oversight (RIO) Office
University of Houston, Division of Research
713 743 9204
cphs@central.uh.edu
<http://www.uh.edu/research/compliance/irb-cphs/>

Appendix D

Script Notes; Teacher Recruitment Meeting

Title of research study:

Cultivating Capacity: A Principal's Use of Distributed Leadership Theory Techniques

Investigator:

Laura Casper-Teague

- Please make note of questions for which you do not have answers so that the researcher can respond appropriately.

Emphasize the following points:

- Taking part in the research is voluntary, and whether you sign consent is up to you.
- You can agree to provide permission and later change your mind.
- Your decision will not be held against you.
- You can ask all the questions you want before you decide and can ask questions at any time during the study.

Research overview:

- All fourth-grade teachers at Spring Creek Elementary are invited to take part in an autoethnographic research study about how a principal's beliefs about involving teachers in the shared decision-making process evolves as a result of the research study, to what extent is teacher attrition influenced by involving them in the decision-making process, and to what extent are fourth-grade standardized reading assessments influenced when teachers are included in the decision-making process?
- The autoethnographic research study involves campus related activities in which teachers typically take part in as a member of Spring Creek's staff.
- During the second semester of the 2019-2020 school year (January 6th – June 1st), teachers will participate in PLCs, faculty meetings, campus and off campus professional development, and common planning with members of their grade level team and leadership team.
- Semi-structured interviews will be audio-recorded and/or recorded by hand (a practice that researchers often use to collect data).
- For the purpose of the autoethnographic research, the principal, who is also the researcher, will transcribe and analyze some of the discussion audio-recordings.
- The researcher will also transcribe and analyze some of the field notes and journal entries collected during the study to help answer the research questions.

- Point out that if the researcher analyzes data collected during the study, recorded interviews and written data will only be used for the purposes of the study and all identities of participants will be kept confidential.

Commonly asked questions:

Will being in this study help me as a teacher in any way?

- Possible benefits include improvement of teaching knowledge and skill, which may translate to improved instruction for students during the study and in the future.
- Teachers' self-efficacy may improve, and they may feel more supported, which may affect their decision to remain in the profession.
- Teachers may increase their ability to become leaders, which may result in them leading more professional development, mentoring others, and participating more in campus activities such as common planning and PLCs due to having more of a voice in campus decision making.

Why is this research being done?

- Teacher and principal attrition are high, and this trend negatively affects students' academic achievement. Of the teachers that leave education for other careers outside of education, 51% report that the workload is more manageable in their current position and 53% state they have better working conditions than when they were teaching (Goldring et al., 2014). Of the principals who leave education, 13% report that the stress and disappointment of the position influenced their decisions to leave and 14% report that they are too tired to continue in the profession (Goldring et al., 2018). The demands placed on educators make it very difficult to be effective while working in isolation. Increasing demands of high stakes testing along with long hours, low pay, limited benefits, and not enough support leads to frustration and ultimately an exodus from the field. This is an unacceptable trend and one that must be addressed from many angles. Improving educators' working conditions must become a priority if our society is to continue to ensure high-quality academic experiences for all children.

What happens to the information collected for the research?

- Each teacher's name will be paired with a code number. The list pairing the teacher's name to the assigned code number will be kept separate from these materials and will be destroyed after the study is complete.
- The data that will remain in the study record will not be linked with a teacher's name or identifying information. Transcripts will be preserved without teacher's names for further analysis.
- Organizations that may inspect and copy study information include the University of Houston Institutional Review Board (IRB) and other representatives of the

university, as well as collaborating institutions and federal agencies that oversee this research.

- This study will collect limited private information (such as teachers' names, years of teaching experience, and teacher demographics). These data will be kept separate and secure.

What happens if I say yes and I want to participate in this research?

- All activities of the study will occur within the normal workday except for semi-structured interviews and the recruitment meeting, which will take place after school.
- This research is designed to not disrupt regular instruction, but is intended to provide a window into how a principal's leadership practices affect students' achievement and teacher attrition.

What happens if I do not want to be in this research?

- Teachers will participate in campus activities whether they choose to participate in the research or not. Choosing to not take part in the research will involve no penalty or loss of benefit to teachers that they are otherwise entitled.

For any teachers who do not participate in the study:

- 1) Their identifiable comments during recorded conversations would be redacted from transcripts.
- 2) Their written work and assessment data will not be transcribed and uploaded.

What happens if I say yes, but I change my mind later?

- A teacher can withdraw permission and leave the research at any time.
- A teacher should contact the Principal, Ms. Casper-Teague, or the Fourth-Grade Team Lead to withdraw permission. The investigator will remove the teacher's data from the study record.

Can I be removed from the research without my OK?

- Teachers will not be removed from the study except by request of the teacher.

Who can I talk to?

- Reinforce that the teacher can direct questions, concerns, or complaints to Laveria Hutchison, faculty sponsor, at lhutchison@uh.edu or (713) 743-4958. They can also contact the University of Houston Institutional Review Board (IRB). You may also talk to them at (713) 743-9204 or cphs@central.uh.edu

- Questions or concerns can also be directed to the Principal Investigator, Laura Casper-Teague, at lcasper-teague@uh.edu or 281-889—1744.

Possible research outcomes:

- Not only will this research contribute to the researcher's understanding of how distributed leadership affects student achievement and teacher attrition, but it has the potential to inform other principals' practice as well.
- Data from this autoethnographic research project may be included in doctoral dissertation research.

Completing consent:

- Signature Pages (Teacher):
 - The teacher should print his or her name.
 - The teacher should print and sign his or her name and date the form.
 - The teacher should select that he or she either does or does not give permission for his or her words to be included in transcripts that may be used for publication.
 - Explain that the teacher may want to give permission to be contacted for follow-up studies or not, but that none are planned at this time.

Appendix E

Consent to Take Part in a Human Research Study



Title of research study:

Cultivating Capacity: A Principal's Use of Distributed Leadership Theory Techniques

Investigator:

Laura Casper-Teague

Key information:

The following focused information is being presented to assist you in understanding the key elements of this study, as well as the basic reasons why you may or may not wish to consider taking part. This section is only a summary; more detailed information, including how to contact the research team for additional information or questions, follows within the remainder of this document under the "Detailed Information" heading.

What should I know about a research study?

- Someone will explain this research study to you.
- Taking part in the research is voluntary; whether or not you take part is up to you.
- You can choose not to take part.
- You can agree to take part and later change your mind.
- Your decision will not be held against you.
- You can ask all the questions you want before you decide, and can ask questions at any time during the study.

We invite you to take part in a research study about a principal's use of distributed leadership practices because you meet the following criteria of being a fourth-grade teacher.

In general, your participation in the research involves campus related activities in which teachers typically take part in as a member of Spring Creek's staff. During the second semester of the 2019-2020 school year (January 6th – June 1st), teachers will participate in PLCs, faculty meetings, campus and off campus professional development, and

common planning with members of their grade level team and leadership team. Semi-structured interviews will be audio-recorded and/or recorded by hand (a practice that researchers often use to collect data). For the purpose of the autoethnographic research, the principal, who is also the researcher, will transcribe and analyze some of the discussion audio-recordings. The researcher will also transcribe and analyze some of the field notes and journal entries collected during the study to help answer the research questions.

There are no known risks expected for you taking part in this study. You will not receive compensation for participation.

Detailed information:

The following is more detailed information about this study, in addition to the information listed above.

Why is this research being done?

Teacher and principal attrition are high, and this trend negatively affects students' academic achievement. Of the teachers that leave education for other careers outside of education, 51% report that the workload is more manageable in their current position and 53% state they have better working conditions than when they were teaching (Goldring et al., 2014). Of the principals who leave education, 13% report that the stress and disappointment of the position influenced their decisions to leave and 14% report that they are too tired to continue in the profession (Goldring et al., 2018). The demands placed on educators make it very difficult to be effective while working in isolation. Increasing demands of high stakes testing along with long hours, low pay, limited benefits, and not enough support leads to frustration and ultimately an exodus from the field. This is an unacceptable trend and one that must be addressed from many angles. Improving educators' working conditions must become a priority if our society is to continue to ensure high-quality academic experiences for all children.

How long will the research last?

We expect that you will be in this research study from January 6th to June 1st of 2020.

How many people will be studied?

We expect to enroll about six people in this research study.

What happens if I say yes, I want to be in this research?

If you agree to participate in the research, the research will collect data related to campus related activities in which teachers typically take part in members of Spring Creek's staff.

During the second semester of the 2019-2020 school year (January 6th – June 1st), teachers will participate in PLCs, faculty meetings, campus and off campus professional development, and common planning with members of their grade level team and leadership team. Semi-structured interviews will be audio-recorded and/or recorded by hand (a practice that researchers often use to collect data). For the purpose of the autoethnographic research, the principal, who is also the researcher, will transcribe and analyze some of the discussion audio-recordings. The researcher will also transcribe and analyze some of the field notes and journal entries collected during the study to help answer the research questions.

This research study includes the following component(s) where we plan to audio record you as the research subject:

I agree to be audio recorded during the research study.

- ☐ I agree that the audio recording can be used in publication/presentations.
- ☐ I do not agree that the audio recording can be used in publication/presentations.
- ☐ I do not agree to be audio recorded during the research study.

You can still participate in the study even if you do not agree to be audio recorded.

What happens if I do not want to be in this research?

You can choose not to take part in the research and it will not be held against you. Choosing not to take part will involve no penalty or loss of benefit to which you are otherwise entitled.

What happens if I say yes, but I change my mind later?

You can leave the research at any time and it will not be held against you. If you stop being in the research, already collected data that still includes your name or other personal information will be removed from the study record.

Is there any way being in this study could be bad for me?

We do not expect any risks related to the research activities. If you choose to take part and undergo a negative event you feel is related to the study, please contact Dr. Laveria Hutchison, faculty sponsor, at lhutchison@uh.edu or (713) 743-4958.

Will I receive anything for being in this study?

No compensation is provided for participating in this research study.

Will being in this study help me in any way?

We cannot promise any benefits to you or others from your taking part in this research. However, possible benefits include improvement of teaching knowledge and skill, which may translate to improved instruction for students during the study and in the future. Teachers' self-efficacy may improve, and they may feel more supported, which may affect their decision to remain in the profession. Teachers may increase their ability to become leaders, which may result in them leading more professional development, mentoring others, and participating more in campus activities such as common planning and PLCs due to having more of a voice in campus decision making.

What happens to the information collected for the research?

Efforts will be made to keep your personal information private, including research study records. Information will only be made available to people who have a need to review this information. Each subject's name will be paired with a code number, which will appear on all written study materials. The list pairing the subject's name to the code number will be kept separate from these materials. We cannot promise complete secrecy. Organizations that may inspect and copy your information include the Institutional Review Board (IRB) and other representatives of this organization, as well as collaborating institutions.

This study collects information such as demographics, teaching experience, semi-structured interview responses, observations, field notes, and journal entries. Following collection, the researcher may choose to remove all identifying information from these data. Once identifiers are removed, data could be used for future research studies or distributed to another investigator for future research studies without your additional informed consent.

We may share and/or publish the results of this research. However, unless otherwise detailed in this document, we will keep your name and other identifying information confidential.

Can I be removed from the research without my OK?

Teachers will not be removed from the study except by request of the teacher.

Who can I talk to?

If you have questions, concerns, or complaints, or think the research has hurt you, you should contact Dr. Laveria Hutchison, faculty sponsor, at lhutchison@uh.edu or (713) 743-4958.

This research has been reviewed and approved by the University of Houston Institutional Review Board (IRB). You may also talk to them at (713) 743-9204 or cphs@central.uh.edu if:

- Your questions, concerns, or complaints are not being answered by the research team.
- You cannot reach the research team.
- You want to talk to someone besides the research team.
- You have questions about your rights as a research subject.
- You want to get information or provide input about this research.

Questions and concerns can also be made to the Principal Investigator, Laura Casper-Teague, at lcasper-teague@uh.edu or 281-889-1744.

May we contact you regarding future research opportunities?

In the future, our research team may be interested in contacting you for other research studies we undertake, or to conduct a follow-up study to this one. There is never any obligation to take part in additional research. Do we have permission to contact you to provide additional information?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No

Signature Block for Capable Adult

Your signature documents your consent to take part in this research.

Signature of subject	Date
Printed name of subject	
Signature of person obtaining consent	Date
Printed name of person obtaining consent	

Appendix F

Interview Questions and Additional Probes

1. What are your thoughts as to the value of common planning?
 - Sample additional question: What ideas do you have for improving common planning?
2. What are your thoughts as to the value of PLCs?
 - Sample additional probe/question: What ideas do you have for improving PLCs?
3. What are your thoughts as to the value of campus professional development provided to you this school year?
 - Sample additional probe/question? What professional development do you need?
4. Can you explain your current level of understanding regarding distributed leadership?
 - Sample additional probe/question: What leadership opportunities are you interested in?
5. Can you describe campus practices that are most beneficial for supporting your needs?
 - Sample additional probe/question: What campus practices do you feel are not beneficial to your needs?
6. Can you describe the supports provided by the principal that may or may not influence your choice to continue in your position as an educator?
 - Sample additional probe/question: What is the most powerful influencer for you to keep teaching?

7. Can you describe the campus practices that you find most beneficial for positively influencing students' achievement on state assessments?

- Sample additional probe/question? What practices do you find least useful for positively influencing students' achievement on state assessments?

Appendix G

Sample of Formatted Journal

Date	Research Question 1	Research Question 2	Notes, Thoughts, Reflections...	Codes and Themes
02/11/2020	How have beliefs about involving teachers in the shared decision-making process evolved since completing the study?	What are teachers' perceptions about distributed leadership?	I am looking forward to completing the initial interviews with the teachers and I believe their responses should provide quite a bit of insight about their views of shared decision-making and distributed leadership. I have an idea that distributed leadership will be a term they are not familiar with, but the ideology behind it is one that I believe will be very natural for the teachers. As I observe them work together, they have developed a close knit and positive culture within their team that did not exist last school year. I know this because it has been explained to me that 5 out of the 6 teachers in fourth grade left their positions at the end of the last year. One of the remaining teachers (MT1), joined the 4th grade team during the mid-year of the last school year and decided to return to the position. It is a relief, for me as the principal, that the 4th grade teachers have been able to become a cohesive and collaborative team so quickly. They appear to value each other and work well together. As a leader, I trust them and try to put structures in place to support them to meet the students'	Cohesiveness, trustworthiness, value, teamwork, improvement, differentiation, common planning, collaboration

			<p>needs such as ensuring that in-service days are scheduled for planning and incorporating professional development into PLCs based on data I collect through my observations, assessment data, and anecdotal information shared with me from members of the leadership team or other campus staff. I try to view all the data I collect in a balanced way in order to adapt to the needs of the students and the adults in the school by continuously pushing forward the campus collaborative and common planning model defined in the Campus Improvement Plan (CIP). Sometimes, it feels that it would be much easier and quicker to focus on compliance to get staff to follow through with improvement plans for the campus, but I know that I have to continue to work to get the staff to find value in common planning and collaboration as a means to differentiate and build capacity that is sustainable over the long haul. This is going to take time and a great deal of effort.</p>	
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Appendix H

Table H1. Teacher Responses to Question Four of Semi-Structured Interviews

Table H1

Teacher Responses to Question Four of Semi-Structured Interviews

Participants	February 2020 Response	April 2020 Response
ELA1	So, what I think distributed leadership is, is not a sage on the stage. It is shared responsibility. I love that different aspects, different experiences can share in areas rather than take over. It is to divide and conquer. You know each other's strengths and how to build each other up. (ELA1, personal communication, February 21, 2020)	Because of the way our team works, I understand it pretty well. Even though MT1 is the team leader, we all share different leadership roles to help our students. We split the work and share responsibility together. We share 4 th grade. All of 4 th grade are our responsibility. We build on strengths and move forward. (ELA1 personal communication, April 21, 2020)
ELA2	It's limited. (ELA2, personal communication, February 20, 2020)	I feel like at the end of the school year I understood it more. It is an empowerment movement for all to be involved in the decisions for students. Powerful. All of our voices matter. (ELA2, personal communication, April 21, 2020)
ELA3	I'll pass. (ELA3 personal communication, February 18, 2020)	My understanding of distributed leadership is having more than just one person in charge, so all the weight is not put on one person. I think the idea of distributed leadership is great. (ELA3, personal communication, April 20, 2020)
MT1	Based on the title, I feel that I would take from it, different roles distributed. It means certain people	When I was asked this before I took distributed leadership as having different members of a

	can help. I need more information. (MT1, personal communication, February 20, 2020)	school take on different leader positions to help the school run smoothly. (MT3, personal communication, April 25, 2020)
MT2	<p>The way I think of it is having all the different people I need to go to. It isn't a one-person thing.</p> <p>Knowing who you can go to for the expertise you need. Going to Dena and Riley for MAP. Going to Sara for technology, Going to the person with the inside information. (MT2, personal communication, February, 19, 2020)</p>	<p>I understand it to be teachers being leaders in the classroom and on the campus. I view it as we have our personal body and a hand a leg. We have all the parts working together as on a body. The different skill sets are like a full working human being. Everyone has a special part. Leaders in the classroom. It doesn't matter if you are a leader in the community or classroom, you're just as important as other leaders. (MT2, personal communication, April 22, 2020)</p>
MT3	<p>I don't know what distributed leadership is. Different people having different roles? (MT3, personal communication, February 20, 2020)</p>	<p>I think distributed leadership is an environment that allows all teachers to have opportunities to lead, grow, and work together to better student achievement. (MT3, personal communication, April 20, 2020)</p>

Note. Question four: Can you explain your current level of understanding regarding distributed leadership?